LANCASTER

WORDS

An Anthology of Essays
Contents

Introduction by Dr Brian Baker and Dr Jo Carruthers

‘Belief’ by Dr Andrew Tate 4

‘Biblio’ by Dr Liz Oakley-Brown 9

‘Mapping’ by Professor Sally Bushell 13

‘Rough’ by Dr Jo Carruthers 19

‘Scripture’ by Dr Mark Knight 24

‘Something’ by Professor John Schad 28

‘Type’ by Dr Brian Baker 32

Illustrations by Inés Gregori Labarta and Rebecca Shaw
Dr Brian Baker and Dr Jo Carruthers

Welcome to Lancaster!

That is what we might say the first time we see you, as a way of introducing you to the Department of English Literature and Creative Writing, or a way of introducing you to your three years of undergraduate study with us. Of course, it is also a way of introducing ourselves to you.

The way we introduce ourselves will tell you something about us, in what we say but also how we say it, the tones of our voices, the kinds of words we use, the way we walk and wave our arms around – our body language. An introduction is a beginning, and in some ways sets up what is to come. We want to make the right introduction: make a good impression, hit the right note, set off on the right foot! (Or left.)

These are all figures of speech, ways of saying, in other words: we want to welcome you into your studies and put you at your ease. We want you to be excited and stimulated and to enjoy yourself. We want to show you the kind of things you will be doing with us as part of your degree, whether in English Literature or in Creative Writing (or in both). This short book of essays is intended to introduce you to the Department, in what we hope will be a stimulating and fun way.

These essays are also an introduction to a certain way of thinking about language as something that is historical and cultural. The essays here think about the changes of meaning in a single word, the ways in which literature plays with language and how its meanings may often be up for grabs. The essays demonstrate how our reading of what we have decided to term ‘literature’ is an adventure, a challenge, often a puzzle. We have been inspired by Raymond Williams’s 1976 Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, a book that is certainly worth introducing to you. Type the words ‘Williams’ and ‘Keywords’ into the library ‘Onesearch’ when you arrive and there’s an electronic copy to dip into. Or read it in the library itself. Have a look at Williams’s own introduction to the book: that’s the kind of thinking that inspires these essays, and hopefully, will inspire you.

So, what you are reading now is an Introduction to the Introduction, we might say. In this little book, Lancaster Words, we want to introduce ourselves before you meet us when you come to Lancaster. We want to show you the kind of things we do, and the kind of inter-related things we want you to be doing when you’re here: writing, thinking, reading – using words.

Not all of us are present here. You’ll meet more of us, in person, when you come. Here there are seven of us who have written short essays to get you thinking about words, and literature, about writing. They are all very different, because they are written by very different people! The book has been illustrated by Inés Gregori Labarta and Rebecca Shaw, and the illustrations will introduce us to you in a different way.
Not every book begins with an Introduction, of course. Many novels do not. Some do, especially those published as ‘Classics’, and those are introduced by someone other than the person who wrote the novel. The Introductions to those novels have a particular function and purpose: to provide some historical context, for instance, or biographical details. But they might be a way of putting the reader at their ease. They might be saying, in effect, ‘yes, we know you don’t know anything about this person, and the setting or context may well be very unfamiliar to you, but look, how interesting it is! How different! Keep turning the pages and you will find out!’

So, of course, this is what we would like you to do at Lancaster: keep turning the pages. To find out.

Some kinds of books begin differently. Some have a ‘Preface’, which can be like a short Introduction and is more often written by the author of the main body of the book. Some may have Acknowledgements of one thing or another, a kind of indebtedness that extends to the reader: ‘begging you pardon, dear reader, but we’d just like to thank…’ (Often these end up thanking you, for putting up with the delay. Unless you skip that bit. I hope you haven’t skipped this bit. Thank you for reading.)

Just as often, of course, with a novel or a poetry collection, you have a title page, contents page, then – BANG! You’re plunged right into the first poem, or the beginning of the story, and you have to go from there. And then, the beginning of the book itself is the introduction. Which prompts certain questions.

How does the book welcome you? What techniques or strategies does it use? Does it ask you to bring certain knowledge or understanding to the text to enable you to make meaning from it, to complete it? How does it start? How does it end?

These are questions we’d like you to think about when you read these short essays that we have compiled in this book. All of them can be called ‘essays’, but they each use different techniques, different strategies. Some, like the last one, are very overt in those strategies, asking you to recognise some things it is doing immediately. Others will ask different things of you, perhaps more subtle or implicit things.

So, what we would like you to do with these essays is to read them. Then, we would like you to think about them. Not only in what they say, but how they say it.

When you come to write your own essays, these are questions we would like you to bear in mind with your own writing. Not only what you are saying, but how you are saying it. What strategies and techniques do you use? How are you welcoming or persuading the reader? What shape does the essay have? What does it ask the reader to do? How do you start and how do you end?

When you arrive in Lancaster for what is known as Welcome Week, there will be certain activities that will involve you and the department and we will draw on these essays as part of that Introduction. So please read them and think about them and, when you get to see us, you can try to match who we present ourselves as being here with who we appear to be in person. (Not, I should add, who we are.) We look forward to meeting you all, in person.

And we hope you enjoy these essays. Welcome to Lancaster!
“Faith” is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who see!

But Microscopes are prudent
In an Emergency!

Belief
by

Ft
Emily
Andrew
Tate

Belief. Dr Andrew Tate
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
Belief is one of the most contested combat zones of literary history. In the early twenty-first century, we tend to see the great world library as a treasury of open-mindedness, freedom and empathic connection. Yet risk-taking authors have often been punished for articulating unorthodox convictions. For example, John Bunyan, Puritan author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), was imprisoned for his radical faith; a century or so later, Oxford University ejected Percy Bysshe Shelley because he wrote a pamphlet that advocated atheism. Literary censorship is not limited to deep history: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee is celebrated as a critique of racism but has not always been welcome in the author’s native south. Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (2000), a powerful graphic memoir of growing up in Iran during the revolution, has been banned in both the author-artist’s country of birth and certain schools in the United States. In each of these very different cases, the texts defy social expectations and present alternative ways of seeing the world. Literature of all genres, of every era, has the potential to challenge conventional creeds.

