

misrepresentation

a collection of criticism and creativity

edited by Peter Maber and Lily Sims

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Each piece contained within this volume expresses its author's opinion, and does not represent the views of the University.

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Introduction

Peter Maber and Lily Sims

The articles, creative works and workshop materials collected in this volume originate in a collaboration between the student-led Literature Society and Faculty at Northeastern University London. Over late 2025 and early 2026 we ran a series of workshops examining how literature both represents and misrepresents the self, others, history, and the world, and asking what literature might offer by way of response to misrepresentations, whether in work that already exists or in writing of our own.

In April 2026 we then held a Performance Festival on the theme; an evening where we were lucky to be joined by so many talented writers and performers, who each shared their own responses to misrepresentations. With a theme as multi-faceted and boundless as misrepresentation, we found that the only way to attempt to do it justice would be by simply providing the space for so many different voices to be heard. This volume has become the written legacy of that evening – a celebration of a range of perspectives. We present here versions of many of the incredible pieces from the Festival, unfortunately unaccompanied by the evening's musical performances which are not reproducible on the page. As on the evening, writers here are presenting in their own voices, from their own perspectives (and using referencing conventions,

where relevant, of their own choices). We've separated out critical from creative works, without seeking to deny the creativity that can go into criticism and the critical precision that can go into creativity. And we've included in a final section a showcase of some of the workshop materials that led up to the performance evening, which sheds some light on process.

We set out asking questions about whose stories get told and why, what it means to claim authenticity, how those who have been marginalised are rendered, or render themselves, on the page, stage, screen. It became clear that misrepresentation and representation cannot be thought of as a straightforward binary, of distortion versus the recoverable truth. Representations are not stable; they always select, frame, shape, never offering a neutral mirror to the world. But when does representation become misrepresentation? And who decides where that line falls?

Several of the pieces gathered here seek to listen and to look again at people who have been misheard and mis-seen. When a woman sings in literature, Jennifer Gardiner argues, her vocal excess risks dismissal as madness or mere prettiness; reading Ophelia alongside Blanche DuBois, she recovers that singing as a reclaiming of agency rather than a symptom of its loss. Misrepresentation, then, can extend from how someone is depicted to the interpretative habits that are brought to a figure,

in the refusal to hear what she is actually doing. Related dynamics recur across the centuries, and in multiple literary forms, including in the racial and sexual mis-seeing that Charlotte Grant traces through the artifice of Vauxhall Gardens, where difference was both the attraction and the danger; and in Orlando Reade's account of Nina Simone interrupting her performance of a sentimental song, and in the process exposing the gap between manufactured and sincere emotion. What at first sight (or sound) can feel like failure or breakdown is revealed instead to be a deliberate, critical refusal.

If some contributions ask how the misrepresented might speak back, others ask whether speaking back is even possible, including from within institutions that control representations. Several pieces engage warily and productively with that problem. Emma Woodhouse's study of the historical drama series *A Thousand Blows* examines a Victorian gang leader who has been refashioned for a streaming audience. Real lives and timelines are collapsed into a single sensational protagonist; and yet any clean, fact-versus-fiction verdict is complicated when it's revealed that the subject spent her own life manufacturing fictions about herself.

Lara Parmiani, interviewed here on migrant-led theatre, warns of the 'veneer' of inclusion, that can see those who have often been excluded now cast, but only once they have been filtered through an

acceptable Britishness; and she warns too of the silos that so-called identity theatre risks hardening instead of dissolving. Emmanuel Ekere Thompson's scored dialogue 'Calabash, Glasgow' stages related tensions as an ongoing argument, asking whether visibility in Western literary institutions can ever constitute a meaningful resistance, or whether it is more likely to constitute a mere performance, staged while home burns. The piece, fittingly, refuses to resolve the tensions. This volume deliberately holds onto such refusal to arrive at resolution. Catherine Brown's 'Palestine' approaches misrepresentation from its starkest edge: not so much as distortion but rather as erasure, the removal of representations, of solidarity, and finally of a name. Here questions of who controls representation are brought to the fore, and the essay's own formal choices become part of its argument.

