

Creative Writing at Nottingham

#### Contents

### Contents

Creative writing at Nottingham	3
How to get involved	4
Our creative writing community	7
Staff profiles	10
Student profiles	16
Optional additional modules	18
Graduate destinations	19



## Sparking your creativity

66 It would be hard to imagine a city with a better writing scene than Nottingham, and our creative writing course plays a big part.

In 2015, Nottingham was named a UNESCO City of Literature, an award that reflects the city's rich literary heritage and wide-ranging writing community. Between them, the campus and the city offer a huge range of facilities and networks for students interested in the creative and performing arts. For instance, the New Theatre, based on our University Park campus, was the first wholly student-run theatre in the UK. The University is also a partner of the Nottingham Festival of Words and has close connections with the Nottingham Playhouse, Theatre Royal and other local theatres, as well as with regional publishers, authors, poets and writing organisations.

To join the BA English with Creative Writing course, or to take creative writing as an optional module, is to become part of this vibrant creative writing community, where staff and students support each other in the writing process. You will work alongside experienced academics and established writers, so you can benefit from their expertise as well as that of guest authors and poets.

Jon McGregor, Professor of Creative Writing, coordinates our creative writing literary journal, *The Letters Page*, and oversees the work of the student editorial team. The journal offers a unique chance to gain first-hand experience of editing and publishing, enabling students to put their skills into practice from a publishers' perspective. There are also a number of creative writing societies and student publications that you can get involved with. Turn to page 7 to find out more about our creative writing community.

Dr Spencer Jordan Programme Director and Assistant Professor, Creative Writing.



## Undergraduate opportunities

There are two ways to study creative writing at Nottingham; either by selecting the three-year BA English with Creative Writing course, or by choosing optional creative writing modules on the BA English or BA English Language and Literature programmes.

#### **BA English with Creative Writing**

This course allows you to explore key areas of English literature, language and drama, whilst developing your writing skills and creative practice under the guidance of creative writing tutors and published authors. The amount of time spent on specialist creative writing modules increases year by year until, in your final year, half of your time is spent focusing on creative writing.

#### Year one

Through six year-long core modules, you will explore all the areas of English offered at Nottingham: language, literature, drama and performance, as well as creative writing. This broad basis gives you the freedom to select modules in your second and final years which reflect the areas of English you most enjoy.

#### Year two

You will take two compulsory creative writing modules, 'Poetry: Forms and Conventions' and 'Fiction: Forms and Conventions', and choose four other modules to cover at least three areas of English studies. You may also apply to spend a semester abroad.

#### Final year

You will take three compulsory creative writing modules, 'Advanced Writing Practice: Poetry,' 'Advanced Writing Practice: Fiction,' and a dissertation project in creative writing. You will also choose three modules to cover at least two areas of study in the School of English, or you can choose 'Digital Story: Craft and Technique' and two modules from two other areas of study.

For more information see nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/english



At first, the idea of seminars where we write and share our work was terrifying, but all the students are so supportive and most of the time you completely forget you're in a university seminar because it just feels like being around friends.

Sophie Horton BA English with Creative Writing

Following the captivating lectures that this course offers, I have really enjoyed experimenting with the short story and with poetic forms like the sonnet and villanelle.

Patrick Landy BA English with Creative Writing



#### **Choosing optional creative writing modules**

Students on the BA English and BA English Language and Literature degrees can choose Creative Writing Practice as one of their year one optional modules.

In year two, you can choose one of the following creative writing modules:

#### Fiction: Forms and Conventions

You will examine techniques of writing fiction, including narrative voice, point of view, character development, dialogue, plot, and setting. You will be introduced to a diverse range of writers and techniques, and explore the publishing industry as it relates to fiction.

#### ■ Poetry: Forms and Conventions

You will examine poetic styles and techniques, including poetic line, stanza, rhyme and imagery, along with traditional forms such as the sonnet or haiku. You will develop your own creative work as well as your critical and reflective skills.