‘I do not believe in Belief,’ writes E. M. Forster in a memorable defence of liberalism, tolerance and human sympathy. In his fiction and criticism, Forster critiques all forms of dogmatism and certainty. The denouements of Forster’s most famous novels, *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1922-4), both privilege personal relationships and, in particular, the intimacy of friendship above nationality, religion or politics. This gentle hostility to codified forms of belonging is very different from suggesting that belief – an act of faith in something or someone – evaporated in the early twentieth century. Emily Dickinson, a dynamic, witty and distinctive American writer, who published only a few poems during her own lifetime, offers a playful but acute thought about the relationship between faith and science in a few short lines:

“Faith” is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who see!

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But Microscopes are prudent
In an Emergency!²

This kind of scepticism is a distinctive strand of literary culture and the rebellious disposition of Romantic writers in the early nineteenth century encouraged the view that authority, whether located in church, government or education, should be resisted. ‘I must create a System or be enslav'd by another Man’s,’ writes William Blake, the visionary poet-artist.³ This fierce celebration of individual identity foreshadows the big shift towards belief in the self, an idea that has become something of a cliché in contemporary popular culture. Non-conformity and narcissism are, however, different phenomena. Blake’s idiosyncratic principles advocate individualistic belief rooted in creativity and compassion rather than defiant egotism.

The relative decline of institutional religion in Europe, particularly in the public sphere, is often coupled with faith in more earthly concerns, such as democracy or social justice. From a contemporary progressive perspective, literature is frequently understood as the opposite of political or religious propaganda since it relies on openness, ambiguity and uncertainty. According to John Carey, literature ‘does not indoctrinate, because diversity, counter-argument, reappraisal and qualification are its essence’.⁴ This is a somewhat idealized view as it suggests that ‘literature’ is a category of writing that somehow escapes human proclivities for self-defence, obfuscation and deception of which lesser art forms might be guilty. However, it is vital that we are alert to the ways in which revered, canonical writers sometimes evade difficult questions about their work.

Is it ever possible for writing to be ethically neutral? Oscar Wilde certainly professed to believe so. ‘There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book,’ claims Wilde in the preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891). For the daring fin-de-siècle author, books ‘are well written, or badly written. That is all’.⁵ This interpretation is attractive in lots of ways because it distances the pleasures of art from the difficult responsibilities of ethical action. Yet it is far from the whole story: Wilde’s Gothic fable might style itself as scrupulously amoral

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but its ending seems to be shaped by traditional morality and Dorian’s deeds have specific, punitive consequences. A belief that books can be judged purely on aesthetic criteria also neatly avoids the ways in which all texts and readers emerge from the mess and complexity of specific historical moments. Few of us would claim to be free of any kind of belief, even if we are not committed to a clearly defined spiritual or ethical worldview. The act of reading is not a morally objective experience: our prejudices and values, consciously or otherwise, do not disappear when we encounter a text. However, we can become more aware of our political or moral beliefs and begin to address the kind of assumptions that shape our reading. ‘Human beings are ethical animals,’ states Simon Blackburn. This contemporary philosopher is not making a claim for the innate goodness of human beings but he observes that our history has plenty of evidence, often embodied in art, that we aspire to virtue: ‘We hope for lives whose story leaves us looking admirable; we like our weaknesses to be hidden and deniable.’ The sense of a human need for our lives to resemble a story – a set of events with meaningful purpose, bound to time but not damaged by it – might be one explanation for why we invest so heavily in stories told about other lives, ones often far removed from our own, in both space and time.

The long tradition of ‘speculative’ or post-apocalyptic fiction – one that we can trace back at least as far as Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) – has become extraordinarily popular in the last twenty years. Some of the most vivid and artistically successful contemporary examples of these novels are characterised by a strong sense of engagement with human responsibility. Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-13), for example, imagines a post-apocalyptic future in which a lonely man, Jimmy (aka Snowman), reflects on his part in the downfall of humanity. However, the three novels in the sequence are more interested in how human beings are able to behave in an ethical way even in horribly bleak circumstances. This is also true of Suzanne Collins’ dystopian *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-10) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006). Each narrative presents the worst kind of human behaviour possible. However, the narratives also subtly identify resources of hope, defiance and practical forms of belief as a way of resisting despair. The futures that they imagine are a kind of challenge to ethical complacency in our own age.

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Literary texts normally ask readers to suspend their disbelief, to make a leap of faith, or to believe, temporarily, in their fabricated realities. Indeed, the mood in which we might start to believe that the inner life of, for example, Jane Eyre or Katniss Everdeen, is authentic and truthful is one of the pleasures of reading. James Wood makes a parallel between the ways in which traditional religion and literary texts require different kinds of belief. ‘Fiction moves in the shadow of doubt,’ he argues, and ‘knows itself to be a true lie, knows that at any moment it might fail to make its case. Belief in fiction is always belief “as if”’. This temporary state, in which scepticism and belief are in dialogue, might be empowering for a reader. Indeed, the study of literature can create a space between credulity and scepticism: it requires both skills of deduction rooted in evidence and the capacity for empathic imaginative connection with others. Critical reflection is a form of attention that makes ethical demands of authors and readers; nobody who is part of this process is finally able to ignore the social reality that we are connected to a wider world, one made up of different selves and voices.

Meet Andy....

Andy’s two main research areas are literature and religion and apocalyptic fiction. He has many other varied literary interests including nineteenth-century fiction, American literature, Romanticism, the work of John Ruskin, literature and the visual arts and environmental literature.

Andy is also involved in the University’s Graphic Novels and Comics Research Network, which includes the Department’s Distinguished Visiting Professor Benoît Peeters.

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Biblio - Dr Liz Oakley-Brown
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
I love books. I love words about books. If I had a pet snail I would call it ‘Biblio’ after βιβλίο, the Greek term for ‘book’. (Yes, I also love snails but that’s another story.) A great deal of my professional life is spent thinking about two specific book-related words: ‘bibliography’ and ‘bibliotherapy’ and I thought you might like to know why.