The creative works extend these questions into practice. A woman is denied her name of choice at her own baptism in Siva Sithraputhran's fiction; another is misdiagnosed, and shut away across the decades in Alison Thompson's 'Agnes'; a young writer in Lily Sims' closing monologue can't answer the simple bureaucratic question of where she's from without unravelling the inadequacy of the process. Placed alongside the critical essays, these pieces make an argument of their own: they make clear that the generation of new work can itself be one of the 'ways forward' that the workshops (some of which are included at the end) set out to find; and

that you can answer a misrepresentation not only through analysis but also by writing into the space it leaves.

With such wide ranging contributions, we could never hope to come to a shared conclusion. Taken together, our work here seems instead to point towards a shared, unsettling suspicion: that representation might never be said to be wholly innocent; that the line between portrayal and betrayal is drawn by power as much as by truth; and that literature and the wider arts are some of the few places where that line might be brought to light, examined, contested, and even redrawn. Our hope, then, far from trying to reach resolution, is that this volume is taken as an extended, many-voiced attempt to keep these debates open.

critical

‘Legal Aliens’: Lara Parmiani on Theatre, Migration and the Limits of Representation

*Peter Maber spoke with Lara, founder and Artistic
Director of migrant-led, women-led theatre
company LegalAliens.*

*LegalAliens takes its name from the bureaucratic
language used to classify non-citizens. Could you
tell us how you came to choose that name for the
company?*

So when we first started LegalAliens, one of the first projects we did was some work on a play written by an English woman and an Italian woman, Margaret Rose and Emanuela Rossini, called *Neither Here Nor There*, which we did in various formats, mainly as stage readings. And it was the first time that I realised that in English, the word alien was used for people and not for creatures from outer space. And I was really quite shocked. I didn't know that in bureaucratic language, aliens are not Martians, but are foreigners. with kind of a complicated status. So at the time we had not decided what to call ourselves and I really liked the idea of legal aliens, almost in quotation marks. It's a kind of, you know, laugh at bureaucracy, which is something that keeps returning. Obviously we are doing it in *Ali in Wonder(Eng)land* as well. And it's almost like

wanting to say, hey, look, we are legal. We are aliens, but hey, don't worry, we are legal. We could have also been called illegal aliens to a certain extent, but we went for that as a kind of wink at the audience as well. And it is ironic. Some people don't immediately understand it and they think, oh, you know, why do you feel you're better than the people who have illegal status? But no, it's just literally a satire. And it doesn't have any other implications other than making sure that everyone knows how ridiculous it is that human beings are called alien.

What would you say are the major challenges of representation in the performing arts today? Are there now orthodoxies around who is cast or commissioned that you find yourself pushing against?

I think regarding representation the debate has widened in the last 20-25 years. I think when I first came to Britain it was in the late 90s/ early 2000s and I remember the first Black Henry VI being cast by the Royal Shakespeare Company [David Oyelowo, the first Black actor to play an English monarch with the RSC] and this response of oh my God, the original king wasn't Black and blah, blah, blah. And I think that almost opened the doors to a series of castings of non-white actors in traditionally white roles, which I thought was really good. But then I realized that very often it was veneer. So yeah, okay, I'm casting somebody Asian, or somebody who with a Caribbean background, but

effectively everything is filtered through traditional Britishness. So it's almost like an external thing. And there's amazing progress there; it's great that we have a Black actor playing Shakespeare, in a role that traditionally would have been played by a white person. It's theatre. It's not a documentary, so anything goes. We don't have real costumes from, you know, the 13th century. We don't speak like we are in Shakespearean times. None of us is Russian if we are doing Chekhov. So it makes no sense that we want this kind of photorealism. We are not making a documentary. So it's great. But in a way, it's almost like people who come from these backgrounds are accepted in theatre because of their traditional Britishness, because of how they sound, because of the fact that they were born here, that they went through the drama schools here, etc. If there are some real outsiders, so like instead of being somebody with a Caribbean background, but born here in Britain, somebody who is, for example, brought up in Barbados, that is much rarer to see because accents at that point come into consideration and not only accents, but backgrounds, the way people train, the kind of tradition of acting that you take with you.