In your third year, you can choose from a range of advanced modules, which build on the knowledge and skills acquired in years one and two, including:

#### Advanced Writing Practice: Poetry

You will read key writers within specific forms and conventions as well as relevant secondary texts. Topics include literary influence, writing process, and collaboration, as well as a more detailed reexamination of some of the techniques and conventions covered in previous modules.

#### Advanced Writing Practice: Fiction

You will read key writers within specific forms and genres as well as relevant secondary texts. Topics covered include narrative voice and technique, point of view, character development, dialogue, plot and setting.

#### Joint honours students

Joint honours students from the School of English can get involved with the numerous creative writing opportunities on offer, from writing for our *Words on Words* blog, to joining the Creative Writing Society. For more information about opportunities open to all students, see nottingham.ac.uk/english/write-create-perform

## Postgraduate opportunities

#### **MA Creative Writing**

Each year we welcome a new cohort of masters students into our supportive postgraduate community. They enhance their writing practice and creative network through a range of activities, including regular postgraduate seminars and conferences. Students enrolled on our MA in Creative Writing will benefit from:

- a diverse range of modules that focus on the craft, structure, methodologies and techniques associated with writing fiction and poetry
- specialist workshops led by published poets and authors
- sessions with guest publishers and professional writers (previous guests have included Alison Moore and Ruth Fainlight).

For more information, visit nottingham.ac.uk/go/creative-writing-ma

#### PhD research

To undertake a research degree with us is to join a lively, diverse and international body of researchers and practitioners, in which an exceptionally wide range of specialist interests is combined within a close-knit community. All PhD students are assigned supervisors, who are experts in a related field of research.

A PhD creative writing thesis will primarily consist of your own original creative work. The creative element could be a novel, a manuscript of poems, a collection of short stories, a play, or another form of creative output.

Alongside this you will be expected to write a critical analysis of your work, its context, and your research methodology.

For more information, visit nottingham.ac.uk/go/creative-writing-phd



After the discipline of my English degree at Cambridge, the creativity of Nottingham's Creative Writing MA was exactly what I needed. It gave me the freedom and challenge to experiment with diverse styles I would never ordinarily have tried. Though daunting, the process of sharing work and getting so many students perspectives on it was a weekly pleasure and most importantly gave me the confidence to develop my own poetic voice.

Lauren Colley MA Creative Writing, PhD Creative Writing



# Nottingham's creative writing community

#### Opportunities at the University Student magazines

- Impact Magazine (the University's official student magazine)
- Firelight (the Creative Writing Society magazine)
- Her Campus (online magazine see hercampus.com/school/nottingham)

#### **The Creative Writing Society**

From coffee shop critiques to the *Off the Page* podcast, this friendly community welcomes anyone with a passion for writing.

#### **Nottingham New Theatre**

If you've ever fancied trying your hand at writing for the stage, the Nottingham New Theatre could be for you! It is the only theatre in the country run entriely by students, enabling you to try everything from acting, directing, producing and writing.

#### The Letters Page

Edited by Jon McGregor, this respected journal allows students to publish stories, essays, poems, interviews and reportage – all in the form of letters.

#### Words on Words

Develop your own voice and writing style and share your student experience by contributing to the School of English blog. See blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/wordsonwords

#### The English showcase

A student-run event which celebrates the work produced by final year undergraduates and masters students. For more information, see nottingham.ac.uk/english/showcase

## Opportunities in Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature

Nottingham became a UNESCO City of Literature in 2015. For events and news from across the city, see nottinghamcityofliterature.com

#### Nottingham Writers' Studio (NWS)

Offering workspaces, networking, advice, and creative and professional support, NWS helps writers navigate the path from aspiration through to publication. For more details, see nottinghamwritersstudio.co.uk

#### Writing East Midlands

Writing East Midlands organises a range of creative writing events and projects for and with emerging and established writers across the region.



Nottingham offers a wide range of societies to get involved in, including the online magazine *Her Campus*. I contribute articles to the travel section, and this has helped me meet students in years other than my own, as well as helping me to learn about pitching ideas and producing them efficiently whilst keeping to deadlines.

