

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

# SPEAKING VOLUMES



At the University of Reading we make the study of English Literature not only a rewarding challenge, but also the foundation of a critical and cultural awareness that will remain with you for life. Our curriculum is global, contemporary and comprehensive. You can study literature from across the world and every period of history, right up to the present. You will become part of a diverse community of readers and writers, united in our passion for our subject.

**Michelle O'Callaghan**  
Head of the Department  
of English Literature

[www.reading.ac.uk/english](http://www.reading.ac.uk/english)

**“ Literature is where  
I go to explore the  
highest and lowest  
places in human  
society and in the  
human spirit, where  
I hope to find not  
absolute truth but  
the truth of the tale,  
of the imagination  
and of the heart.”**

**Salman Rushdie**



# FINDING UTOPIA



**Dr Chloë  
Houston**

Dr Chloë Houston's research is on early modern utopian fiction, or ideas about the ideal society in writing from the 16th and 17th centuries.

After reading Thomas More's *Utopia* as a student, she became fascinated by how people imagine ideal societies and by the contradictions within them. "Utopia initially seems like a model society, especially compared to the social inequality of Tudor England, but it's such a playful book, full of jokes and irony, that it sometimes challenges the ideal nature of that society."

Living at a time which can seem more dystopian than utopian, we question how our own society functions, and our place within it. Through the 'Utopia' module that Chloë teaches, students encounter fictional ideal societies from More to the present day, and consider their own answers to philosophical questions such as what it means to lead a good life, and how we order society so that as many people live as well as possible.

Utopian texts also have much to tell us about the time in which they were written and their authors' own lives and values. In comparing different utopian texts, students evaluate how different writers imagine better societies and communities, and look at how utopias relate to certain historical moments. Using a blog which they compile over the term, students choose the themes and ideas which interest them the most and create their own pathway through the module.

“Teaching 'Utopia' is such a rewarding experience. I love hearing how students respond to these images of different societies and thinking about the bases on which any society can be considered ideal.”



# OTHER WORLDS



**Dr Aisling Byrne**

**Dr Aisling Byrne specialises in medieval literature. Her first book was entitled *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* and she developed a final-year module, 'Medieval Otherworlds', based on her research.**

"I was sixteen when I first encountered medieval literature. I had read *The Lord of the Rings* and my interest in Tolkien led me to the Old and Middle English writings that he studied in his academic career. I can trace my interest in all things medieval to that discovery."

Researching her book opened Aisling's eyes to a whole range of medieval stories about strange and wonderful alternative worlds. She wanted to feed this research into her teaching. On the module, Aisling and her students explore medieval accounts of fantastical places: texts where questing knights arrive in fairy kingdoms, surreal accounts of the world of dreams, and travellers' tales that fill remote corners of the world with marvels.

**“I worked on medieval otherworld descriptions for seven years while writing my book, but in every class students come up with new perspectives, new material, and new ideas. There has been wonderful intellectual collaboration on the module and that's always really exciting.”**



Alongside the module on 'Medieval Otherworlds', Aisling also runs two introductory medieval modules in the second year of the degree. One of these is a module on Chaucer, and the other introduces the very earliest literature in the English language: Old English literature. Aisling has now started work on her next book which explores how two popular genres, romance and epic, intersect in medieval writing. This project was inspired by classroom discussions about Old English epic poetry.

The collaboration involved in seminar discussions means students come away with a real sense of ownership of the material – they are engaging with new research as it takes shape.

# AFTER WINDRUSH



Dr Nicola Abram is interested in the ways in which literature imagines and enacts a more equitable and just society, with a particular

focus on the aesthetics of contemporary postcolonial and feminist writings, and reading representations of 'race', ethnicity and gender in non-naturalistic British drama.

"During my undergraduate degree I became curious about the idea of 'identity', which so often appears in contemporary literature. Focusing specifically on the issues of gender and ethnicity, I began researching plays and performance poetry by black British women – most of which had never been published. This resulted in my first book, *Black British Women's Theatre: Intersectionality, Archives, Aesthetics*."