Most of us engaged in essay writing (that is, you and me) are familiar with the term ‘bibliography’, the list of works cited and consulted which are placed at the end of a piece of scholarly writing to prove that we have adequately researched, and are thus informed about, the foregoing topic. The English Literature and Creative Writing Part One Handbook has a fair bit to say about bibliographies, for example under the subheadings Moodle (p.4), Word Limits (p.22, p.35), Presentation (p.23), References (pp.31-32) and Marking Criteria (p.40). In these respects, the Part One Handbook makes it very clear that a bibliography is a mandatory part of an academic’s toolkit; it must be used. There are also creative and collaborative aspects of bibliographies which are often overlooked. ‘Bibliography’ (from the Greek βιβλιογραφία) means ‘book-writing’ and in the seventeenth-century the word meant just that: ‘The writing of books’. It is only since the early nineteenth century that the noun refers to ‘The systematic description and history of books, their authorship, printing, publication, editions, etc.’

However, there is a great deal of pleasure to be had in fashioning your bespoke ‘systematic description’ of the primary and secondary materials you have studied in order to produce your coursework or publication. When crafting the essay itself gets tricky (which it inevitably does) turning to the art of bibliography – and I like to think of it as an art – can offer a helpful change of pace and activity that allows you to return to the prose form with a refreshed perspective. Furthermore, a bibliography allows your reader to take up and develop your essay’s interesting critical observations (which you inevitably will make) by engaging with some of the works you have listed. This is exciting. I have encountered many books, book

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8 Anon. The English Literature and Creative Writing Part One Handbook 2017-18 (unpublished). All references are given in the text.

chapters, articles and scholarly websites on bibliographies of all kinds which have
subsequently shaped my own critical thinking. As much as they calibrate your sources,
bibliographies are records of your partnerships with past, present and future literary critics.
And at some point in your writing career it is often revealing to reflect upon the collective
content of your bibliographies. Are there critics and theorists that make regular appearances?
What kinds of secondary sources are frequently omitted? To what extent do your
bibliographies represent ideological choices? Questions such as these help to show how
bibliographies are dynamic components of scholarship.

Bibliographies are necessary and helpful for academic writing. Yet they not are
healthful in the way that the term ‘bibliotherapy’ proposes. Coined in 1916 by Samuel McCord
Crothers in an article entitled ‘A Literary Clinic’ (Atlantic Monthly, 293), ‘bibliotherapy’ broadly
describes the connection between books and wellbeing. The OED records its first use in
Christopher Morley’s short prose fiction The Haunted Bookshop (1919). The novel’s featured
Brooklyn bookshop ‘Parnassus at Home’ has a sign announcing ‘malnutrition of the reading
faculty is a serious thing. Let us prescribe for you’.10 Conventionally, bibliotherapy considers
reading and narrative content. With Dr Liz Brewster, a non-clinical lecturer in Medical
Education at Lancaster University and an expert in bibliotherapy, for the past year or so I have
been thinking about the ways in which books as objects – their textures, colours and smells –
might also contribute to wellbeing. When I read the printed words on a paper page, for
example, I use a range of senses that go beyond that specific intellectual attainment. I
encounter the thickness of the leaf inscribed with the ink’s shade and aroma. Sometimes I
notice and enjoy how a book feels as much as what it says. Thus building on my own research
in premodern material cultures and surfaces,11 I am interested in exploring the health benefits
of holding a book and being surrounded by books in a library (public and otherwise).

My love of books and words about books are part of my critical thinking about being in the
world. Without doubt, I am a bibliophile.

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10 This information is from Liz Brewster, ‘Bibliotherapy: A Critical History’, in Bibliotherapy, ed. by in Liz
Brewster and Sarah McNicol (London: Facet Publishing, 2018), pp. 3-22, p. 4-5. The quotation is from
Christopher Morley, The Haunted Bookshop (New York: Doubleday, 1919), p. 2 and is cited in Brewster,
11 Liz Oakley-Brown and Kevin Killeen, eds, Scrutinizing Surfaces: Journal of the Northern Renaissance, 8 (2017)
Meet Liz....

Liz is an early modernist with her main area of research being fifteenth and sixteenth-century writing. She is interested in areas of translation, surface, objects and embodiment.

Liz has a passion for twitter and sharing her many and varied interest! Look out for her hastags; #surfacestudies #adoresnails #biscuitstudies #OvidAlert #translatio
Mapping: Professor Sally Bushell
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
We live in an unusually spatial and visual period in which maps are all around us as part of daily life. But this is not how things have always been. In fact, in Medieval times there was not even a term to describe such an object:

There is no word for map in any ancient European language. In some modern European languages . . . the word used derives from late Latin *mappa*, a cloth, by way of *mappa mundi*, a cloth painted with a representation of the world. In most others it derives from late Latin *carta*, which meant any sort of formal document, resulting in ambiguities that persist to this day . . . 12

Most medieval people travelled no more than 15 miles away from where they lived in their lifetimes. They didn’t need maps and if faced with one they would not have known how to read it.

What is a map as we would understand it? The *OED* defines it as: ‘a diagrammatic representation of an area of land or sea showing physical features’ while the Preface to the first volume of the *History of Cartography* tells us that: ‘Maps are graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes, or events in the human world.’ 13 Loosely, then, a map is the most effective, visual means of presenting spatial and geographical information in a way that enables us to negotiate and make sense of things around us. What is a map for? It exists primarily in order to enable us to feel located and confident of our place in the world. Without it, or if we get lost, our experience of place will be radically different.

What, then, is a literary map and what might be unique about a map for literature as opposed to any other kind? I would define it as: ‘a visual representation of spatial relations between places or objects (real or imagined) presented alongside the literary text that depicts


the world that the text purports to represent’. Crucially, then, the world of the map may only exist imaginatively (Middle Earth; Hogwarts; Gormenghast). There is no real world for us to visualise it in or through. Why is the map there then, what is it for? In fact, the literary map works in a range of ways, some contradictory, but we expect it to be there to help us, to in some way illuminate the place and space of the text. We trust the map. (Whether we should or not, is another matter.)