Emily Talbut BA English with Creative Writing

#### **Nottingham Poetry Exchange**

Nottingham Poetry Exchange is a dynamic poetry platform based in the Centre for Regional Literature and Culture at the School of English. It hosts a diverse events programme and a reading group, where discussions include modern to contemporary poetry, covering works by Lorine Niedecker, Kamau Brathwaite, Jorie Graham, Anna Mendelssohn, and Edna St Vincent Millay.

There are plenty of opportunities for students to get involved, whether through contributing a poem to the student-run poetry magazine, *Voices*, or participating in the annual open mic event, 'Lunch Poems'. The Exchange also runs lectures, which are led by students, staff, and visiting poets. Lecture topics have included sign language poetry, poetry and coding, and poetics of the reserve in the layered landscape.

Nottingham Poetry Exchange's regular performance and reading series has hosted special events with a number of contemporary poets, including Sophie Collins, Rachael Allen, Eley Williams, Abigail Parry, Andrew Taylor, Nisha Ramayaa, Sam Buchan-Watts, Nasser Hussein and Isabel Galleymore.

The Exchange is open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Nottingham. It is a fantastic way to meet other students from across the University who share a passion for poetry.

For news and events, plus interviews with visiting poets, see **nottinghampoetryexchange.wordpress.com** 





## **Experience real-life publishing**

The Letters Page is a literary magazine produced by School of English students, under the editorial guidance of Professor Jon McGregor. Now in its eighth year, the project enables our students to experience writing - and publishing - as real world practices.

What's unique about *The Letters Page* is that the stories, essays, and poems featured are all submitted in the form of handwritten letters.

The journal aims to develop links with writers and publishing professionals across the world. It explores the role of the letter in literary culture and in life, playing with the tensions between writing for a single reader and writing for an audience.

The Letters Page offers opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in publishing through a work placement scheme. Placement students work alongside Jon to read and select submissions, carry out editorial and design work, and write copy for the website and social media platforms.



Working on *The Letters Page* was an utterly invaluable experience. It gave me insight into everything from editorial process and consumer marketing to the logistics of producing a print publication. After I'd graduated, my placement with *The Letters Page* was also one of the biggest talking points I had with potential employers during job interviews.

Olivia French BA English with Creative Writing graduate (now working as Marketing and Communications Manager at HarperCollins)





## Meet our academics

#### Professor Jon McGregor Writer in Residence and Professor of Creative Writing

My role in the Creative Writing team is, in part, to act as a link between the seminar room and the world of publishing. My working week is divided 50/50 between the two, and my teaching is heavily informed by my experiences as a practising writer.

A very good approach to developing your writing skills is to read more, to write more, and to allow your writing to reflect your reading. These are skills and habits I work on with my students; encouraging analytical reading, an understanding of critical context, and an appetite for writing and rewriting. My focus in class is on storytelling technique: structure, pace, point of view, voice, character, and the search for a connection with your reader.

As well as teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, I work with students to edit and publish our literary journal, *The Letters Page*. This has given students an opportunity to really get their teeth into the 'nuts and bolts' of small-scale literary publishing. The buzzing editorial office of *The Letters Page* and the demands of the annual production cycle provide a real hub for those students who want to get more from their time at Nottingham.

When I'm not teaching, I write fiction. My most recent novel is Lean Fall Stand, which has been serialised on BBC Radio 4. My last novel, Reservoir 13, won the Costa Novel Award in 2017; I have also published two collections of stories and three other novels, as well as publishing short stories in Granta, Zoetrope, Conjunctions, The Guardian, and Five Dials. I was once Writer in Residence with the British Antarctic Survey, in Antarctica, but I don't like to talk about it.



My teaching is heavily informed by my experiences as a practising writer.

## Dr Lila Matsumoto Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

Creative writing gives unique insights into literature. Students who take creative writing learn not only how to read and analyse texts, but how to create the effects of those texts: its story, voice, humour, bathos, emotional resonance. My aim as a teacher of poetry is to help students develop the skills to convey the world imaginatively, and to pay close attention to the texture of the word.

In my classes we share our work in friendly and supportive workshops, discuss a wide range of poetry, take field trips to art galleries and museums, and partake in collaborative writing exercises. Writing may take place in private, but ultimately we produce work for others to read.

