

Sophister Module Description 2026-27

Full Name: The Seven Basic Plots (ENU44011)

Short Name: 7BP

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Carlo Gébler; carlogebler@gmail.com

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: HT

Year: JS

Module content

The module is intended as an introduction to the history, theory and practice of narrative, storytelling and plotting. Students need to be aware that this is a writing module and writing (and the generating of text as well as the study of how narrative functions) is at its heart. Every week students and the module leader will examine a set text (titles below) which will have been read in advance: this discussion will focus on how the text functions and succeeds (or not) as a piece of fiction. Students will also (by prior agreement at the beginning of term) provide a piece of fiction (not necessarily finished, and not less than a 1000 words in length and not longer than 3000 words in length) in advance as hard copy to Carlo Gébler (who is teaching the course): this piece of written work will also be discussed in class; again, as with the discussion of the set text, the focus will be on the efficacy of the material and whether or not it works as a piece of narrative art. The discussion of student written work in class will be focused, constructive and detailed; it will also be in depth. Participants may not previously have had the kind of attention that they will experience on this module directed at work they have written and they should come to the module prepared for this. Typically, students will have to provide at least one piece of fiction in advance for discussion in class over the course of the term (although it could be more – the number of submissions is entirely dependent on the size of the class). Typically, two pieces written by students will be discussed in each class in conjunction with the set text. Finally, and this cannot be emphasized enough: this is a writing module and writing is at its heart. Seminar/workshop attendance is compulsory.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module a student should be able to:

1. Identify and show a critical understanding of some of the key terms for interpreting and discussing narrative and plot.
2. Show an understanding of the history and recent developments in the theory and practice of plotting and narrative.
3. Demonstrate an awareness of some of the key debates about the nature of narrative, storytelling and plotting.
4. Employ a range of high-level writing skills in producing a range of texts.
5. Have a working knowledge (and be able to reproduce) the standard narrative conceits or tropes common to literary culture.

Learning Aims:

To understand exactly what is involved in the creation of a narrative or fiction text which is intended for publication.

Assessment Details:

This module will be assessed by the submission of 5000 words at the end of term - EITHER an essay which explores how narrative works OR a creative project which explores some aspect of plotting or narrative theory and that can (indeed most likely will) take the form of a piece of original fiction, i.e., a story. The nature and content of the submission will be agreed with Carlo Gébler in advance. Students will have the opportunity to discuss their essay's structure, form and content during the contact hour, which will either follow the class or happen at another, mutually agreed time.

Content warning

Some texts on this module may include offensive language, including racial, gender-based, able-ist, sexual and other slurs, and may portray troubling events and narratives, including murder, abuse and sexual assault. We are committed to the critical analysis of these texts and of their contexts.

Preliminary Reading List:

Each week, one book will be studied in detail. The work should be read in advance of the class. It cannot be stressed enough that all texts must be read in advance and this includes Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots*; this last, a long book, must be read before the first class in week one. It is the foundation stone on which the entire course rests.

Week 1: Introduction: *The Seven Basic Plots*, Christopher Booker

Week 2: Heroes/Heroines: Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

Week 3 Monsters/Others: Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley*

Week 4 Tragedy: *Oedipus Rex*

Week 5 Comedy: Jane Austen, *Emma*

Week 6: The Quest: Elizabeth Smart, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Voyage and Return: Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*

Week 9: Transformation: Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

Week 10: Anti-Plots: Kraus, *I Love Dick*

Week 11: Plots and Reality: Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa*

Week 12: Summary and Review: time allowing we may consider Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea*. This will be determined during class.

Carlo Gébler

FRI 12 DEC 2025

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.

The School of English strongly supports Trinity's strategic commitment to the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion. Staff in the School are required to adhere to all the college's policies around issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, including engaging with appropriate training. The School also encourages its students to engage with the training made available to them in relation to these areas by Trinity's Equality Office. This training and further information about the college's policies can be found on their website: <https://www.tcd.ie/equality/>. The School acknowledges, however, that texts studied in its modules may contain forms of representation or language that engage in and portray prejudice and discrimination of various kinds. Fostering the ability to engage critically with such texts, and the complex and challenging debates and deliberations to which they give rise, is an essential part of the School's educational mission. So too is instilling knowledge of the historical and sociolinguistic dimensions of what has and has not been considered offensive. As a community committed to open, respectful and responsible discussion, the School recognises that the direct quotation of discriminatory, derogatory terms from texts in lectures, seminars and tutorials should generally be avoided. It supports the right of its members to respond critically, openly and vigorously to ideas or opinions that they oppose, while affirming its commitment to fostering a robust intellectual environment in which all members can freely participate. The School also recognises the complexities of debates about teaching and questions of equality, diversity and inclusion, and undertakes to continue to work towards a better understanding of the issues involved.

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