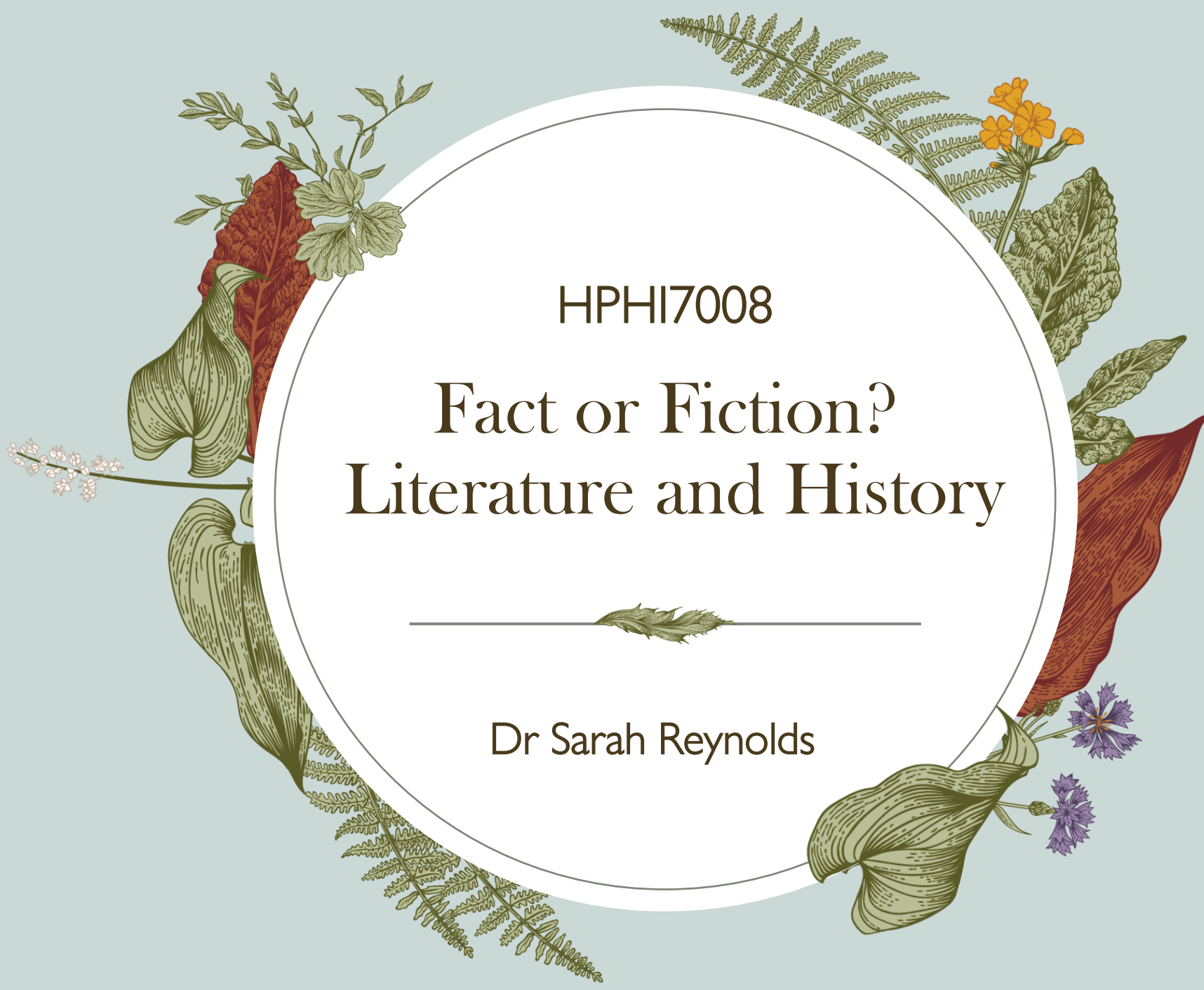


A circular wreath of various botanical illustrations surrounds the central text. The wreath includes green ferns, a red maple leaf, a green bell-shaped flower, a branch with small pink blossoms, a large green leaf, a red leaf, purple cornflowers, and orange marigolds.

HPHI7008

Fact or Fiction? Literature and History

Dr Sarah Reynolds



Today's session



1. Introduction to creative research practice.
2. Case study: Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* and its exegesis, *Searching for The Secret River*.



What is Creative Research Practice?