I realised that I come from a tradition of acting, when I act myself, that is very physical, it's very body centered. It's not just about words. And I feel that in this country, because traditionally theatre is so text-based, that's also why this Britishness,

especially in sound, has been so important. It's in sound, it's in demeanour, it's in the body, your physicality. So you immediately come across as other, just by the way you move. And I think it's still like that. I think when we set up Migrants in Theatre during COVID, we really wanted to flag this, to flag how effectively anyone who's not born in this country is really an outsider here and still is an outsider. And we really struggle being kind of seen by the system. And that led to some changes, you know, for instance, a little bit around accents, but it's still quite rare. And in a way, COVID opened up a lot of conversations and then the moment things went back to normal, those conversations were somewhat forgotten.

Your practice involves so many different forms and methods. Could you tell us something about how these come about?

I am a little bit like a magpie and I steal everything I encounter that I think is interesting. I studied two things at the same time; at the beginning of my career, I had almost like a parallel academic and practising career, because I went for a degree, which in Italy is the equivalent of a Master's, because it's five years of study in total. And I did literature and theatre and dramaturgy. So with that degree, I studied a lot of history of theatre and of theatre practitioners. It was the Catholic University of Milan, which unexpectedly was incredibly forward and not what you would associate with a Catholic

University; in fact, quite the opposite. It was the hub where the Centre for Theatrical Research was based and that centre was linked to [Jerzy] Grotowski and [Eugenio] Barba, it was linked to all these amazing pioneers of twentieth-century physical theatre; so at university I studied all those practitioners. At the same time, I trained at a very traditional drama school in Milan, where I did Shakespeare and the classical stuff.

And then I moved to London. And I've always mixed these two things. And along the way, I have encountered other things. Thanks to my collaboration with Becka McFadden, for instance, I've discovered a more performance-led way of working. Quite recently, for instance, Becka worked a lot with Butoh. I can't say that I'm using Butoh now, but those elements really intrigued me. I now want to find out more about those elements. When I came here, I did a lot of workshops and further studying, for instance with Complicité, and they are very Lecoq-based. So again, physical theatre, but physical theatre applied to text. I like words and I like movement equally.

And then when I started also making my own theatre, I realised that I really like scale. I like visuals. I think that visuals are also incredibly liberating and very accessible from an audience point of view, because you don't just have to listen to words. You can be more immersed. So all this has a big impact. And also, let's not forget Viewpoints

and Anne Bogart, because considering there are not too many women practitioners that gained notoriety in the twentieth century, I think we need to remember her as well as one of the masters of physical theatre. I basically just take things and then put them together. And I feel that at the end of the day, there is so much in common that all these methodologies have.

Could you tell us about your current projects? In particular, what specific misrepresentations have you been taking on, and how are you addressing these?

At the moment, we are working on re-staging *Ali in Wonder(Eng)land* [first staged in 2023]. And what I want to say about that is that when we first created it, it was incredibly over the top. You know, all the characters, all the encounters were so grotesque, were so exaggerated. And now I feel that the world has changed to the point that that level of grotesque, that level of performative evil, is actually realism. It feels almost like we need to go even further because reality has caught up with *Ali in Wonder(Eng)land*. And I mean, I'm not going to mention names, but we are surrounded by people who look, sound, and behave in a way that they all look like baddies from some kind of clichéd cartoons, pretty much.

I think there are a lot of risks with what I would call identity theatre. And it's a risk that I would really like to avoid: the risk of creating silos; so, you

know, we are the migrants and you are the British people, you are the Caribbean people. I think it's very dangerous. And for instance, when we talk about migrants and refugees, first of all, migrants are different from refugees, are different from asylum seekers. And even if you take one of these three categories, it includes people that are so different. There are people who are from non-white backgrounds and experience racism on top of being migrants or refugees. There are people who are queer. There are people who are disabled. So, I mean, there's so, so much. And there are people who are just people. So I feel that I am trying desperately to find a new way, for instance, to describe the Tottenham project [which provides free classes]: what can I say instead of a project for migrants and refugees? For humans who have experienced migration? Something like that, because at the end of the day, I would like to start making more and more theatre with these demographics, with actors from those backgrounds, but theatre that is not necessarily *about* migration; it could be about encounters and creating communities, but maybe – and it can still be very political – maybe not fixated on stories of migrants, also because migration, and especially being a refugee, should be a moment of passage. You know, you can't be a migrant all your life. At some point, you have to have roots somewhere. I mean, when is it that you start just being, I don't know, a Londoner, for instance, instead of an eternal migrant?

