

3.2

How do conventions evolve over time?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To understand how writers can modify the expected conventions of a text or work in response to changes in societal values and concerns.
- ▶ To recognize how readers and writers can question and change the use of traditional literary and non-literary conventions in order to discuss significant issues within society.
- ▶ To provide an overview of how, as the use of the English language changes over time, the conventions of the language can also change.
- ▶ To demonstrate ways to apply course concepts to specific works of literature and non-literary texts.
- ▶ To demonstrate ways to understand specific works of literature and non-literary texts in the context of global issues.

In Chapter 3.1 we explored how we can define the conventions that belong to a particular genre or text type and why it is that writers may adhere and deviate from these conventions. In this chapter, we will be exploring how and why these conventions can change over time. To do this, we will be exploring, in detail, each of the objectives listed at the beginning of this chapter.

In addition, throughout Chapter 2.1, you will have explored how we can define culture and the impact that a person's culture can have upon how they receive a text or work. In this next part, we will discuss the impact that culture can also have on the production of texts and works.

How and why writers modify the expected conventions of a text

In this section we will explore how and why writers modify the expected conventions of a text or work in response to changes in societal values and concerns.

All varieties of writing, whether they are fiction or non-fiction, prose or poetry, advertisements or news reports, can be seen as a product of the environment in which they were produced. Writing can be affected by, just to mention a few examples, the political climate during the time period in which it is being written, by major events that are happening locally, nationally or globally at the time of writing, and/or by trends within society such as the popularity of a certain kind of music or aesthetic during the writing process. As all of these factors shift and change throughout time, so does the writing that reflects them.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

CULTURE

If you were to research events of global significance that occurred in the years 2001 or 2002 you may note down the September 11 attacks (which took place in the USA in 2001) as being a key political/historical event from that time. Then, if you were to research significant cultural events from the same time period you may note down that the highest grossing film at the US Box Office during 2002 was the film *Spider-Man* directed by Sam Raimi. The film tells the 'origin' story of the eponymous *Marvel Comics* character and is set in New York City. Part of its success could be attributed

to the resonance it had with Americans at this highly emotional time through its characterization of *Spider-Man* as a hero of New York who strives to save the city from crime and a variety of 'evil' influences, (many of the battle scenes were set among the key landmarks of the New York city skyline); along with its depiction of *Spider-Man* struggling and then succeeding in bearing the weight of the responsibility that he felt came with his superhuman powers and the sacrifices that he had to make for the greater good of the city and its people. This more nuanced, serious, and character-driven approach to a 'superhero' film was a change in convention from previous incarnations of the genre that had focused primarily on more sensational action-driven narratives. Can you think of any other cultural products that have been created as a direct result of, or have clearly been influenced by, an event of global significance?

To further the relationship between culture and texts/works, we will analyse two magazine front covers. They are both magazine front covers from the print publication *Cosmopolitan*. *Cosmopolitan* is an international lifestyle magazine intended for a female readership which is published in 35 different languages and in 110 countries around the world. The magazine originated in the USA in 1886 as a family magazine, before becoming a literary magazine, and then a fashion and lifestyle magazine in 1965. The magazine has traditionally focused on content such as fashion, celebrities, horoscopes, beauty, relationships and health. Despite the challenges to the print media industry as explored in the previous chapter, *Cosmopolitan* still has over three million subscribers to its print edition, even though it does have an online version of the magazine and is also increasingly viewed through various social media platforms.

KEY FEATURES MAGAZINE FRONT COVERS

- It is important to remember that aside from sales of the actual magazine itself, advertising is a huge source of revenue for the magazine industry. The front cover of a magazine is ultimately its advertisement to the public and so is crucial to its commercial success and therefore its potential to attract companies to advertise in its publication. This is important to consider when analysing the features of a magazine front cover.
- **Masthead:** the name of the magazine (usually at the top of the page).
- **Tagline:** memorable phrase that readers may apply to magazine.
- **Headline:** text that reveals the main article (usually in large font or a different font to stand out).
- **Main image:** a large visual image, often a photograph, that promotes the main article in the magazine. Often this will be the central feature of the cover.
- **Subtitle:** text that advertises the other big stories (usually denoted through larger font than the cover lines).
- **Cover lines:** text that reveals the other stories.
- **Pull quote:** a quotation from the main article – words are surrounded with quotations marks.
- **Buzz words:** words that promise there is even more in the magazine ('plus ...', 'and ...', 'exclusive ...').
- **Strapline:** a narrow strip of text at the bottom of the cover.
- **Puff:** an incentive to buy the magazine, usually put in a different shaped 'box' or 'balloon' to stand out.

The QR codes in this part of the chapter will introduce you to a series of *Cosmopolitan* magazine front covers, together these can constitute a body of work.



Scan the QR code on the previous page to view the *Huffington Post* article 'Six Decades of Cosmo'. In particular, look at the cover from April 1990 featuring supermodel Christy Turlington. Then, scan the second QR code to view the article from *Cosmopolitan* featuring their October 2018 cover, with plus-size model Tess Holliday on the front. After reading the two *Cosmopolitan* magazine front covers, read the table below that highlights the key differences in the conventions used in each magazine front cover.