- Creative research practice is research by ‘doing’ or ‘making’ a creative work.
- In academia, there are two parts to the process:
 - The production of a creative artefact (art work, poetry collection, novel, play etc.)
 - The exegesis: an essay that reflects upon the process of producing the creative work in terms of research and development.



CREATIVE RESEARCH PRACTICE



Process

- Formal academic research (books, papers, videos)
- The questions you ask as a practitioner; the problems you encounter; the methods you use to gather information; your analysis of the work in progress.
- Creative reflection focuses on personal practice.
- Practitioners reflect upon and document their creative process and the issues that arise from it.



Outcome

- The research also comprises the artistic product (artefact, novel, song, performance etc.)
- The ways in which the finished product engages with the existing body of work, and with its target audience, constitutes part of the research.
- The research product might not be a static object but something that continues to evolve with performance for example.



“

“...the outcomes from practice-based creative research can influence the ideas and actions of other practitioners as well as a wider community of interest. This is underpinned by practitioner documentation of the process of making artefacts, their creative intentions and goals and the results of experimentation with new forms and materials available in published articles. Reflection through research can provide a rich source of new understanding about the nature of creative practice for the practitioners themselves.”

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Linda Candy, *The Creative Reflective Practitioner: Research Through Making and Practice* (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), p. 235.



“

“History (contrary to the common view) does not record events. It merely records echoes of events – which is a very different thing – and, in doing this, it must rely on imagination as much as on memory... the historian and the novelist both must invent the truth.”

”

Simon Leys, ‘Lies That Tell the Truth: The Paradox of Art and Creative Writing’, *The Monthly* (Nov 2007, 6) p.43.



“

“The past is not dead ground, and to traverse it is not a sterile exercise. History is always changing behind us, and the past changes a little every time we retell it. The most scrupulous historian is an unreliable narrator; he brings to the enterprise the biases of his training and the vagaries of his personal temperament, and he is often obliged, in order to make his name, to murder his forefathers by coming up with a different take on events from the one that held sway when he himself learned the discipline; he must make the old new, because his department's academic standing depends on it.

Once this is understood, the trade of the historical novelist doesn't seem so reprehensible or dubious; the only requirement is for conjecture to be plausible and grounded in the best facts one can get. What really disconcerts commentators, I suspect, is that, when they read historical fiction, they feel their own lack of education may be exposed; they panic, because they don't know which bits are true. So here is a handy pocket guide. Every time the author writes, "He thought that . . ." or "She felt that . . .", she's making it up. We never know what people thought or felt, unless they kept frank and full journals. And the world is full of people who lie to their own diaries.

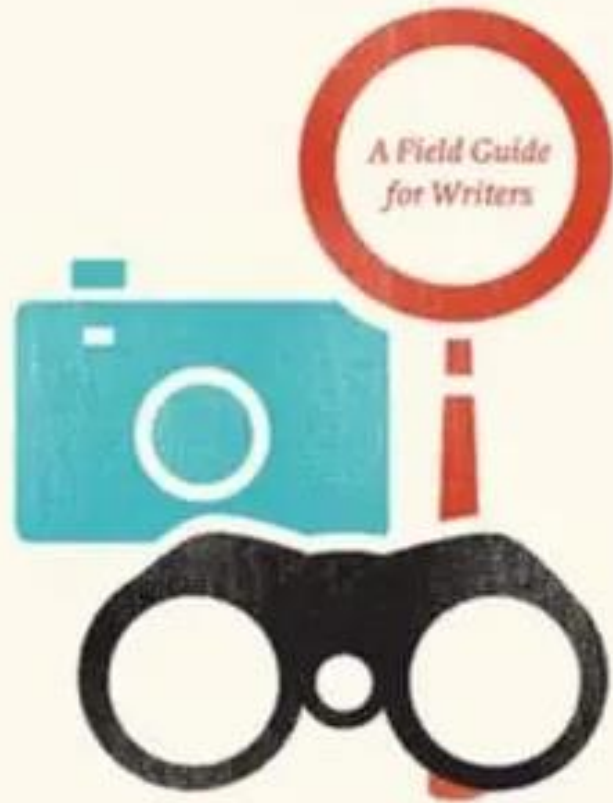
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SOURCES

Novelists use the same sources as historians:

- **Primary Sources** - original, first-hand accounts or direct evidence of an event or topic.
- **Secondary Sources** - created by individuals who did not directly participate in the event or topic being studied. Typically, sources that describe, interpret or analyse primary sources.
- **Tertiary sources** - reference materials that compile and summarize information from primary and secondary sources.
- **Ethnographic** – gathered by fieldwork, observations, taking field notes, informal conversations, interviews, document analysis, surveys, filming and photography.