Maybe it's not possible, but we all have multiple identities. I can't say I'm Italian because that doesn't sum me up, but I can't say I am English because I am not English, but I've effectively lived most of my life in the UK. If anything, I can say I'm a Londoner because, in a way, a Londoner – it is a very kind of multifaceted identity. But I think that's why we need to always remember that each person, no matter where they're from, has a very complex identity, and we have to be really really careful about just placing a generic label, because that also doesn't help anyone.

So maybe after *Ali* I'll have to be very careful about what I'm going to do next. It's not like migration and displacement are going to stop being part of what we do. But, for instance, it was great with *The Flowers of Srebrenica* [a 2025 production] to do something that was very much linked to displacement, but it was about genocide and wars and discourse. So I would like to try and find ways to go beyond.

Ali in Wonder(Eng)land is at Jackson's Lane Theatre, Highgate, July 14th and 15th, 2026.

workshop materials

A Collaboration with LegalAliens Theatre

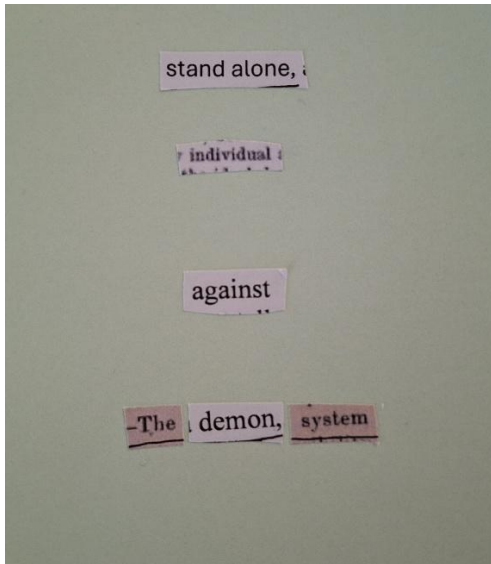
Between April and May 2026, members of LegalAliens Theatre were Artists in Residence at Northeastern University London. The company revisited a previous project, which ‘performs back’ to misrepresentations of ‘foreign women’ in literature, working alongside Peter Maber and Emmanuel Ekere Thompson, whose research explores similar areas.

As part of the collaboration, founder, actor and director Lara Parmiani and director and performance artist Becka McFadden joined Peter and Emmanuel’s class Literature and Decolonisation, to explore ideas in colonial and postcolonial texts and theory. Students engaged in a bricolage task, which involved cutting up colonial texts and reconfiguring them as possible ways forward, which fed into the project. Examples of the results are pictured in the pages following.

The workshop images are from a related session where members of the Northeastern London community contributed to the evolving ideas of the company; the performance images are from an in-house trial and then external performance at Bold Studios of the resultant work, “‘Foreign Women’ in Nineteenth-Century British Literature”. For the full performance, Becka and Lara were joined by actors Taz Munyaneza and Nada Sabet.

Bricolage

These texts reconfigure extracts involving the misrepresentation of women from Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre; Rudyard Kipling, 'Lispeth' (1886), Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1899); together with Thomas Babington Macaulay, Minute on Education (1835) and Lord Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (1922).



love a her,



Workshops and Performances





(Mis)representation: Workshops

Devised and Delivered by Peter Maber

This pair of workshops brings into play models, ideas, and practices that might help us craft creative representations that avoid misrepresentation, and which ring true.

Workshop 1: Character and Identity

Getting Started: Authenticity

We've likely all encountered characters in stories, plays, or films that feel wrong: stereotypes, caricatures, or versions of people like us that don't ring true. This workshop aims to translate such frustrations into something more positive, using them as the fuel to create something better. The goal is authenticity: creating characters and representations that feel real, regardless of the genre or the mode we're working with.

Stage 1: Warm Up: Starting with Awareness

The creative process doesn't need to start at a desk. Dramatic approaches can help us find inspiration: characters live in bodies, and grounding ourselves physically, before we even start writing, can remind us what it is to inhabit a body, and potentially help us find an initial way forwards.