■ Table 3.2.1

Feature	<i>Cosmopolitan</i> 1990	<i>Cosmopolitan</i> 2018
Masthead	The masthead is capitalized in a print font, which is coloured white, and isn't large enough to fill the entire of the top of the magazine from left to right.	The masthead is capitalized in a print font, which is coloured a soft pink, and fills the entire of the top of the magazine front left to right. The masthead seems bolder and more assertive, definitely less stereotypically 'soft' and 'feminine' in its aesthetic.
Colours	The main colour used for the background and the dress of the cover model, is a soft purple/lilac. The text is all the same colour – white.	The main colour used for the background is a steely, cold blue varying in shade. The cover model is wearing a swimming costume that is a dark, emerald green. The text varies between bold black and white, and a softer pink. Like with the masthead, these colours are less stereotypically 'feminine' when compared to the colours used in the 1990 front cover.
Layout	The layout of the magazine is fairly minimal, with only the masthead at the top of the page, the main visual image of the model featured in the middle with eight cover line stories featured around her, all in the same font and text colour. When looking at the front cover, there seems to be a lot of blank space only occupied by the background colour.	The layout of the magazine front cover is very 'busy' with the masthead at the top, the main visual image of the model in the middle, and the cover lines featured around the model taking up almost every available space on the page. This mirrors the change in pace of many women's lives in the modern era which are as full and frenetic as their male counterparts.
Main visual image	The main visual image on the front cover is of supermodel Christy Turlington. The model is slim and tanned, and is wearing a strapless purple satin dress which while being short, isn't too revealing. Her hair and make-up, while being clearly styled in a way that was fashionable at the time, are 'natural' in their style and colour palette.	The main visual image on the front cover is of plus-size model Tess Holliday. The model has paler skin covered in a variety of tattoos and is larger in size than a typical fashion model. She is wearing an emerald green vintage style swimsuit that is quite revealing. Her hair and make-up are similar to the 1990 front cover, naturally styled but more in a vintage 1950s aesthetic fashion. It is clear that the stereotypical notion of a 'desirable' and 'beautiful' cover girl is being subverted here through the inclusion of an atypical model.
Cover lines	The cover lines on the 1990 front cover frequently refer to marriage, with words belonging to its semantic field appearing many times; 'married', 'wives', 'husband'. This perhaps connotes that the intended reader would also be a married woman, or a woman actively looking to be married. The topics covered are stereotypically feminine and focused on issues within relationships – 'What Makes a Man Want to Marry', or mainstream entertainment and culture, for example, an interview with an A-list Hollywood actress and the release of a new romance novel.	Even though this magazine cover has fewer cover lines than the one from 1990, their typography is much larger and there are subheadings provided that give more details about the topics being covered. The topics are still female-centred but in, perhaps, a less stereotypical way. For example, one cover line details a husband's viewpoint of his wife's affair and one cover line is about a survivor of sexual assault. There is also the inclusion of profanity in the cover line, 'Tess Holliday Wants the Haters to Kiss her Ass'. This implies that perhaps the readership of <i>Cosmopolitan</i> is more interested in reading detailed, serious features than before and also does not shy away from strong opinions like those of Tess Holliday.
Language features	The front cover utilizes the type of language features that we would expect to find on a magazine front cover such as elliptical sentences 'Battered wives. Why they stay', alliteration in 'What Makes a Man Want to Marry' and tricolons in 'Tall, Blonde and Terrific'. The language never directly addresses the reader, referring ambiguously to 'a man' and 'women' throughout. As mentioned previously, most of the language belongs to the semantic field of marriage or heterosexual relationships between men and women.	The front cover also utilizes the type of language features that we would expect to find on a magazine front cover such as rhetorical questions in, 'Is Success an Illness?' and intensifiers in 'Total Chic' and 'The UK's Most Eligible Man'. The front cover, like its 1990 counterpart, also doesn't ever directly address the reader. This front cover only once refers to marriage, and it is ambiguous whether this is a same-sex or heterosexual marriage.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

How far that the texts we read represent the truth of our human experience has long been a contentious topic, and none more so than in the beauty industry and the mass media connected to it. Once you have read the two magazine front covers and read the above features table, it is clear that there has been a deviation from the conventions that used to be used by *Cosmopolitan* to represent women on their magazine front covers, and a shift in the topics that they feel women would like to read about. But, why is this?

The lives of women, and the things that they desire and expect from life, have drastically changed in many parts of the world across time. For example, in 1990, in both the UK and USA, marital rape still hadn't been criminalized, and laws pertaining to statutory maternity leave for all working women were still not fully in place. In 1990, the USA still hadn't had a female speaker in the House of Representatives, and in both the UK and USA women were still

barred from serving in any combat role within the military. However, by 2018 all of this had changed, with marital rape criminalized in both countries and statutory maternity leave being required by law for all working women in both countries. By 2018, all combat roles in the UK and USA military were open to women, and in 2007 Nancy Pelosi became the first woman to take up the position of Speaker of the US House of Representatives. This great change in the rights of women across time is perhaps best summed up in Nancy Pelosi's speech to the opening of the 110th US Congress:

'For our daughters and granddaughters, today, we have broken the marble ceiling. For our daughters and our granddaughters, the sky is the limit, anything is possible for them.'