Nicola shares this fascinating subject with students on the Part 3 module 'Black British Fiction', where she works with students to analyse a range of texts – novels, short stories, poetry, plays, films, and theory – in relation to their historical contexts.

Through the module students look at the ways in which ideas of 'home', 'community', 'conflict' and 'belonging' have evolved since the Windrush period (the phase of post-war migration from the Caribbean to Britain, named after the boat on which hundreds of passengers travelled to the UK in 1948). They also trace the use of different forms of English, such as Jamaican Creole, and recognise how language and literature are enriched by these sources.

“By the end of the module students are better informed about the colonial and postcolonial history of Britain, and are equipped and eager to critique insular ideas of the nation. Not only do they recognise and celebrate the diversity of its citizens, but they become more active and engaged as citizens themselves.”





**BACK  
TO  
THE  
FUTURE**



**Professor David Brauner**

**Professor David Brauner's main research interests are in the fields of contemporary American fiction and twentieth-century Jewish literature. He has also published work on graphic novels, Holocaust fiction, and on the representation of ethnicity, gender and sexuality in the modern novel.**

"Comics were my first love; as a child I taught myself to read by looking over my older brother's shoulder as he sat transfixed by the latest issue of the Avengers or Fantastic Four. Many years later, I included *Maus* on a 'Holocaust Fiction' module that I offered at Reading. In the last few years, I have developed a

much broader interest in the graphic novel form, publishing a number of essays on confessional works by Jewish-American women writers and on the representation of 9/11 in the comics medium."

David's research has fed into a final-year module, 'The American Graphic Novel', which looks at texts such as *Watchmen*, *Fun Home* and *Ghost World*. The module begins by getting the students to look at how traditional ideas of (super) heroism and the conventions of the comic-book were reinvented in the context of the Cold War and widespread anxiety about a nuclear apocalypse. It ends by looking at how the Holocaust has been represented in

graphic-novel form. Is it possible to depict such a traumatic event in comics without trivialising it? In between, we look at a number of texts that blur the lines between fiction and autobiography, focusing on the ways in which they depict childhood and adolescence.

Dr Ian Sansom (Trinity College, Dublin), an external examiner for the English degree at Reading, said that the reading list for this module was 'the best I have ever seen for any course at any university'.

**“The best thing about teaching this module is that I get to share my expertise and enthusiasm with the students and their ideas and insights have in turn inspired me to conduct further research in the field.”**



# VOLUMES OF EXPERIENCE

**Our library contains over a million volumes, and our students have access to a wide variety of online resources too.**

Here at Reading, we have a number of internationally significant research collections, including the Samuel Beckett archive, the Special Collection of Children's Literature, and the Archive of British Publishing and Printing. We use these unique archives in our teaching: all of our students have the opportunity to work with rare materials as part of their degree course. Students can also access teaching materials, contact their tutors, and keep up to date with their modules via our virtual learning environment.

**Whatever your interests, you'll be able to develop them here at Reading.**

Budding journalists can write for our award-winning student newspaper, *The Spark*, or host and produce radio shows for the campus-based radio station, Junction 11. There are lots of opportunities to get involved in student sports, music and drama. In the Department of English Literature, students produce an annual creative writing anthology, run writers' groups and political and debating societies, and our English Society organises social events and trips.

**“I got very involved with extra-curricular activities, throwing myself into student media and political cause societies in particular. I knew I wanted to work in politics/journalism, so I was able to host my own radio show, run my own news team and get involved with campaigns I cared about.”**

**Oliver Ratcliffe**  
BA (Hons) English Literature and Politics



# READ ABROAD

**English at Reading helps you develop as a global citizen. You can study abroad at one of our partner institutions in Europe, North America or Australasia for a term or even a whole year in the four-year variant of our programme.**

This is a great opportunity to continue your study of English Literature whilst immersing yourself in a different culture and enhancing your language skills.