Let’s turn to a famous historical example. Take a good look at the map on page 15. If you knew nothing about it, and were given it out of context, how would you interpret it? Perhaps the first thing to respond to would be the pleasing nature of the visual image, its aesthetic quality, felt in the images of ships on the sea, the mermaids around the scale at the top of the page and the compass rose radiating out across it. The map is a beautiful object. Next, or closely associated with this, at a subconscious level, the mind would register the map as historical – it feels old, not of our time. You would probably assume that this is not a map of active use (like an Ordnance Survey map) but something that was once used in the past. The map immediately prompts basic questions: What is this a map of? Why is the map here? After these rapid initial visual responses you might begin to try to ‘read’ the map verbally; first the easy-to-read names such as ‘Hautbowline Head’ or ‘Spyeglass Hill’ and then the handwriting in different coloured ink. The handwriting is readable, but not that readable, so that it offers a challenge and creates a slight sense of mystery; you have to work quite hard to decipher it. In all of these ways the map has begun to draw you in.

Looking at this first edition (1883) map of Treasure Island in isolation allows us to begin to appreciate the power of the literary map in two contradictory ways. First, it makes clear how much work the map which is placed at the front of a book can do, on its own, before the reader has begun to read. It ‘warms the reader up’ and anticipates the text. On the other hand, it also makes us realise how limited the map is when it is read just by itself rather than being integrated with events, characters and narrative: its full power and value have yet to be unlocked. Only as the story unfolds and the map at the front begins to play a part in the narrative can it really come to life for the reader. As much as anything this is because the map does not have a correspondence in the real world for the reader to relate it to. Before we read the book, it is waiting to come alive.
Map of *Treasure Island* from the 1883 edition by Cassel.
What about this particular literary map; why is it included in this book? The map for Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* is unusual as a literary map because it is so detailed and purports to be a real historical map with soundings, scale, compass points and so on. Literary maps are not usually as well made as this. But it is also important because it is a hugely influential map when we look at the number and spread of literary maps across historical periods. Up to the publication of this map in 1883 there are very few examples of maps given within a literary work. After this point maps begin to appear far more frequently. At first this is in the new genre of Adventure Stories for Boys that *Treasure Island* initiates, but it soon spreads to other related and emerging genres such as children’s literature and detective fiction. Perhaps this would have happened anyway, since the late Victorian period is such a great age of colonial mapping, but this map seems to function as a catalyst, allowing the inclusion of a map alongside the story within a book and licensing other authors to use literary maps as well.

The easiest way to think about what the map does, or what it adds to this literary work, is by considering its role in relation to the story. For *Treasure Island* the narrative itself divides into three main parts determined by the location. The first part is situated somewhere on the South West coast of England at the *Admiral Benbow Inn*, where Jim Hawkins (the boy hero) lives with his parents. The second part concerns preparations for the journey to the island and the journey on board ship. The third section is located on the island itself.

I have said that the narrative is divided according to location, but it could equally well be divided in terms of the map. The first section is centred upon a desire to find and take ownership of the map. It has been brought to the inn by the old buccaneer, Billy Bones, who was given it by Captain Flint: ‘He gave it me at Savannah, when he lay a-dying’ (p. 22). When Bones himself dies, the map falls by chance into Jim’s hands as he and his mother try to get their rightful rent from his chest before the pirates return:

“I’ll take what I have,” she said, jumping to her feet.

“And I’ll take this to square the count” said I, picking up the oilskin packet. (p. 35) The second section of the story is centred upon use of the map to get to the island. The Squire, the Captain and Jim are in physical possession of the map, but they are in turn being unknowingly used by the pirates who are letting them lead them. Carelessness with the map,

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or with knowledge of it, is dangerous. The Squire’s foolish inability to keep quiet about it allows the pirates to infiltrate the crew of his ship, the *Hispaniola*, and puts them all in danger. Power silently shifts from the authority figures who own the map to the hidden alternative authority of Long John Silver.

The final section is focussed on using the map to find the treasure hidden on the island by Captain Flint. In spite of skirmishes for possession, both of the actual island and the mapped representation of it, in the end it turns out that the map as a treasure map is out-of-date since the treasure has already been removed from its original location by the shipwrecked pirate, Ben Gunn, in his wanderings. Ironically, those who do successfully locate the treasure (Jim and his allies) do so without needing to use the map at all.

So – as this brief example shows us – maps are not to be trusted in spite of our (and the characters’) innate instinct to do so. But equally, for literature, they are far more than a mere illustration at the front of the book to be glanced at and ignored. The map is a vital and central part of the meaning of the literary work.

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**Meet Sally…**

Sally’s research area is in nineteenth-century literature, in both the Romantic and Victorian periods. She has a particular interest in Wordsworth, in the process of writing, and the Lake District (to the north of the University).

Sally is fascinated with cartography and mapping in literary texts. Her current research project is called LITCRAFT and involves making 3D literary maps with Minecraft.
Rough- Dr Jo Carruthers
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
The rough tongue of a cat drags against the skin that it licks. The finish of recently sawn wood is rough. We should take ‘the rough with the smooth’. And we might write a rough draft before the final polish that produces the finished essay. We often think of the ‘rough’ as a stage to hop over before a final, even perfect, version is achieved. This sense of being unfinished – alongside the other connotations of being ‘rough’ – was perhaps what inspired the use of the term to refer to the working classes in Victorian Britain. Those deemed unworthy of the vote were labelled the ‘roughs’ by politicians: factory or mine workers ridiculed for their coarse manners and lack of education. These people were thought of in similar aesthetic terms to the rough finish: abrasive, disreputable and unfinished in the sense of being uneducated and rudimentary, or rude. And such a term enables the maintenance of disparity alongside democracy – the roughs aren’t lesser human beings, the logic runs, and would deserve the vote were they educated and ‘finished’.