(Nancy Pelosi)

ACTIVITY 1

As the way that society views and treats women changes, then it is hardly surprising that the way in which they are represented in mass media will also change. When looking at the two front covers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine from the QR codes, how do you think the visual and language conventions used in the 2018 cover show a deviation from those used in the 1990 front cover to show this shift in culture and representation? Read the example response below.

The main visual image used in the 2018 *Cosmopolitan* print magazine front cover depicts a large photograph of the model Tess Holliday. Tess Holliday is a 'plus-size' model meaning that she is larger in dress size than that of usual fashion models. She is wearing an emerald green swimsuit that is vintage in style, and her make-up and hair is also styled in this fashion. She has on display her many tattoos. There has been a backlash against stereotypical representations of women in the mass media, especially in fashion and advertising, in contemporary society and the use of Tess Holliday as an atypical fashion model could be seen as an attempt by *Cosmopolitan* to meet the needs of its young, socially aware, female readership who may be aware of, and involved in, this discussion about the representation of women in the mass media. The vintage style of Tess Holliday is an allusion to fashion models from the 1950s, who although larger in size than models commonly used today, were still considered beautiful. This allusion connotes to the key idea contained in the use of the main image that even if a woman does not conform to stereotypical notions of beauty she can still be considered beautiful. This is a message that the readership of the magazine may wish to see on the front cover of the magazine and thus help to sell it.

Revisit the 'Six Decades of Cosmo' article via the QR code and look at the covers from March 1987 and September 2013. Use the model above to write a commentary of how you think the visual and language features used in them show a shift in culture and the representation of women in the mass media.



ACTIVITY 2

The above response focuses on how *Cosmopolitan* uses magazine cover conventions in order to meet the needs of a female readership that is now far more likely to question the way in which they are represented in the media due to the greater opportunities and rights being afforded to women in many contemporary societies. However, it is clear from the first cover example that women didn't always feel that they had the voice to question this representation, or simply didn't feel the need to. Also, despite some positive changes in the representation of women in the media there is still, in some people's opinion, a lot of progress to be made in order to create a diverse, equal and accurate representation of women in the mass media. For example, there is still discussion ongoing about how few women of colour are used for the main image of fashion magazines compared to their white counterparts and there is still concern about the main focus of many fashion magazines still being on how to make women as sexually attractive to men as possible.

Go online and see if you can find the front covers for this month's leading fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar*. How truly representative do you think the models depicted on this array of front covers are? In your opinion, how could these be changed to be more representative? Write down a summary of your ideas.

From your analysis of the *Cosmopolitan* covers you should be able to see how and why *Cosmopolitan* changed the conventions used in its print magazine front covers in order to respond to a societal shift in the way women are depicted, and expect to be depicted, in the magazines that they read. In the next part, we will look at how and why literary works can also respond to shifts in the concerns of society.

The next text is an extract from the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818). The novel focuses on the scientist Victor Frankenstein and the scientific experiments that he conducts with the intention of reanimating a human corpse. In the extract, Frankenstein has succeeded in his scientific attempts, but the end result is not what he anticipated. The novel can be seen as containing elements of the **gothic fiction** genre (see previous chapter) and **Romanticism** (see Chapter 1.2). The novel can also be seen as an early example of the **science fiction** genre, key features of which are listed below.

KEY FEATURES SCIENCE FICTION

- Science fiction can trace its origins back to the tenth century, with some people seeing the first examples of science fiction in the compilation of tales and folk stories in *One Thousand and One Nights* or as it's commonly known, *Arabian Nights*.
- The modern concept of a science fiction novel was developed throughout the eighteenth century and the novel *Frankenstein* is seen as being one of the first, if not the first, example of this.
- Science fiction shares **commonalities** with **gothic fiction**, **Romanticism** and **dystopian fiction** (which can be seen as a science fiction **subgenre**) and resists a straightforward definition as it is a blend of various genres and styles.
- Science fiction is a genre that can be applied to non-literary texts such as films and television programmes, but in this section we will focus on how the genre applies to science fiction literary works. Some of the key ingredients of science fiction works are listed below:
 - **Plot:** The **plot** of many science fiction novels focus on scientific experimentation, advancements in technology and the lives of people living in societies and worlds much more scientifically advanced or different from our own. This focus on the future and what may happen to society as science and technology advances has led to science fiction also being called '**speculative fiction**'.
 - **Characters:** The type of **characters** that a reader would expect to find in a science fiction novel would include scientists and researchers, and the

subjects of their experimentations and research. This could include supernatural creatures (like the reanimated corpse seen in *Frankenstein*), or animals that possess special scientifically advanced skills, or robots and other forms of artificial life. Extra-terrestrial life from outside our own planet or from a fictional planet are also often used as characters in science fiction novels.