There are so many opportunities in Nottingham for engaging with creative writing, including readings at the artist-led space Primary, small press book fairs such as Bread & Roses, and lots of open mic events in the city. With a team of dedicated students I run the Nottingham Poetry Exchange, a programme of poetry performances, workshops, and reading group sessions.

I am a practicing poet and publish and perform my work regularly. My publications include *Urn & Drum* (Shearsman), *Soft Troika* (If a Leaf Falls Press), and *Allegories from my Kitchen* (Sad Press). I am particularly interested in experimental forms of production and performance of poetry, and the points of contact, historical and potential, between literary practice and visual arts.

I am also committed to organising literary events and creative writing workshops. I organised the Women's Poetry Publication Workshop, held at the Nottingham Women's Centre. Over the course of a day we learned about and produced our very own 'zine' (a hand-made poetry publication) using collage, typewriters, thread, and tape.



There are so many opportunities in Nottingham for engaging with creative writing.

## Dr Spencer Jordan Programme Director and Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

One of the great things about creative writing is that it forms its own unique relationship with each and every writer, every time they take up a pen or strike a keyboard. That's what makes creative writing such an exhilarating experience.

As members of the School of English, in the Faculty of Arts, our students become part of a rich and rewarding academic community that includes subjects from film and archaeology, to philosophy and music. Bringing these wider interests into your writing, allowing your practice to bridge disciplines and genres, is one of the key benefits of studying with us at Nottingham.

I was born and brought up in the East Midlands so perhaps it's no surprise that my novel, *Journeys in the Dead Season*, was set in the landscape in which I grew up. Yet the writing also quickly became an exploration of my own interests in history and memory. It also allowed me to explore techniques I'd picked up from writers like W. G. Sebald and Kazuo Ishiguro with their claustrophobic first person worlds. I quickly learned that writing is a research technique in its own right, a way of understanding more about the world. These are some of the things I bring into my teaching, whether at undergraduate or doctoral level.

Perhaps that's why I'm also fascinated by digital storytelling and the impact of 'the virtual'. It's here that I see my interests coming together, including my love of fiction and the literary geographies of place.



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#### Matt Welton Associate Professor in Creative Writing

Perhaps the most exciting thing about teaching creative writing is that I work with students whose experience in the other areas of their degree – language, literature, drama and medieval – means that when it comes to creating their own poetry, fiction and drama, their writing feels like it has been informed by a broad understanding of what language can do.

The vital element creative writing classes can add is an understanding of the way that writers go about making their work. I teach the poetry content on the 'Creative Writing Practice', 'Poetry: Forms and Conventions' and 'Advanced Writing Practice' modules, and use the sessions to encourage students to think of their own writing in the same contexts which apply to published writers. The processes of keeping a notebook, drafting and redrafting your writing, reading contemporary writing, and developing your knowledge of how publishing works all play a part in our student writers' development.

I have published four books of poems with Carcanet, most recently Squid Squad (2020), and have had work included in anthologies from publishers including Penguin, Faber and Bloodaxe. I am interested in the way poems can balance different kinds of content with the beauty of language. I am also fascinated by the overlap between poetry and other forms, including fiction, art and mathematics, and regularly collaborate with the composer Larry Goves.

I am also deeply involved in the Nottingham writing scene. There are lots of opportunities here for our students to learn about the world of writing from professional published authors. I do everything I can to encourage them.



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## Thomas Legendre Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

I am interested in helping students to produce fiction of all shapes and sizes. My classes are devoted to not only rigorous writing exercises, but also careful attention to the process of reading published works from a writer's perspective.

Using this approach, we develop an understanding of the subtle but crucial use of narrative voice and distance in relation to point-of-view, the structures of narrative, and the unexpected renderings of character, dialogue, setting and plot that lead to engaging stories and novels.

My creative work tends to draw from other disciplines, exploring the subjective underpinnings of apparently objective material. My first novel, The Burning, features characters whose personal lives are inextricable from their discoveries in the fields of economics, ecology, and astrophysics. My play, Half Life, was an entirely different sort of project - an immersive, site-specific performance which took place on the west coast of Scotland as part of NVA's environmental art installation - yet its dramatic technique was derived from the methods of archaeology as well as general relativity and cosmology.