‘Rough’ is such an everyday term, but as literature of the nineteenth century reveals, it became a semiotic battle site in which writers fought over wider cultural issues and concerns. In this battle we can see the influence of the writings of the famous art writer, John Ruskin (of Lancaster University’s Ruskin Library fame). Perhaps the most influential critic of the nineteenth century, his writings on art and architecture were the meme of his day. If he lived today his quotations would litter Twitter and Facebook with pithy aphorisms such as his challenge to consumerism, ‘There is no wealth but life’. He approached the ‘rough’ in his writings on the gothic style – this mode of architecture to be seen in medieval cathedrals with their mass of carved stone sculptures, gargoyles, decorative arches, and rose windows. For Ruskin the ‘rough’ was not a stage to be got through on the march towards perfection. Instead these two terms pulled in two opposite directions and the choice to be rough or perfect had distinct moral consequences. Somewhat counter-intuitively, Ruskin was an advocate of the

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rough and saw perfection as the enemy of creativity. For Ruskin perfection indicated mere mimicry: the imitation of what had already been identified as good or the best. To produce the perfectly straight line, the perfectly sublime angelic face, the perfectly ghastly gargoyle, you would merely copy someone’s else’s perfect example. Such imitation of what was already considered ‘the best’ was for Ruskin an utterly soulless form of creativity. Imitation left nothing of the individual within it. Instead, the truly creative artist, in striving for something new and original, in putting his soul into work, in expressing his individuality (and for Ruskin it was usually a he), the artist would produce something more ‘savage’ and ‘rough’ (these were his terms of choice), but they would produce something more individual and something more creative. Such roughness indicated a more honest expression of the individual’s vital creativity. Writing of the ‘working creature’, Ruskin asserts: ‘Let him but begin to imagine, to try to do anything worth doing; and the engine-turned precision is lost at once’.17 The gargoyles that adorn gothic cathedrals are weird and wonderful precisely because they are not mere reproductions of a single ‘perfect’ gargoyle, but strange-looking wonders, each a novel form of diabolical individuality.

Ruskin reminded his readers that roughness was a form, an aesthetic, that expressed creativity. And such roughness was to be embraced alongside its inevitable bedfellow: failure. To aspire to greatness (which is not the same as perfection) is to inevitably fail: how many cakes are burnt or soggy before a Great British Bake-Off finalist triumphs with something odd and yet strangely satisfying? Paradigm-shifting art must do precisely that: unsettle normal ways of thinking. And so, Ruskin advised his readers to embrace failure and to see the beauty in roughness. He was perhaps drawing on old theological traditions (he was brought up in a strictly religious household and memorized huge swathes of the Bible) in which roughness is an honest account of humanity. As Hamlet says, ‘there’s a divinity that shapes our ends/Rough hew them how we will’.18 Ruskin and Shakespeare agreed that we form (‘hew’) ourselves in inevitably rough ways, imperfect though wonderful beings that we are.

And if we read the novels of Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, among myriad other Victorian writers, we can see the same re-evaluation of roughness – and the roughs – as part of their social agenda. In these novels that challenged the state of the world, creativity is valued above perfection, and aspiration is admired above the status quo.

Take, for instance, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, a set text on our core first-year English Literature module, ‘ENGL100’.

In this book the working-class characters – the rougs – are characterized by creativity: the entomological science of Job Legh in his collection and study of insects and Margaret’s singing. The elite are characterized by an imitative form of art as seen in Harry Carson’s caricature of the working men through which he mocks their suffering. These novelists, like Ruskin, turn to another valence of the word ‘rough’, which also refers to a sense of simplicity or the rudimentary. When Gaskell uses the term ‘rough’ she does so to intimate a simplicity and honesty that is not found in the more complex, ‘perfect’ artificiality of the elite classes. We first come across the word ‘rough’ in the description of Jem’s ‘cubbish’ care of his little brothers (ch. 1), and in the scene in which the working men Barton and Wilson visit a suffering poor family and act as ‘rough, tender nurses’ (ch. 6). The word is a synonym for ‘uneducated’ when Gaskell describes the taking of the Chartist petition to parliament – a document asking for workers’ rights and a redress of terrible working conditions – as the ‘force of their rough, untutored words’ (ch. 9). These rough words aren’t listened to by the educated elite, who Gaskell condemns for their lack of attention and care. The word begins to take on the valency of creativity when Job Legh’s insect cases are described as ‘roughly-made’ (ch. 5). And the boatman that helps out Mary toward the end of the novel is described as rough three times, but he acts with great kindness. His roughness is not to be underestimated and expresses a straightforward, honest and uncomplicated kindness. Indeed, in his home, although described as rough twice in one sentence, we are told that to his wife, ‘to her old, loving heart, his crossest words fell like pearls and diamonds, for he had been the husband of her youth’ (ch. 31). The novel does not question the roughness of its working characters, but it does question any easy assumptions about what this roughness indicates. Gaskell constructs the meaning of ‘roughness’ throughout her novel so that it comes to indicate qualities of the uneven and unfinished, but also the honest and trustworthy, indicative of Ruskin’s creative and vital individual.

The term rough can and does mean many things but Ruskin was aware enough of the term’s negative connotations to argue for a positive way of understanding the ‘rough’ that had strong ethical consequences. And he provoked a choice to his readers: do you choose the way of perfection, of imitation and low risk? Or do you take a risky path in which creativity

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19 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. by Thomas Recchio ([1854] London and New York: Norton, 2008). All subsequent references to this text will be given by chapter in parenthesis in the main body.
and individuality are valued above repeating the pre-ordained ‘right’ answer? In reading literature at university level, we are given the opportunity to think anew about all of things we take for granted and to approach the world we live in differently. It is a subject that often pushes us to re-evaluate a word, a concept or the way in which we view a whole group of people. Literature often explores a subject rather than providing answers: it presents a dialogue (see Bakhtin and his idea of ‘dialogism’ later this year) of approaches that are often not brought to a singular conclusion (or if they are, the conclusion rarely silences earlier discord). This is your first year of university study. You now have the opportunity to write about things you care about and that interest you. Don’t just strive for perfection – don’t just think about the ‘First’ or the ‘A’ grade – or you won’t see your work improve. This year aim to produce essays that draw on your creative writing skills, your historical knowledge or philosophical propensities. Imitation of what others have judged as perfect will not be rewarded anymore. Instead, strive, explore, ask questions, be challenged. Your essays may be more rough than you’d like but you will find the task ahead more satisfying.