- **Settings:** Science fiction novels are often set in centres of scientific and technological research such as laboratories and universities. As mentioned in the information on 'plot', science fiction novels can also be set in societies and worlds much more scientifically advanced or different from our own, for example, outer-space or very far into the future. A lot of modern science fiction is set in a **post-apocalyptic** world where civilization as we know it has been destroyed by a scientific or technological accident or advancement.
- **Structure:** There is no distinct overall structural form used in science fiction, but writers will often use **flashbacks**, **leaps in narrative time-frames**, **cliffhangers** and the **gradual unfolding** of the consequences of a scientific experiment or technological advancement to keep the reader guessing what may happen next.
- **Colour:** The colours used in science fiction can vary between the dark and dull colours that we normally associate with **gothic fiction** to depict a world that has been negatively affected by, or currently is being affected by, scientific experiments and technological advancements. Or, writers can use bright and bold colours such as electric and neon colours to connote an other-

worldliness that we associate with outer-space and technologically advanced societies.

- **Literary features:** Like gothic fiction, science fiction will often include many examples of sensory language which reduces the distance between the reader and the text and will make them feel much closer to the events being described. This is important when describing events that may seem inexplicable or unbelievable to a reader. Science fiction often aims to inspire a sense of wonder and awe in the reader and so will be highly descriptive using elaborate **metaphors**, **similes**, **personification** and other forms of **figurative language**. A **semantic field** of scientific and technological **jargon** will also often be used, and in some cases, brand new words will be invented by the writer to give language to people, events and things that may not currently exist. Also like gothic fiction, an **atmosphere** of suspense and tension is integral and as such **short sentences**, **ellipses**, **exclamation marks** and **one-sentence paragraphs** are often used by writers to create this.

Further reading

- Some examples of science fiction works that are seen as important in the development of the genre are listed below:
 - *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine* both by HG Wells
 - *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K Dick
 - *Neuromancer* by William Gibson
 - *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams.

Read the extract from *Frankenstein* below. It has been numbered to explain where and how the features of science fiction writing have been used by Shelley.

- 5 How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how describe the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful? Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these features only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

- (1) I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep.

(Mary Shelley 43)

(1) The main **plot** point of the extract is focused on the science experiments of the protagonist pertaining to his attempts to re-animate a human corpse. The idea of a scientist attempting to carry out such a dark, and morally dubious, science experiment clearly links to the main **plot** focus of many science fiction novels that **speculate** about the capability for science and technology to be used for nefarious purposes.

Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley was a writer from the UK who was born in 1797. She was the daughter of the philosopher and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, and was married to the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley wrote novels, essays, dramas and travelogues but is perhaps best known for her novel *Frankenstein* which contains gothic and Romantic elements, as well as often being regarded as one of the first examples of a science-fiction novel. There has been renewed interest in her larger body of work in recent times, especially from feminist literary critics who see many feminist themes in her writings, such as implicit questions about the role of women in society, anxieties surrounding motherhood and repressed female sexuality.

ACTIVITY 3

Use the key features of science fiction box to label the conventions of science fiction where you can see them being used in the extract on the previous page. A model of how to label the extract in this way has been demonstrated in the previous chapter of this section, and there is a further example demonstrated below the extract.

GLOBAL ISSUES

Field of Inquiry: Science, Technology and the Environment

THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ON THE NATURAL WORLD

Society in nineteenth-century Britain and western Europe (where *Frankenstein* was written and is set) was largely conservative and Christian; believing that only God had the power and right to create and take life. However, during the time the novel was written, there was much public debate and controversy about the possibility of 'raising the dead' – in part due to the experiments of Luigi Galvani, who in the late-eighteenth century used electric currents to 're-animate' animals. In *Frankenstein*, we see Victor Frankenstein 're-animate' a human corpse, but inadvertently create a monster that he is disgusted by: 'How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how describe the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form?' The

use of hyperbolic metaphors ('this catastrophe', 'the wretch') and the rhetorical question helps convey the despair that Frankenstein feels when he sees what he has created. This links to Christian fears at the time the work was written about the 'unholy' consequences of human beings 'playing God' and interfering in the 'natural' processes of life. It is clear when reading the extract from *Frankenstein* above that Shelley was using the conventions of the science fiction genre to respond to and mirror the concerns felt by many towards science and technology.

There will be further discussion of this Global Issue in a commentary on Cormac McCarthy's 'The Road' further on in this chapter.

Now let's read an extract from what could be considered a more contemporary science fiction work that also focuses upon the concerns of society towards science and technology. Below is an extract from the novel *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2006). The novel describes a post-apocalyptic America where most of human life and the landscape have been destroyed by an unspecified event. In the novel a father and son are travelling to an (also) unspecified location south, hoping to find better conditions in which they can survive.

With the first gray light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here.

- 5 When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again. Then he just sat there holding
- 10 the binoculars and watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land. He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God, God never spoke.

(Cormac McCarthy 4–5)

Cormac McCarthy

Cormac McCarthy is an American writer who was born in 1933. McCarthy writes novels that belong to a variety of genres such as western, post-apocalyptic and southern gothic. He is known for his sparse style of literature where he often dispenses with conventional usage of punctuation and tends to write with few literary flourishes such as the excessive use of figurative language. Many of his novels have been turned into successful films such as *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*.