Let's take a moment to breathe, feel a connection with the ground, stretch, open out, and become more aware of ourselves. Try walking around the room, in whatever way feels comfortable to you. Notice your rhythm, your flow, your weight, and any habits that are coming to the fore. If you're with others, notice how we all move differently; and notice how we interact, adapting our movements in relation to those around us.

Stage 2: Exploring Identities (James Marcia's Model)

A working knowledge of how identity can be understood can help with crafting character. Here's just one example of a model, from the psychologist James Marcia, which is particularly useful in its flexibility. Marcia suggests that identity forms across key dimensions of life, including our vocation, relationships, family, religion, and politics. At any given moment, a person will sit somewhere between two states: **commitment** (having made choices) and **exploration** (being in the middle, exploring possible choices).

This gives us four character positions to play with:

- **Foreclosure:** commitment without asked questions (*"I've always known what I'd do"*)
- **Identity Achievement:** questions

asked and clarity reached (*“I know who I am”*)

- **Moratorium:** actively questioning, unsettled (*“I’m still working it out”*)
- **Identity Diffusion:** being neither committed nor exploring (*“I don’t know and I’m not sure I want to”*)

This might be used as a **diagnostic tool**; it certainly doesn’t need to be used rigidly. Ask yourself where your character might sit. Are they the same across every dimension, or do they have conviction in one area and lack it in another? Exploring such tensions might set us on the way to creating interesting characters.

Stage 3: Choose a Mode

The way in which you tell a story can shape the characters within it. Consider whether one of these modes might support what you’re trying to convey:

- **Realism:** characters mirror life as closely as possible
- **Idealism:** characters reach towards something higher or better
- **Symbolism:** characters embody abstract ideas or forces
- **Impressionism** : characters are captured in fleeting, sensory moments

- **Surrealism:** characters are driven by dream logic and the unconscious
- **Expressionism:** inner emotional states are projected outwards; characters become heightened types

Your mode is unlikely to be an arbitrary aesthetic: it can play an active role in shaping *who* your character can be and *how* their identity comes across on the page or stage.

Stage 4: From Stanislavski: Building a Character

The great theatre director Konstantin Stanislavski developed a set of questions that actors often use to bring a role to life. Writers can use the same tools to *create* characters.

The **Given Circumstances** are the starting point: these are the fixed facts of your character's world. What can and can't be changed? What are the constraints of their situation?

Then there are seven questions to work through:

1. Who am I?
2. Where am I?
3. When is it?
4. What do I want?
5. Why do I want it?

6. How will I get it?
7. What must I overcome?

This process can take the form of an interview: you answer as the character; the answers are likely to be surprising.

Stage 5: Making the Character Your Own

The wider purpose of Stanislavski's method is to help actors close the gap between themselves and the character they're playing. His notion of the **Magic If** is a further tool, asking you to imagine you are someone else, in a given situation, and to ask yourself what you would then do.

In creating characters it can also be productive to bring our own selves and experiences to the life of our creation.

You can also draw on **Emotion Memory**; this involves reaching back into your past experiences to find feelings that resonate with your character's situation. But you don't have to use your own life directly. The actor and teacher Stella Adler offered a powerful alternative: using **imagination and research**. Following this school of thought, you don't have to have lived something to be able to write it truthfully; you just have to do the work of understanding it.

You can ask of your character what they want *right now* (their immediate objective); and what their primary goal in life is longer term (their super-objective). The gap between these often generates some of the most compelling tensions (developed in the plot workshop).

Subtext runs beneath everything. What a character says rarely gives a full picture: consider also what they are *not* saying, and why that might be.

Stage 6: Put It on the Page

Now the pieces can be brought together, as you place your character in specific moments:

- Where are they, and when?
- Do they speak? If so, to whom? In a monologue or in dialogue?
- What do they do? Are stage directions or physical actions needed?
- Why do they do this? What's driving them on? What lies beneath the surface?

Crafting with these questions in mind, even if working on a short scene, can produce a character that feels complete and distinct.