Read what others have thought about a novel or play, but focus on those moments that challenge, provoke or stun you. Follow the untrodden, rougher paths.

Meet Jo....

Jo’s research areas include literature and the Bible, aesthetics, and literature and place. She writes and teaches primarily on Victorian literature, but likes tracing influences across different periods.

Jo is the Department’s Part I Director and organises, with Rebecca Shaw, the teaching and structure of the first year. Jo is the convenor of our two first year modules, ENGL100 English Literature and ENGL101 World literature.
Scripture - Dr Mark Knight
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
Scripture can appear to be of a wholly different order to literature. For many, the first is marked by rigidity and fixity, and is a form represented appropriately by the rules carved in stone and carried down the mountain by Charlton Heston (playing Moses) in the film The Ten Commandments (1956). The fact that Heston went on to become the president of the National Rifle Association serves to confirm some people’s sense that the scriptures belong to a certain type of right-wing religious politics, whether that takes the form of Christian fundamentalism in the USA or related expressions of narrowly-focussed religious thought elsewhere. By contrast, literary texts are considered to be vessels of creativity and freedom, the means of bringing new worlds into being and an expression of imaginative thought that eschews closed modes of thinking.

But the distinction is questionable, and I would contest the notion that the scriptures can be said to belong to any single group. The term comes from the Latin scriptura and means writing. This etymology is a prompt to think about a much closer relation between religious scriptures and literary writing: both involve texts that are read and re-read, and to which we attach a wide array of meaning. The proximity between these two types of writing is further encouraged when we think about the multiple literary forms that we find in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures: law, devotional poetry, erotic verse, parables, proverbs, prophetic writing, letters, dreams, narrative, apocalyptic writings, and so on. Many of these forms are familiar to those of us who study literature, and the fact that communities of faith have chosen to bring these different forms together and treat them as sacred text is a reminder that religious scriptures are more diverse than we might think. The Jewish and Christian scriptures contain endless examples of rewriting—think, for instance, of Jesus’s ‘you have heard it said ... but I say unto you’ or the multiple accounts of creation that we find throughout the Bible. Thus, it is no surprise that when sixty-six contemporary writers were each asked to reimagine a book from the Bible for the Sixty-Six Books project, produced in 2011 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible, their contributions ranged enormously and offered a powerful collective testament to the many-
voiced nature of the original. One of my favourite contributions is Salena Godden’s beautiful rewriting of 1 Chronicles, in which she takes inspiration from the list of names in 1 Chronicles and writes about literary canonicity and the idea of stories being remembered and passed on.

The emphasis on how stories are remembered and passed on is just one instance of the multitude of ways in which religious scriptures have been reimagined by literary writers. While these rewritings range in tone, from faithful homage to open criticism, they all point to the amazing fecundity of the scriptures. Writing about the Bible being locked up by the authorities in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), Offred describes it as ‘an incendiary device: who knows what we’d make of it if we ever got our hands on it’. But literary writers continually do get their hands on it and reveal the various places to which our reading of scripture can lead. Consider John Milton’s epic expansion of the Genesis story in *Paradise Lost* (1667); William Blake’s revolutionary continuation of the prophetic tradition in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790); the questions of religious inclusivity that arise when Jo is helped to recite the Lord’s Prayer in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-53), Christina Rossetti’s remarkable commentary on Revelation in *The Face of the Deep* (1892), Salman Rushdie’s playful and controversial reflections on sacred texts in *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and Marilynne Robinson’s compelling exploration of the parable of the prodigal son in *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014).

Texts such as these feature heavily on literary syllabi around the world and are frequently studied by students with the same sort of careful attention that religious readers bestow upon their own sacred texts. These literary and religious scriptures share much in common, not least because the literary tradition draws so heavily on sacred texts for inspiration. One might point to differences between these scriptures, for sure, and it can be as instructive to think about the differences as it is to focus on their similarities. Those who read the Gospels are more likely to talk about how their life has been transformed by what they read. But literary texts can change us, too, and over the years I have been privileged to hear countless stories from students and colleagues about how an array of texts, from seventeenth-century devotional poetry to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851), have turned their lives around. If there are differences between religious and literary scriptures, then, perhaps we should stop thinking about them as being set in stone.
Meet Mark....

Mark joined the department in 2016 from the University of Toronto. His research interests include Victorian literature, religion and literature and the work of G.K Chesterton and is currently writing a book on Oscar Wilde.

Mark co-wrote *Literature and the Bible: A Reader* with fellow *Words* contributors, Jo Carruthers and Andrew Tate.
Something- Professor John Schad
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
Poor ‘something’ – a word so often just muttered, a shambling, scruffy, unconsidered tramp-of-a-word, naming nothing in particular, or at best serving as mere example of a thing, humbly standing in for whatever it is we cannot quite think of, or bother to think of.

Poor ‘something.’ So unlike ‘everything’ or even ‘nothing’ – both of which are literary kings, colossi in the modern world of words. Take, for example, André Breton, who says that ‘literature is one of the saddest roads that lead to everything’. Or W. H. Auden, who says that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ – really happen, as it were. Nothing, like everything, is where literature is said to be heading, the end of its sorry road. Nobody says, ‘literature is the road to something’.

But, then, perhaps they should. And perhaps we will, you and I. After all, there is a ‘something’ at the very end of the greatest poem that has ever been written, George Herbert’s poem ‘Prayer (I)’ (1633), which, after a hundred breath-taking descriptions of prayer (‘the church’s banquet, angel’s age, ...[t]he soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage’ etc. etc.), finally comes crashing to a shuddering halt with the poor, bare phrase: ‘something understood’. Prayer, at the end, in the end, after this avalanche of language, is simply ‘something’.