Instead of focusing the plot of the novel on the consequences of the dubious scientific experiments of one physician which then has very personal implications, McCarthy focuses upon the consequences of a scientific experiment that has had terrible consequences for everybody in the natural world. It is clear from reading the extract that some kind of terrible event has destroyed both human life and the landscape. It is unclear what this event was, but from the striking description of the natural landscape as being smoky and devoid of both colour and life you could easily surmise that some kind of environmental disaster has befallen the land. This work was written in 2006 when society was becoming gradually more aware of, and concerned about, the consequences of environmental issues such as pollution, resource shortages and extreme changes in weather patterns. You could read this work as an attempt from McCarthy to alter some of the conventions of the science fiction genre, transforming the conventions into those belonging to speculative fiction, to explore societal anxieties about the changes to the natural world being wrought by developments in science and technology. As mentioned before, Shelley makes the story of *Frankenstein* a personal one – it is essentially the story of the personal tragedy of Victor Frankenstein which helps to convey a clear warning to the reader about the dangers that can occur when science and technology are misused. However, the ambiguity in setting and in who the characters are in *The Road* helps to make this work universal, mirroring the universal nature of the issue being discussed in the novel.

which is far more apt if you were to read this work as a warning against the potentially catastrophic results of environmental damage on the global population and the natural world.

It is clear when reading the extract from *The Road* that McCarthy is using the conventions of the speculative fiction genre (a subsidiary of the science fiction genre) to respond to and to mirror the concerns felt by many today towards science, technology and its impact on the natural world around us.



TOK Links

When reading *Frankenstein* and *The Road* it is clear that through the utilization of genre conventions, both works are able to discuss and explore issues pertinent to the society and culture in which they were written. However, though both works could be seen as belonging to the science fiction genre and though both works explore anxieties surrounding the development of science and technology they were written hundreds of years apart; they both focus on very different aspects of science, technology and the natural world and they utilize the conventions of science fiction very differently.

With that in mind, is the study of texts better approached by means of a temporal perspective, grouping texts according to when they were written, or by means of a thematic approach, grouping them according to the theme or concern they share?

In the last part of this chapter, we have explored how and why texts and works can modify their use of conventions in response to changes in societal values and concerns. In the next part of this chapter we will explore how readers and writers can interpret and change traditional literary and non-literary conventions, changing the way in which they are received and reproduced. We will also analyse how the use of the English language has changed over time and, as a result, its conventions.

How can readers and writers interpret and change traditional literary and non-literary conventions to discuss significant issues?

In this section we will explore how readers and writers can question and change the use of traditional literary and non-literary conventions in order to discuss significant issues within society.

When you think about the works and texts that you have explored throughout your studies in English Language and Literature, where were these texts and works from – geographically, culturally, temporally? In the literary works you have studied, what characters or settings do you feel were used most frequently? In the non-literary texts, from whose perspective did you often read? Who or what was the subject matter of these texts? How relatable have you found the texts and works that you have studied to be? Were the characters and settings recognizable to you? Was the subject matter something that you had experienced or were likely to experience?

In your responses to the above questions, you have begun to explore the issues central to the debate about how diverse the books that we read and study are and should be. Some people feel that, currently, the majority of books that are published, discussed in the media and/or studied in academic institutions only represent a minority of readers in terms of ethnicity, culture, gender and social background. As a result, some writers are changing the traditional conventions of the works and texts that they create in order to be more diverse.

The next text is an excerpt from Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's longer TED talk about diversity in English language works and texts, which you can watch online on the TED website via the QR code opposite.



You have already analysed informative texts in Chapters 1.2 and 1.4, persuasive texts in Chapters 1.2 and 1.4 and speeches in Chapter 1.4 and so you may want to use the notes that you made in those chapters to help you to understand this lecture.

I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call 'the danger of the single story'. I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader, and what I read were British and American children's books.

- 5 I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we
- 10 never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

- My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was. And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story. What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had
- 15 read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify.

- Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books. But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with
- 20 skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature.

I started to write about things I recognized. Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

(Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie)

Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie is a novelist who was born in Nigeria in 1977. She moved to America for her university studies in 1996. Much of her writing is set in Nigeria and includes Nigerian narrators, protagonists and characters. Thematically, much of her writing focuses on relationships, cultural identity and feminist issues. She is perhaps best known for her novels *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. Adichie is also known for her contributions to TED talks such as her lecture on 'We Should All Be Feminists'. Her above lecture is one of the top-ten most viewed TED talks of all time.