More recently, my novel Keeping Time involves a blend of geology, archaeology, music, and time travel, while another work in progress, Spring Fever, is a quantum romantic techno-thriller with a literary sensibility.

I have also written critical essays, reviews, stories, and a radio drama, Dream Repair, broadcast on BBC4.



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### Meet our students

## Stephanie Limb PhD Creative Writing student and published author

I enrolled part time in the Creative Writing MA in 2018 – fifteen years after I graduated from my BA. I wanted to get better at writing and learn more about crafting fiction. I didn't guess how much I'd love studying again and I ended up taking additional modules until I was studying full time. I fell back in love with poetry and learned so much about fiction (and reading with a pen in my hand). However, the turning point was towards the end of the first semester when we experimented with creative criticism. Creative nonfiction was a form I'd ever considered for myself, but as I read Anne Carson, Anne Boyer and Jenny Boully, I discovered a mode of writing critically about real life. Chris Kraus calls it 'life thinking' rather than life writing. I didn't want my MA to end and applied for a PhD.

I'm now in the second year of my PhD. My project will be a single, blended creative-critical research project, where the criticism will not be restricted to conventional academic prose, allowing form to play an active part in the development of content. I'm informed by writers whose work is often described as auto-theory, like Chris Kraus, Paul B. Preciado and Maggie Nelson. My project aims to extend the lyric essay into auto-theoretical territory, while also telling a narrative; crossing boundaries between the essay, poetry, nonfiction and the novel.

Studying at Nottingham has transformed me in so many ways and introduced me to writers who challenge me to think about life. The teaching staff at Nottingham are always so generous with their time and with their expertise. They have encouraged me to seek publication. Since I began studying at Nottingham my work has appeared in Litro, The Moth, Stand, Structo and other journals. My first book: My Coleridge – a collection of lyric essays about Sara Coleridge and motherhood – was published by Broken Sleep Books in October 2020.



Studying at Nottingham has transformed me in so many ways and introduced me to writers who challenge me to think about life.

#### Michela Villano MA English Studies

I'm Michela and I am a current full-time MA English Studies student. I have been studying at the University of Nottingham for 4 years now, having done my BA in English with Creative Writing here too. I am mainly interested in creative writing, especially poetry and game writing, but I also study medieval literature of the 11th-15th century.

I really cannot stress enough how wholesome, exciting and rewarding my time at the University of Nottingham has been! Both courses have really shaped the person I am now, both academically and individually. The wide variety of module choices has always been the main selling point for me, especially since I do really like all areas of the School of English. Over the years I have managed to specialise in specific topics as well, thanks to the modules that have become more and more narrowed down in focus.

Studying at higher academic levels is challenging, but the University of Nottingham makes sure that you are always supported during your academic journey. I think that the relationships I have established with my tutors and lecturers have really helped me to develop my skills: sometimes I am still shocked at the improvement I have made overtime and I really have to thanks all the academics within the School of English that were always available and enthusiastic to chat with me about my assessment ideas, doubts, confusion and also about life in general.

During my BA and MA, I have also had the opportunity to participate in multiple placements with The Letters Page and The Nottingham Poetry Exchange. Working alongside published writers like Prof. Jon McGregor and Dr. Lila Matsumoto is an experience like no other: I have learned so much from their knowledge of the publishing sector, while also developing my communication, written and team working skills.

When I finished my BA, I never actually researched other universities for my MA: I knew that the University of Nottingham would welcome me again and that it would be the right place for me to keep growing academically. I can't wait to (hopefully) continue my journey forward with my PhD!



66 The relationships I have established with my tutors and lecturers have really helped me to develop my skills.



#### Regina Bergés BA English with Creative Writing student

Like everyone, at first I didn't know what to expect. Part of me felt like there was nothing new I could be taught about writing, plus the idea of sharing my work in seminars and receiving face to face feedback about it was scary. I had never done anything like that before, I used to keep all my work to myself. And I was not crazy about having poetry lessons along side fiction either, for I considered myself to be really bad at poetry.