**“Studying abroad enriched me in so many ways. I was able to adapt quickly to my new surroundings and meet the easiest people to get on with I have ever encountered. It has helped me gain confidence in all aspects of my life. I was able to settle into new teaching styles and after just a few weeks I received requests from my professors to use my work as examples for future classes, which makes me incredibly proud.”**

**Emily Barnes**  
BA (Hons) English Literature – studied abroad at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)



# ON THE PROFESSIONAL TRACK

As an English Literature graduate, you will enter the job market with highly developed research and communication skills. You will know how to access reliable information on any topic and how to present your findings in clear and persuasive language; these are valuable skills in today's competitive economy. Many of our modules are vocational as well as academic. They offer you a preview of different career paths, and they develop skills that will be crucial to your success after university. For instance:

Our first year module, **Persuasive Writing**, develops your professional writing skills. It involves you in debates about the role of literature and language in democracy.

In the second year, **The Business of Books** introduces the history of publishing and gives you access to historical machinery used in book production.

Our second-year modules **Communications at Work** and **Literature, Languages and Media** involve placements in relevant professional settings.

We work closely with industry and employers to help you gain experience while at university and to ensure that our degrees are highly regarded in the employment market. We offer our students a range of innovative 'placement modules' in which two weeks of your learning takes place in professional environments; this is a great opportunity to try out different career paths.

Recent graduate destinations include:

- Oxford University Press
- Time Inc UK
- Department for Work and Pensions
- BBC Worldwide
- Mergermarket, Financial Times Group
- Macmillan Publishing
- The Royal Mint
- Sky Sports
- Cisco Systemss

“**[Literature, Languages and Media] was an incredible module not only because I now am a published author, but we also gained some invaluable hands-on experience when it comes to publishing and marketing.**”

**Katie Lawman**  
BA (Hons) English Literature



# WRITING HER OWN HEADLINES



**Chayya Syal is an English Literature graduate who now works as a writer, broadcast journalist and consultant. She has worked for the BBC Asian Network and The Asian Today newspaper.**

In 2016, she was presented with a *Women of the Future* media award and in 2017, at the age of 25, she was included in Forbes 30 Under 30 Europe list of influential media figures.

“There's so much that I love about my job. Firstly, I'm just so happy and humbled that my ambition to become a journalist has become a reality – I overcame a lot of adversity to get here which is why my career means so much to me. One of the best things about my job is the breadth of people I meet and the diverse range of opportunities which come my way.”

Chayya says that her time at Reading really laid the foundations for a successful career.

“The best thing I did was writing for the university newspaper. It not only gave me confidence but an idea as to what a potential career in journalism could entail. In addition, all of the articles, working skills and editorial skills I learnt have been invaluable to me as I have gone deeper into my career as a journalist.

“A huge bonus about getting involved with student led media is that I learnt a lot of practical, hands on skills which have put me at a distinct advantage over candidates who don't have that practical experience.

I also kept every single article I ever wrote and put it in my portfolio – it's a brilliant, physical thing for me to carry into job interviews because it shows my progression from print to broadcast and digital. I'm currently working on the BBC Coding Journalism Pilot Project for the Digital Pilots and Skills, where I'm learning how to code! This is something I never thought that I'd do as a journalist – our usual skills set is communication but the industry is becoming increasingly tech focused.

“**My time studying English Literature at Reading was one of the best times of my life so far because I got to study a subject I loved in depth and got to grips with skills and ways of learning which I use in my everyday career. I hope that future students who are considering studying English at Reading do so because the department is full of staff who are extremely knowledgeable, supportive and want their students to succeed.**”



# GO YOUR OWN WAY

We offer our students a fully rounded education in a friendly and supportive environment. The range and diversity of our module options allow you to specialise in areas of literary studies that interest you most.

You will be taught in small groups and receive regular one-to-one tuition. The English Literature with Creative Writing degree pathway, available to single-honours students, is taught by authors working at the highest professional level. All of our students have the opportunity for regular contact with their own, named academic tutor. We monitor standards, student achievement and student satisfaction to ensure everyone achieves their full potential.

“I love having the freedom to choose my modules and study the areas of literature that interest me, and now that I’m working on my dissertation in my final year I feel more supported and encouraged by staff within the department than ever. Studying at Reading has fuelled my love of literature and given me a university experience that has boosted my confidence both academically and personally. I’ve never doubted that Reading was the right choice for me.”