So ‘something’ does have its place in the literary sun, and we should not be surprised since it has been there before. Think of Hamlet (c.1600) where ‘something is rotten in the state of Denmark’— as if to say that ‘something’ is what is wrong with us. And ‘something’ comes again when Hamlet thinks about death, or what we fear follows death; this he calls ‘the dread of something’.

Perhaps, then, ‘something’ is not to be pitied. There may be no ‘poor’ about it. Not if it names what most overwhelms us, that is to say: what is rotten about us, and what we dread – indeed, what we dread so very much that we cannot bare to think of it. Such a ‘something’ marks, in fact, the point at which we cease to think at all; and that is precisely what two most peculiar philosophers say. One, a runaway called Theodor Adorno, whispers, “something” ...
is [that part] ... of any concept ... that is not identical with thinking’. Another, a runaway called Karl Marx, mutters darkly about ‘the something of this clumsy world’, as if ‘something’ is the clumsiness of our clumsy world, a world too clumsy to be thought of.

A little after Marx, in 1887, Thomas Hardy says, ‘somewhere ... here something lies / The dust of the lark that Shelley heard’. It was over 60 years before that Shelley-the-poet had heard the lark, and now, says Hardy, all that is left of the lark is dust, or what, for a moment, he calls ‘something.’ For Hardy, ‘something’ is all that remains of the body after death, the worthless remains. ‘Something’ is the least of life, the least of us.

This, though, would not have surprised Charles Dickens. In 1861, he writes, ‘I put out my hand and Mr Wemmick looked at it as if I wanted something’ - as if to say, Mr Wemmick looked at my hand and all he saw was a demand for money. For Mr Dickens, ‘something’ names the way that so often we seek only what we might gain from each other. ‘Something’ names the worst of us.

Things are not, I fear, looking good for ‘something’. But then, almost 100 years later, a man called John Cage decides to give ‘A Lecture on Something’ (1959). Mad it is, quite mad. But it is time, it seems, at last to think more of ‘something’ – or at least to think of more kinds of ‘something’; for there are, he madly says, ‘no end to the number of somethings’. Indeed, what, he madly wonders, if ‘all the somethings in the world were to sense their at-one-ness’, what then? Quite a thought, I think, madly suggesting that ‘something’ is a thing, indeed one universal thing – ‘Something’, if you will.

Mad, yes. A mad suggestion by a mad man. But it is, nevertheless, echoed by a wise man called Jorge Luis Borges who, at much the same time, announces that ‘certain places’, certain rubbish places like cheap hotels, ‘try [either] to tell us something or are about to say something’. In short, ‘something,’ thinks Borges, is what the world, or at least the rubbish world, is about to tell us. Hallelujah, we think. Until we read on, and find that this almighty ‘something’ is not, in the end, to be told: ‘this imminence of a revelation,’ says Borges, ‘does not occur’. Damn, we think. ‘Something’, in the end, like Godot or the bus, will not turn up, and we will be left waiting, forever waiting for what we think is about to be revealed but never will be.

Damn, we think again. Damn. But soon, very soon, we once more dare to raise a Hallelujah, as wise-man Borges adds that this not-being-told-something is in fact (wait for it) no less than ‘the aesthetic phenomenon’ itself. In short, the ‘something’ that we are not told
is the very essence of that strange miracle we call art. And there is more – for if Mr George Herbert is right, it may even be that still stranger miracle we call prayer, since ‘something’ understood is surely not the same as ‘something’ told. Indeed, it may well be, come to think of it, that prayer is precisely the ‘something’ we are not told but for which we are waiting, forever waiting, forever and ever, amen.

Meet John....

John’s main areas of research are in critical-creative writing, Modernism, Victorian writing, literary theory and religion and literature.

His creative-critical approach (as seen here) is unique blend of literary research and creative writing. His book *The Late Walter Benjamin* is written in the form of a novel and concerns a man on a post-war council estate near London who thinks or says he is the late Walter Benjamin. This creative-critical approach is one of the ways of exploring literature made available at Lancaster.
Type- Dr Brian Baker
Inés Gregori Labarta & Rebecca Shaw
Type. That is what I am doing right now, as I write. Type. Type-write. A verb. But not, of course, on a typewriter. Typewriter is a noun, the thing upon which I type. But is it also me, at this moment: a type-writer?

The keyboard on which I type has the same layout as a typewriter, known as QWERTY. There have been other layouts of the keyboard. I had to correct myself just then as I wrote ‘other types’, which might be confusing. My fingers and my brain are used to QWERTY, and I can type at a reasonable speed, as you might expect of someone who has written several books. I cannot quite touch-type, however. That is where you lay your fingers along the middle row of the keys, fingers resting on f and j (which is why they have little raised bumps on them), and all your fingers dance across the keys. I use 3 fingers on my right hand and a couple on my left. It’s quick enough.

Sometimes, though, I cannot type-write at all. I face the screen and keyboard and I just cannot do it. My brain seizes. My hands will not move. I have to go back to pen-and-paper. When I first went to university I actually had a mechanical typewriter, a portable Olivetti. You had to ram down the keys and mistakes, typos, as we still call them (type-oh!) had to be fixed by typing through the offending mistakes or Tippexing them out (        ) and typing over them.

This is the difference between an analogue technology and a digital one, of course. An analogue technology is linear, like cassette tape. If you make a mixtape on cassette, and you make a mistake in timing, you have to go back to the point of the error, the fork in the path, and re-record the whole thing, making a new path. With digital, you can go back, insert a new track into the playlist, or a new sentence into the paragraph, like I just did. (I’m not going to tell you which one.)

I have chosen this typeface or font, called Courier, because it is the standard font that looks like old-fashioned typewriting. But
there are many others, from Microsoft’s Calibri, a ‘sans serif’ font, to Times New Roman, which imitates the typeface of the British newspaper, and which has ‘serifs’, little blobs and extensions like on the feet of the capital N and R. But back to Courier. ‘Sans serif’ fonts are often thought to be easier to read, while ‘serif’ fonts have weight and seriousness. 