EE Links: English A - Language category 3

TED lectures are a relatively new and innovative text type that can be used by speakers to explore issues that they feel are of significance within society. You could use this text type for a category 3 extended essay which could analyse a variety of the most-

watched TED lectures in order to answer this research question: **How do TED lectures use language, structure and prosodic/phonological features in order to convey their message effectively to their intended audience?**

CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

It is clear from Adichie's TED talk that her lack of exposure to works and texts that represented her own identity and culture meant that she then struggled to articulate that culture and identity herself in her own writing. It was only when she was exposed to the writings of authors who authentically represented her own identity and experiences that she was then able to express them herself. Through creating her own works of literature containing characters and language that represented her own identity and experiences, Adichie has deviated from the traditional conventions of the literature that she grew up recognising into a set of conventions that better fits the messages and ideas that she wants to convey to her reader.

Is Adichie's experience one to which you can relate? Whether you can or cannot will depend entirely on your own identity; for example, the gender that you identify with, the ethnicity that you feel like you belong to, the sexual orientation that you feel represents you, the religion that you believe in and the nation, or nations, that you were born and/or grew up in. It would also depend on how rigidly the curricula that you were taught in school, or the facilitators of your education, adhered to 'classic' or 'canonical' reading lists that tend to be dominated by Western writers who also tend to be white and male. If you grew up, for example, as a female in an economically

and socially deprived area but only ever read and studied works and texts that were set in a more prosperous area, written by and about men who come from wealthy backgrounds, then this may affect the way that you view your own identity, perhaps as something other and inferior. How useful would these works be in constructing and representing your own identity and experiences in the texts and works that you create? The variety of answers that this debate engenders are important and relevant and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.3 of this section, when we ask how valid the notion of a classic work is.

In her TED lecture, Adichie clearly questions the conventions of the works and texts that she was exposed to when she was younger and makes a powerful argument against a 'single story' of one nation and its citizens. If you would like to understand how Adichie used language and structural features effectively to do this then read the commentary analysing her TED lecture in the end of book commentaries. If you would like to read the rest of the transcript of the lecture (which will be useful for understanding the end of book commentary analysing the speech and for the concluding activity) then scan the QR code opposite and click on the 'transcript' tab under the video of the speech.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Once you have read the end of book commentary analysing Adichie's TED lecture use the information in Chapters 1.4 and 1.5 about speeches to see if you can spot anymore language and structural features that Adichie has used in her lecture.

Next, we shall explore how a particular writer has changed, and experimented with the more traditional conventions of poetry, in order to represent his own identity more authentically.

The following poem is called 'Parade's End' by the writer Daljit Nagra (2007). In this poem, Nagra describes a British-Indian family who have moved from the south of England to a part of northern

England called Yorkshire. The family own a shop in an economically deprived area and are the targets of racism and violence.

You have already studied the key features of poetry in Chapter 1.2 and so you should use the notes that you made there to help you understand and analyse this poem. In the table below there are listed two definitions of language features that you will need to know in order to understand the poem.

■ Table 3.2.2

Language Feature	Definition
Colloquial language (or colloquialisms)	Words that are informal and 'everyday', words that you might use when speaking with friends or in another informal environment. For example, 'mates' instead of the more formal 'friends', or 'kids' instead of the more formal 'children'.
Dialectical language (or dialect)	In linguistics, dialect refers to words that belong to a specific geographical region or social group. For example, in Australia people may refer to the 'afternoon' as the 'arvo' or in Scotland some people may refer to a 'baby' as a 'bairn'.

Parade's End

Dad parked our Granada, champagne-gold
by our superstore on Blackstock Road,
my brother's eyes scanning the men
who scraped the pavement frost to the dole,
5 one 'got on his bike' over the hill
or the few who warmed us a thumbs up
for the polished recovery of our re-sprayed car.

Council mums at our meat display
nestled against a pane with white trays
10 swilling kidneys, liver and a sandy block
of corned beef, loud enough about the way
darkies from down south *Come op ta*
Yorksha, mekkin claaims in aut theh can
befoh buggerin off in theh flash caahs!

15 At nine, we left the emptied till open,
clicked the dials of the safe. Bolted
two metal bars across the back door
(with a new lock). Spread trolleys
at ends of darkened aisles. Then we pressed
20 the code for the caged alarm and rushed
the precinct to check it was throbbing red.

Thundering down the graffiti of shutters
against the valley of high rise flats.
Ready for the getaway to our cul-de-sac'd
25 semi-detached, until we stood stock-still:
watching the car-skin pucker, bubbling smarts
of acid. In the unstoppable pub roar
From the John O'Gaut across the forecourt,

30 We returned up to the shop, lifted a shutter,
 queued at the sink, walked down again.
 Three of us, each carrying pans of cold water.
 Then we swept away the bonnet-leaves
 from gold to the brown of our former colour.

(Daljit Nagra)

Daljit Nagra

Daljit Nagra is a British writer who was born in 1966. His parents emigrated from India to Great Britain in the late 1950s. Nagra often writes about the experience of Indians who have emigrated to Britain and the experience of British people who have Indian heritage. He is perhaps best known for his collection of poems, *Look We Have Coming to Dover!*



How many of the words in the poem did you struggle to understand? For example, there is a section of the poem which is written phonetically in the Yorkshire dialect that you may have struggled with:

*Come op ta
 Yorksha, mekkin claaims in aut theh can
 befoh buggerin off in theh flash caahs!*

(Daljit Nagra)

This roughly translates as, 'Come up to Yorkshire, making claims on anything they can before bugging off in their flash cars.' As well as the use of this dialect, there are also some other British colloquial words and terms used such as 'dole' (line 4), 'got on his bike' (line 5). The use of this language is perhaps unusual in more classic and canonical examples of poetry that tend to refrain from using this kind of English. However, as a writer who is from and grew up in this particular area, Nagra has used this language to ensure that the voice of the speakers within his poem sound authentic, while also giving a voice and representation to an alternative perspective on growing up in England that some readers of literature may not have otherwise considered.