**Hannah Groves**  
BA (Hons) English Literature



# CREATIVE WRITING

**Creative writing allows you to explore literary creativity from the inside: creating characters, shaping poems, and drawing on your imagination.**

There are two ways to explore creative writing at Reading. You can enrol directly onto one of our creative writing joint degree programmes or single honours English Literature students who take a Creative Writing module in the first year can switch to the joint honours English Literature with Creative Writing degree at the end of that same year.

We teach creative writing in a variety of ways, including via lectures and workshops. Our teaching covers novels, poetry, screen writing and radio plays and your workshops will concentrate on specific, practical issues such as how to construct a character or the challenges of writing historical fiction. Our small workshop group sessions are the heart of Reading’s writing community: guided by one of our lecturers, you will gain confidence through practical writing exercises. You will also have the opportunity to publish your work - and gain experience in editing and publishing - by participating in our annual Creative Writing Anthology.

The Department boasts prize-winning poets and novelists among its staff including Kate Clanchy MBE who won the UK’s most prestigious award for political writing when ‘Some Kids I Taught And What They Taught Me’ was named the winner of the Orwell Prize for Political Writing Book. In 2018, she received an MBE for services to poetry. Professor Peter Robinson, described in reviews as ‘the finest poet of his generation’ and ‘a major English poet’ has been the winner of the Cheltenham Prize and John Florio Prize.

“The opportunity to work closely with published and experienced authors was really beneficial to my work as the feedback was so valuable. The workshops allowed me to share my work, gaining invaluable feedback while making friends; often we would continue talking about our work in the pub, long after the class had finished! The chance to try a range of different forms from dialogue to non-fiction journalism allowed me to explore what I was interested in and what I wanted to pursue further. This support meant that my work was good enough to be published!”

**Louis Danby**  
English Literature with Creative Writing

# COURSES

BA English Literature  
(with optional Creative Writing pathway)

BA English Literature with Foundation

## OUR JOINT DEGREES

### Creative Writing:

BA English Literature with Creative Writing

BA Creative Writing and Film

BA Creative Writing and Film & Theatre

BA Creative Writing and Theatre

BA Art and Creative Writing

### English Degrees with Modern Languages:

BA Modern Languages and English Literature

BA English Literature with French

### Joint Degrees with other subjects:

BA English Language and Literature

BA English Literature and Film and Theatre

BA English Literature and Film

BA English Literature and Theatre

BA English Literature and International Relations

BA English Literature and Politics

BA Art and English Literature

BA Classical Studies and English Literature

BA History and English Literature

BA Philosophy and English Literature

# YEAR 1

BA English literature at Reading begins by giving you a secure foundation in the subject, followed by a wide range of options.

In your first year, you will study modules that introduce fundamental debates about the study of literature, through close analysis of selected texts from a broad range of historical periods.

## Year 1 modules include:

Genre and Context

Poetry in English

Research and Criticism

Twentieth-Century American Literature

What is Comparative Literature?

Introduction to Creative Writing

Thinking Translation: History and Theory

# YEAR 2

In the second year, you will have a range of module options, covering key historical periods, themes and concepts.

## Year 2 modules include:

The Business of Books

Contemporary Fiction

Chaucer and Medieval Narrative

Critical Issues

Early Modern Theatre Practice

The Romantic Period

Shakespeare

Victorian Literature

Writing America

Writing, Gender, Identity

The Romantic Period

Renaissance Texts and Cultures

Shakespeare

Victorian Literature

Writing America

Writing, Gender, Identity

Writing and Revising

# YEAR 3

When you reach your third year, you are able to choose from up to 40 research-led modules.

You can concentrate on particular periods or genres encountered in the first two years of study, or expand your interests in other directions, from postcolonial literature to manuscript studies and children's literature.

## Year 3 modules include:

Hitchcock

Contemporary American Fiction

Children's Literature

Dickens

Holocaust Testimony

Modern American Drama

Margaret Atwood

Psychoanalysis and Text

Shakespeare on Film

Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury

## Dissertation

You can further tailor your degree to meet your personal interests through your final-year dissertation. This is an independent research project with individual supervision, enabling you to produce a work of significance and originality.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

# JOINT DEGREES

## BREADTH AND VARIETY

Our joint courses allow you to study two subjects in detail, adding to the breadth of your knowledge base and equipping you with skills from two different disciplines. At Reading, we offer you an extensive range of joint honours courses.