Comic Sans, of course, is not serious at all. All fonts take up different space on the page. Courier takes up a lot of space. Arial takes up less and is legible at a smaller size, which we call ‘point’. This is in 10 point. The standard is 12 point.

Before type, there was handwriting, and not the imitation lettering of Comic Sans. Texts were hand-written; to make a copy of them, a scribe would have to literally copy the text out, word for word. A great possibility of corruption exists in this process of transmission – the tired scribe might miss a crucial word (‘not’), or garble a sentence, or misunderstand something, or even deliberately alter the meaning of what is copied. Therein we find the ‘problem’ of multiple copies of the early play-scripts in Shakespeare studies, the Folios and Quartos, which have errors and are not very reliable on their own. There was no standardisation before type.

This is the argument of Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media theorist, in his book The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962). In it, he argues that the advent of type, of standard design and layout, produces a different understanding of space and the relations between things. Ultimately it sets human beings on the path to machinery, to standardised procedures, to the Scientific revolution and industrialisation.

It begins with Johannes Gutenberg, who in 1439 developed movable type – individual letters which, when placed in rows, can form sentences and paragraphs that form pages, upon which multiple copies of the same page can be printed. This why the repository of out-of-copyright texts is called Project Gutenberg, of course, and why the early texts that were digitised – not scanned but typed up by contributors – used this very font, Courier. It was meant to look like type.

Robert Bringhurst, in The Elements of Typographic Style (1992), makes an interesting point:
In a world rife with unsolicited messages, typography must often draw attention to itself before it will be read. Yet in order to be read, it must relinquish the attention it has drawn. Typography with anything to say therefore aspires to a kind of statuesque transparency.20

Type must be noticeable and pleasurable but we also must forget it in order to concentrate on the meaning of the language. If it fails to relinquish its attention, it becomes a kind of icon or image.

Another very well-known font that imitates mechanical type is American Typewriter. Its most famous use was by Milton Glaser in 1976 when he designed the ‘I Love New York’ logo. In it, the font was blown up to large size and the ‘love’ replaced by a heart – a common typographical technique now, of course. Here, type deliberately becomes a kind of image, each letter or symbol standing for something else in a process of substitution. The aggressively mechanical quality of American Typewriter itself suggests the urgency and vitality of the city. (Think of how many other media texts set in New York use this, or a similar typeface.) The meaning of the message depends on your knowledge, how you can decode not just the letters, but what they represent: what ‘NY’ stands for. It’s type elevated to a kind of visual game or puzzle, a code that the reader might be able to make sense of; and if they do, they can be included in the community that ‘loves NY’.

But we can use the word ‘type’ to mean something else. It can refer to a set of things, a category, a relation of similarity: a type of dress. A type of car. A type of cloud. It can also refer to something we feel is standardised but in the wrong way: ‘stereotype’, for instance, means something we feel is inauthentic because it reproduces in a flat or reductive way the complexities of human behaviour we see around us every day. In literary studies, we might talk about a ‘typology’, and this often refers to categories of literary characteristics or motifs: a typology of spaceships in science fiction, for instance.

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We can also talk about literary ‘types’ in terms of character: the thief with a conscience, the long-suffering housekeeper, the faithful companion. Certain literary (and filmic) genres might be invested in some types more than others, as you might suspect. The crime novel, the Western, the romance, the ghost story, all have characteristic ‘types’ that are used as a kind of narrative shorthand. We recognise them and know where we are, what to expect. This is part of the pleasure of genre fiction. And once you acknowledge the ‘type’, you can take pleasure in their subversion.

What I am doing now, writing, type-writing, I called it: is this ‘type’ at all, I wonder?

I have changed between fonts, used different sizes/points, gone back to fix typos and insert phrases, have inserted an image, all while sitting in my garden type-writing at a table on a laptop. Thirty years ago, the process would have been very different. I would have typed directly on to paper, and changing fonts would have meant changing typewriters. An image would have been cut out and pasted on, with glue. In the age of the digital, where you no doubt blast away on a touch-sensitive QWERTY screen keyboard with two thumbs, have we moved into a post-type world? McLuhan’s ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’, with its domination of print media, is already a thing of the past.

But I don’t think it is as dead as all that.

Type is embedded in literary study. How, as well as what, we read, is a crucial question in contemporary media as well as it is in contemporary literature. Type promised both standardisation and reliability, transmission of texts without the errors of individual scribes, and thereby the dissemination of texts whose shape and texture we can reliably agree on and share and discuss, without which literary study (or scholarship of any kind) would be almost impossible. In a digital world, those issues of reliability and shared, common knowledge have returned. This is another reason why Project Gutenberg might have originally produced their texts in Courier: it suggests reliability, authenticity, the real thing. You might not trust a text printed in Comic Sans.
So, why have I chosen to type-write this in Courier? I don’t usually do so, I can reliably inform you. Perhaps I am asking you to trust what I’m writing. Perhaps I’m an incurable nostalgic. Perhaps this is part of a literary game I’m asking you to decode. But I will leave this question for you to answer.

Meet Brian....

Brian’s main areas of research are masculinities, science fiction, film and critical-creative practice. He also teaches on American literature, literary criticism, literature and film and contemporary literature modules.

Brian is the Departments go-to sci-fi guy and runs a specialist module on the subject in the third year which is very popular with our students.
Meet the illustrators....

Inés Gregori Labarta

Inés is a current creative writing PhD student and has been studying with the Department since 2015. She published her first novella, McTavish Manor, in October 2016. Inés also works as a tutor in creative writing in the Department. Inés is originally from Spain but now calls Lancaster home.

Find her on Twitter, @InesGLabarta and find more out about her work here: https://worderlust.wordpress.com/

Rebecca Shaw

Rebecca is the Part I co-ordinator in the Department. She has worked at the University for ten years in various different departments and roles. Rebecca has a keen interest in art and in particular collage. She is the main point of contact for first year students in the Department and works closely with the Part I Director, Dr Jo Carruthers.