All of this along with the fact that I was in a new country, living away from my home for the first time, made for a very intimidating scenario. But it didn't take long for me to feel at ease, as tutors in the course are open and welcoming, creating an environment where you want to write freely without judgement. Turns out I am good at writing poetry, and more importantly, I enjoy it as much as I enjoy writing fiction. The course's engagement gave me the space to discover new areas and writing styles that I would have never tried on my own. Tutors and classmates are very positive and supportive, receiving feedback never felt like an attack but rather like good advice; it feels good to know you're part of a group of people that can all help each other get better.

I feel like what skills I already possessed have been polished and renewed by the different perspectives people have shared with me about my writing. Leaving the university after these three years, not only do I feel ready to write out there in the world, but my curiosity has been ignited and I can't wait to learn more, to see where else I can take my skills.



The course's engagement gave me the space to discover new areas and writing styles that I would have never tried on my own.



Artwork credit: Zoe MacLellan



# Optional additional modules

As well as the Creative Writing modules mentioned on pages 4 and 5, you will have the opportunity to take modules from the other various sections of the school. Some examples are below.

#### **English Language & Linguistics**

- The Psychology of Bilingualism and Language Learning
- Language in Society
- Literary Linguistics
- Language Development
- Language and Feminism
- Discourses of Health and Work
- Advanced Stylistics
- Teaching English as a Foreign Language
- Language and the Mind

#### **English Literature**

- Shakespeare and Contemporaries on the Page
- From Talking Horses to Romantic Revolutionaries: Literature 1700-1830
- Modern and Contemporary Literature
- Literature and Popular Culture
- Modern Irish Literature and Drama
- One and Unequal: World Literatures in English
- The Gothic Tradition

#### **Medieval Languages & Literatures**

- Ice and Fire: Myths and Heroes of the North
- Texts Across Time
- Old English: Reflection and Lament
- English Place-Names
- Old English Heroic Poetry
- The Viking Mind

#### **Drama & Performance**

- From Stanislavski to Contemporary Performance
- Twentieth-Century Plays
- Changing Stages: Theatre Industry and Theatre Art
- Theatre Making
- Shakespeare and Contemporaries on the Stage

The modules on this page are a sample of what could be offered but not intended to be construed as a definitive list of the modules available. Modules may be changed, updated, or removed due to a number of reasons such as curriculum developments or staffing changes. To see full up to date course info including modules, use the QR code at the top of the page.

## **Creative futures**

Our graduates have moved into a diverse range of careers, working as:

- Teachers and lecturers
- Copywriters
- Journalists
- Communications officers
- Editors
- Singers/songwriters
- Digital marketers
- Proof readers

Our creative writing programmes are designed to develop a range of transferable professional skills, including:

- Analytical reasoning
- Communication
- Research
- Creativity
- Self-motivation
- Time-management
- Developing and presenting complex ideas

#### Clare Harvey, professional author

Clare graduated from Nottingham with an MA in Creative Writing in 2012. Her MA coursework formed the basis for her award-winning debut novel, *The Gunner Girl*. Clare has published four historical fiction novels since 2015. Her most recent, *The Escape*, is out now.

1 loved my time at Nottingham, and the high quality tuition I received definitely lifted my writing to a level that got it noticed by agents and editors, and was the stepping-off point for my career as a published author.





Photo credit: Simon Buck

### Hannah Reid and Dot Major, London Grammar

London Grammar's vocalist Hannah Reid and Dominic 'Dot' Major are both alumni from the School of English, having graduated in BA History of Art and English and BA English, respectively.

The band formed in 2009, when Hannah met guitarist Dan Rothman (Economics and Philosophy) in the Ancaster Hall of residence. Dot joined a year later, and London Grammar was born. Fast forward to 2013, and their platinum-selling debut album, *If You Wait*, was iTunes Album of the Year. Read London Grammar's *LeftLion* interview about songwriting, studying and performing in Nottingham at tiny.cc/szbh7y



mage shows: Dot Major and Dan Rothman of London irammar, collecting their Alumni Laureate Awards in 014.



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