THE ART OF CREATIVE RESEARCH

PHILIP GERARD



“Whatever form this search for knowing takes, it is research. **It becomes creative when the writer applies imagination and artfulness to the manner in which it is pursued—and then incorporated into the work.**

That is, the writer *doesn't* just Google a few facts or read a couple of books, but rather designs a research plan to get to the bottom of something in a profound way, then uses that knowledge to shape the form and content of the writing—not as mere decoration, but as deeply embedded, founding truth. Sometimes the very lexicon of the subject being researched becomes the language of the creative work.”

Philip Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) p. 13.

‘Fiction reveals truth that reality obscures.’

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882)



Fiction can:

- ‘Fill in’ the gaps in our knowledge by making an imaginative ‘best guess’ rooted in evidence-based research.
- Provide a narrative that helps us make sense of the ‘facts’.
- Disguise and protect identities when needed.
- Offer an interpretation of the ‘facts’ – just as an academic argument might.
- Foster empathy by placing ‘facts’ within an emotional context.



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“Instead of trying to present a total explanation of some cultural group or practice, the author of ethnographic fiction aims to evoke cultural experience and sense of place using literary techniques to craft conventional ethnographic materials—interviews, participant observation, fieldnotes, photographs—into a compelling story. Ethnographic fictions are based on factual research and events that actually happened, but they are explicitly crafted and told from a particular point of view, often with the narrator as a character in the story.”

”



Matt Jacobson & Soren C. Larsen (2014) Ethnographic fiction for writing and research in cultural geography, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 31:2, 179-193, p. 1.

HOW DO WE TRANSFORM FACTS INTO FICTION?



- Impose a story-telling structure:
 - Decide where to start for maximum impact.
 - Consider the storytelling order rather than the linear timeline of events.
- Distillation: choose the most impactful / telling facts.
- Humanize the abstract.
- Edit dialogue so that is believable rather than entirely real.
- Use specific, sensory language that appeals to the imagination.



“

Don't tell me the moon is shining;
show me the glint of light on broken
glass.

”

Anton Chekhov

25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

BIRD BY BIRD



SOME
INSTRUCTIONS
ON WRITING
AND LIFE

ANNE LAMOTT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ALMOST EVERYTHING*



“Just as everyone is a walking advertisement for who he or she is, so every room is a little showcase of its occupants’ values and personalities. Every room is about memory. Every room gives us layers of information about our past and present and who we are, our shrines and quirks and hopes and sorrows, our attempts to prove that we exist and are more or less Okay. You can see, in our rooms, how much light we need – how many light bulbs, candles, skylight we have – and in how we keep things lit you can see how we try to comfort ourselves. The mix in our rooms is so touching: the clutter and the cracks in the wall belie a bleakness or brokenness in our lives, while photos and a few rare objects show our pride, our rare shining moments.”

Anne Lamont, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Random House, 1995) pp.74-5.



THE ART
OF CREATIVE
RESEARCH

PHILIP GERARD



“When describing distance or dimension, amount or weight, put the quantity in human terms. For instance, for the average adult, an object two feet away is just within arm’s reach—and within reach of a fist. Thus you can communicate the fact of distance with a dramatic gesture in the scene. Likewise you can tell us an old leatherback turtle crawling ashore on the beach to make a nest is eight feet long and weighs 2,000 pounds, or you can say, “Imagine a barnacle-encrusted creature as big as a Smart car emerging from the surf and trenching its way through the sand to dig a nest deep as a grave.”

Philip Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) p. 88.



Reading



In preparation for this session, you should have read two extracts:

1. Extract from Kate Grenville's book, *Searching for The Secret River*.
Chapter 20: The Fictional Quester
2. Part 1 of *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville.



DISCUSSION

- How do the two texts relate to one another?
- How would you describe Grenville's research methodology?
- Where is the boundary between 'creative' research and 'historical' research?
- What tools of writing craft does Grenville use to bring the past to life?
- How useful is Creative Writing as a research methodology for interpreting the past?





Assessment

Based upon today's session:

- Can you think of an interesting title for an essay?
 - What are the themes that you might explore?
 - Which critical and creative texts might you use?
- 