The speaker of the poem and his family have had economic success in their migration from India to England, and from the south of England to the north of England. The colour imagery of their car being 'champagne gold' (line 1) and the allusion to the 'cul-de-sac' (a closed-off residential street; line 24) that they live in both connote to the wealth that the speaker's family have, which also contrasts with the poverty of the area that their shop is located in 'valley of high-rise flats' (line 23) and 'scraped the pavement frost to the dole' (line 4). This contrast may be considered unusual as a stereotypical representation of recently arrived migrants to the West usually depict these people as poor, and certainly poorer than their Western-native counterparts, and living a life of struggle and hardship. Again, Nagra has subverted the traditional representation of the newly arrived immigrant experience to give voice to an alternative experience and identity that is accurate for some.

In the final stanza, a violent act is committed towards the family by local people who are clearly resentful of the success of the speaker's family. Their luxury car is set alight (not for the first time) and the speaker describes how he and his family 'stood stock-still: watching the car-skin pucker, bubbling smarts of acid' (lines 25–27). The use of plosives in the verbs 'pucker' and 'bubbling' to describe how the golden paint on their car melted away helps to convey the anger and resentment that the local people feel towards the speaker and his family which is rooted in fear of the unfamiliar, racism and ignorance. Again, Nagra gives voice to something that many people of colour, especially newly arrived migrants, have experienced in their lives. This may not be the type of experience that many classic or canonical poems explore, but it is an experience with which many people can identify and thus has value and importance.

GLOBAL ISSUES

Field of Inquiry: Beliefs, Values and Education

PREJUDICE

Nagra's poem also explores, through the deviation from some of the more classic conventions of poetry and Standard English, how the speaker of the poem and their family have become the targets of violence and racism in the Yorkshire town where the poem is set. This poem could be used to discuss the global issue of prejudice (also within the beliefs, values and education field of inquiry) along with another non-literary text focused on this issue. An example could be this online interview, see QR code alongside, which may contain controversial content, with Milo Yiannopoulos who was a former editor of the far-right *Breitbart News* and who is a political commentator, writer and speaker. Read the key features of interviews box, the activity and the commentary below to see how the writer has deviated from some of the usual conventions of interviews in order to explore the global issue of prejudice within the interview.



KEY FEATURES INTERVIEWS

- Interviews can either take a traditional question and answer format or can be narrative in style where the interviewees responses are embedded within the interviewers narration of the interview. The balance of content between the interviewer and interviewee will usually be evenly split, usually a deliberate decision by the interviewer to keep the interview focused on the topics and themes that they wish to be discussed.
- The formality of an interview will depend upon the subject of the interview, the interviewer and the publication in which the interview appears.
- Even a formal interview will usually include examples of spoken discourse to ensure that the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee and/or the interviewees responses seem natural – this can include features such as elliptical syntax, colloquial language, idioms, humour, contractions and dialectical language. However, taboo language/derogatory language that could offend is often omitted by publishers for reasons pertaining to taste and sensitivity.
- Interviews will usually include direct quotes from the interviewee. One of these quotes will often be used as the title of the article.
- There will usually be a clear introduction and conclusion to the interview.
- The interview will usually be focused on an overarching theme or series of themes to ensure that there is a coherent structure.

ACTIVITY 4

Write down your thoughts in response to these activity questions and consider how the writer has deviated from some of the traditional conventions of interviews in order to explore ideas about **the global issue of prejudice** in the interview. When you are finished, read the commentary under the activity box to see a model response to these questions.

In order to analyse this interview website through the lens of the **global issue of prejudice**, we will use step 1 (**genre, audience and purpose**), step 2 (**structure and style**) and step 6 (**reader response to ideas, message and/or purpose**) of the non-literary text reading strategy as delineated in Chapter 1.1. You may wish to re-read this in order to understand the text and the end of book commentary.

- 1 How is the interview structured in terms of the balance of content between the interviewer and interviewee? What effect does this have?
- 2 Can you spot any features of spoken discourse? Why do you think the writer of the interview has decided to include these, and some of the more taboo/derogatory language and comments used by the interviewee?
- 3 The subject of the interviewee, Milo Yiannopoulos, is a controversial public figure who espouses viewpoints that many in society deem unacceptable. What could be some of the reasons that *The Nation* has decided to give him a platform through this interview?
- 4 What overarching theme/themes can you see in the interview, are these discussed in a logical/coherent format? What linguistic and structural choices are used by the writer to highlight these?
- 5 How is the global issue of prejudice explored differently here when compared to Nagra's poem?