## DESIGNED TO SUPPORT

You will be taught by academics across two departments and will have one Academic Tutor who will support you throughout your degree. As a joint degree student you will study for the same number of credits as a single honours student, choosing roughly half of your modules from each of your subjects. You will need to take some compulsory modules, but you will also have a choice of optional modules enabling you to tailor your degree to your areas of interest.

## EXPAND YOUR CAREER HORIZONS

Studying a joint degree course gives you the opportunity to gain a breadth of new skills and knowledge valued by employers. Combining your studies in English Literature or Creative Writing with another subject can broaden your employment prospects as you will be equipped to pursue work or study in either area.

For specific details about each joint degree course, including up to date module information, please go to our website [www.reading.ac.uk/english](http://www.reading.ac.uk/english)

## OUR JOINT DEGREES

### English Literature and Creative Writing:

- BA English Literature with Creative Writing
- BA Creative Writing and Film
- BA Creative Writing and Film & Theatre
- BA Creative Writing and Theatre
- BA Art and Creative Writing

### English Degrees with Modern Languages:

- BA Modern Languages and English Literature
- BA English Literature with French

### Joint Degrees With Other Subjects:

- BA English Language and Literature
- BA English Literature and Film and Theatre
- BA English Literature and Film
- BA English Literature and Theatre
- BA English Literature and International Relations
- BA English Literature and Politics
- BA Art and English Literature
- BA Classical Studies and English Literature
- BA History and English Literature
- BA Philosophy and English Literature

"Studying two subjects kept my options open enough to allow my degree to be shaped to my interests, but was also specific enough to propel me along the road towards my future job."

### Oliver Ratcliffe

Oliver graduated from Reading with a first class degree in English Literature and Politics in 2015. He now works as a writer for TalkPolitics, a think tank dedicated to challenging voter apathy among young people

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### Modules disclaimer

Sample modules are provided as a taster of some of the modules that may be available on this course. The sample modules listed may be compulsory (core) or optional modules. Information is correct at the time of going to press (June 2021) but the University cannot guarantee that a module appearing in this list will definitely run.

For optional modules, the University cannot guarantee that all optional modules will be available to all students who may wish to take them, although the University will try to ensure that students are able to take optional modules in which they have expressed interest at the appropriate time during their course. Optional modules vary from year to year and entry to them will be at the discretion of the Programme Director.

Some modules are available on more than one course; if you see a sample module under one course and want to know if it is available on another course, contact the relevant department.

### Disclaimer

This brochure was issued in 2021 and is aimed at prospective undergraduate students wishing to apply for a place at the University of Reading (the University) and start a course in autumn 2022. The brochure describes in outline the courses and services offered by the Department of English Literature at the University. The University makes every effort to ensure that the information provided in the brochure is accurate and up-to-date at the time of going to press (June 2021). However, it may be necessary for the University to make some changes to the information presented in the brochure following publication – for example, where it is necessary to reflect changes in practice or theory in an academic subject as a result of emerging research; or if an accrediting body requires certain course content to be added or removed. To make an informed and up-to-date decision, we recommend that you check [www.reading.ac.uk/Ready-to-Study.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/Ready-to-Study.aspx) for up-to-date information.

The University undertakes to take all reasonable steps to provide the services (including the courses) described in this brochure. It does not, however, guarantee the provision of such services. Should industrial action or circumstances beyond the control of the University interfere with its ability to provide the services, the University undertakes to use all reasonable steps to minimise any disruption to the services.

### Year abroad and placement fees

Some courses include an optional or compulsory year abroad or placement year. During this year you will only pay a partial fee which is currently set at 15% of the normal tuition fee. Check the website for the latest information: [www.reading.ac.uk/fee-discount-18](http://www.reading.ac.uk/fee-discount-18)



**Department of English Literature**

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**Ask us a question**

[www.reading.ac.uk/question](http://www.reading.ac.uk/question)