Final Thought

You don't need to limit yourself by sticking only to

what you've personally experienced; understanding others can be as important, remembering that people are always multiple, in all their desires, contradictions, contexts, and changes. Characters can be fleshed out through such understanding, combined with the life of your imagination.

Workshop 2: Crafting Authentic Plots

Getting Started

We all have experience of plots that have gripped us, and others that have left us frustrated. Think of some examples, and consider why some feel right and others less so.

This workshop aims to shed light on processes that can generate plots that are compelling, asking what it is that transforms plots from formulae into absorbing vehicles for dramatic action.

Stage 1: Warm Up: Walking with Obstacles

As before, we'll start by grounding ourselves. Let's stand, focus on our breathing, and start walking around, naturally, in whatever clear space you have. Now start adapting your walking space, so that you have physical obstacles you must navigate, or even other people to weave between. Notice how obstacles don't need to stop you here; they can

shape how you move.

Plots work in similar ways: obstacles are often key elements in providing structure.

Stage 2: Story vs Plot

The novelist E.M. Forster drew a famous distinction between story and plot:

Story is what happens, in order. **Plot** is *why* it happens. Plot connects events, using causal logic, to give them significance.

Forster's example sheds further light: 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story; whereas 'The king died and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. Sequences become dramatic with the addition of causation.

To implement this, consider what lies behind events happen in your created world. Are the causes internal to the characters (e.g. their choices, flaws, desires); or external (e.g. accidents, fate, contexts)? It's often a driving question in tragedy whether fate or flaw should be understood as governing the disasters.

Stage 3: Characters Leading (Stanislavski Again)

Plot and character work hand in hand. Plots typically emerge out of characters, which can help avoid the sense of crude imposition. At this point we can return to the questions from the character workshop:

We asked what makes a character tick. What do they want, both in a given moment and at large? What are they prepared to do to get what they want? What's standing in their way?

Two classic ways of developing plot out of character address these questions:

- The **Goal-Obstacle-Conflict** dynamic involves determining what your character wants at any given point, including what might be blocking them and what tensions might follow.
- The **Major Dramatic Question** then involves working out what your character wants overall (especially important for protagonists), what they're reaching towards. This can give the whole work momentum: will they survive? Succeed? An audience or reader must want to know the answer.

Stage 4: Structural Principles: Unity and Logic

Classical drama (more or less – it's technically a later interpretation of Ancient Greek drama) held as an ideal plot structure **three unities**: a single place, a single day, and a single main action. No one has to follow these rules (the Ancient Greeks didn't themselves) but they raise interesting questions about internal logic. A plot usually needs to feel that it in some way holds together.

Another unifying principle comes in the form of **Chekhov's Gun**: if something is emphasised early on in a story, it

should matter later. Every detail can become a promise to the audience. But you can also disrupt that of course.

Structure isn't just about rules. Think about how your choice of mode (as in the character workshop) affects what kind of logic governs your created world. A work of epic theatre may deliberately break narrative unity to shake an audience into mental alertness. A surrealist work may use uncanny dream logic. Form can have productive relationships with the story you're trying to tell.

Stage 5: Structural Principles: Change and Arc

Plots are fundamentally about change.

The **3-Act Structure** is a classic model for mapping out key changes: Exposition (who, where, when, what's at stake), Rising Action (complications mount), Climax and Resolution (pivotal crisis breaks, something is decided). Freytag's Pyramid (drawn up by the nineteenth-century playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag) extends this to five acts, adding a Falling Action between the climax and then a full resolution (especially helpful where consequences need space to unfold). That's not to say plots before Freytag didn't do these things.

The screenwriter Blake Snyder's influential **Beat Sheet** (from his book *Save the Cat*) offers a nuanced contemporary version. More turning

points on offer: a strong image at the start that establishes the world, a disrupting catalyst, a central point that raises the stakes, a ‘no coming back from this’ moment before a rush of momentum, and then a closing image that shows how the world has changed.

Again, none of this needs to be prescriptive; these are tools that can be useful in determining the shape of your story, but they are in no sense rules.

Subplots and non-linear structures can complicate these models productively. A subplot can offer a commentary, contrast, or heightening of events from the main plot, even bringing out things that couldn’t there be said. Non-linearity can shift the emphasis to *why* more than *what*, beginning at the end, for example, and then we work back to understand how we got there.

Stage 6: Tension and Pacing

More local structuring can help with giving scenes variety. Work closely on an individual scene and ask who knows what, and whether that differs between characters. Differing knowledge-states create dramatic irony, a superb source of tension.

Are there multiple objectives in play at once? What small changes are taking place? And how does this scene connect to how the whole work will end?

On a larger scale, going back to Chekhov's gun, there are **setups and payoffs**, where you plant details early that will come to matter later on. Rhythm matters in relation to intensity: moments of rising conflict might alternate with reflection, pressure can build and then release...

Stage 7: Archetypes

Plot shapes recur across the centuries, and across cultures, intersecting with archetypal characters: the Hero's Journey, or the Rags to Riches narrative. They don't have to be clichés; some think of them as kind of universal structures, which map onto common human experiences.

Consider though how (and whether) such archetypes intersect with your specific characters and their particular world. A Rags to Riches story set in one time and place will feel completely different in another. The archetype is merely a skeletal model; representation is key to adding the flesh and blood.

The same applies to genre. Comedy, tragedy, romance, horror, mystery, sci-fi, fantasy – each carries expectations about how we expect plots to move. But will they? Expectations can be met, subverted, or complicated. But knowing what expectations accompany a given genre is a useful starting point.

Stage 8: Putting It on the Page

Now your character is ready to be positioned within a specific scene. Some questions to ask:

- What is the external reality of this world; can it be viewed objectively at all? And do all characters see it the same?
- What does each character want? What's stopping them getting it?
- What do they say, what do they do; how much of what they're thinking do you want and need to reveal?
- Crucially, what drives this moment forward? What will result from it?

If you have clear answers to these questions (even if, for the reader or audience, these are left tense and unresolved) the work is more likely to have a sense of purpose and to feel alive.

Final Thought: Form is also a Verb

There are many structural models available; we've introduced here just a handful. There's no need to pick one and follow it faithfully; form can better be thought of as a verb. Structuring is something you do to your material, actively giving it shape. Authentic plots feel like they could have taken only the shape they did because of their specificities. There's a difference, in other words, between a story that's well-constructed and one that rings true.

Writing for Change

The following miniature pieces, inspired by Yoko Ono's Grapefruit pieces, were produced through workshops with Peter Maber's classes Literature and Decolonisation and First-Year Writing Studio.

1. Morning Piece

Wake up early, before you're ready.

Focus on your first thought, before you remember who you're supposed to be.

Carry it with you or throw it to the wind.

Move onwards.

2. Permission Piece

Think of something you want to do but are held back from doing.

Think of what might be holding you back.

Notice there are no constraints here.

Begin.

3. Inheritance Piece

Think of three things you have learnt without ever being instructed.

Consider how you learnt them.

Consider whether you are still learning.

Create something developing one of them.

Create something from the second that moves in a different direction

Let the third stand.

4. Translation Piece

Recall an experience you've never translated into words.

Select a mode of writing (see the workshops) that you've never tried before.

Translate the experience into your chosen mode.

Keep the original your secret.

5. Contradiction Piece

Think of two things that you believe, but which can't both be true.

Don't choose between them, and don't change them.

Create a representation that brings the two together, allowing them to flourish.

Authenticity doesn't need to be consistent; it can thrive in resolving nothing.

Who We Are within Northeastern University London

Catherine Brown is Assistant Dean for Humanities and Associate Professor in English.

Jennifer Gardiner studied for a BA in English.

Charlotte Grant is Associate Professor in English.

Peter Maber is Head of English, Creative and Academic Writing and Associate Professor in English.

Lara Parmiani is founder and Artistic Director of LegalAliens Theatre; she took part in an artist's residency at Northeastern in spring 2026.

Orlando Reade is Assistant Professor in English.

Lily Sims studied for a BA in English.

Siva Sithraputhran is studying on the Contemporary Creative Writing MA.

Alison Thompson is studying on the Contemporary Creative Writing MA.

Emmanuel Ekere Thompson is studying for his PhD in English, working on connections between Nigerian and British drama.

Emma Woodhouse is studying on the Contemporary Creative Writing MA.