The balance of content between the interviewer and the interviewee (Milo Yiannopoulos) is heavily skewed towards the interviewee. The interviewer has taken the deliberate decision to deviate from conventions and give Yiannopoulos a lot of time to respond to his short prompts/questions to perhaps add authenticity to the interview. This helps to remind readers that Yiannopoulos' interview responses are a true representation of Yiannopoulos' thoughts and beliefs which could be seen as being prejudiced. This perhaps manipulates the reader into viewing Yiannopoulos as a prejudiced person.

The interview is structured in a traditional question and answer format which should help to create a formal tone. The subject of the interview and the topics discussed are of a serious nature which would make a formal tone of the interview appropriate. However, the examples of spoken discourse evident within the interview, for example humour – 'Maybe, but that wouldn't be the top of your list, because you might actually want to see a good movie once in a while', colloquial language – 'This stuff isn't just over there now. It's here, too, and we welcomed it in' and idioms, 'They want to visit the sins of the fathers on the sons' make the interview feel more light hearted in tone which is unusual considering the serious topics that are being discussed. These features may have deliberately been included to signpost to the reader that Yiannopoulos does not take the potential impact of his prejudiced views seriously – instead he views them (and speaks about them) in a light-hearted way.

The Nation may have decided to give Yiannopoulos this platform to speak his beliefs (and, in a deviation from conventions, have included clear examples of taboo/derogatory language/comments) for ideological reasons – they may believe that it is important for the public to know what Yiannopoulos' views are, even if they are prejudiced, so that they can make an informed decision about whether they agree with them or not. It may even have been a deliberate decision made *The Nation* to try to suggest to the reader that Yiannopoulos' views are prejudiced.

The writer signposts to the reader that the interview responses are a true representation of Yiannopoulos' thoughts and beliefs and within the interview Yiannopoulos states opinions that could be considered prejudiced, especially against Muslims and women. It could be the case that *The Nation* wanted to make it clear to the reader through Yiannopoulos' own words that, despite his denials, Yiannopoulos is a prejudiced person.

The overall themes of the interview are focused upon those of culture, politics and societal issues but the order in which they are discussed by Yiannopoulos are not in any cogent or logical structure. Usually, an interviewer would help to steer the interviewee towards certain issues and topics but, in a deviation from conventions, the interviewer largely allows Yiannopoulos to tangentially discuss his ideas as he wishes. This creates the impression that Yiannopoulos is incapable of discussing these issues in an articulate way which helps to perhaps demean him and his prejudiced views in the eyes of the reader.

Yiannopoulos, the subject of the interview, could be seen as someone who espouses prejudiced views, 'single men in their 30s are fine. Single women in their 30s are a mess' and 'Whether that is from mass immigration from backward cultures into rich nations, whether it is, in my case, I care more about Islam. I don't want it here', which is different from the speaker in Nagra's poem who is the victim of prejudiced views.

However, it could be argued that both the poem and the interview are designed to explore prejudice as a negative part of society. Both the poem and the interview deviate from conventions associated with their text type or genre in order to, respectively, explore the effects of prejudice on someone who experiences it on a daily basis and in the interview through the writer's decision to allow Yiannopoulos to shock the reader through giving him the platform to express his prejudiced views unimpeded.

How the use and conventions of the English language have changed over time

In Chapter 1.3 you explored how advancements in technology and its increasing use in our daily lives has affected the English language, leading to the creation of new forms of language such as **textspeak**, **emoticons** and **emojis**. In the next part of this chapter, we will explore how British colonialism, global trade and the passing of time have modified some conventions of the English language, and the way that it is used in some parts of the world.

In the previous part of this chapter you explored how Daljit Nagra used **colloquialisms** and **dialect** in his poetry to convey the characteristics and identity of the area of Yorkshire that the poem was set in. You can separate the way that we describe the usage of the English language into two broad terms – **Standard English** and **non-Standard English**. Standard English refers to the type of formal English that you would use in an academic essay or when writing a letter of application for a job. This type of English is the English that you will have learnt about in school that adheres to rules about spelling, grammar and punctuation. Non-Standard English is any form of English that does not adhere to these rules and includes the usage of **colloquialisms** and **dialectal language**. There are some people who see non-Standard English as 'wrong' and 'incorrect' and who believe that it shouldn't be used in any context. However, there are many writers who come from places where dialectal English is the type of English that they are most familiar with, or who are writing about places where non-Standard English is more likely to be used or about people who are more likely to use it. As a result, many of these writers (like Daljit Nagra) are using this type of non-Standard English in their works and texts to lend authenticity to their writing.

As well as dialectal and colloquial language, there are other examples of non-standard forms of the English language whose conventions have formed through the influence of British colonialism and global trade. In the next part of this chapter we will explore the idea of **linguistic imperialism** and the meaning of the terms **lingua franca**, **Creole** and **pidgin**.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

- From the late-sixteenth century into the twentieth century, Great Britain took possession of a large number of countries around the world which included the modern-day nations of the United States of America, India, Guyana, Jamaica, Fiji, Kenya and many more. The British Empire was the largest in known history and at the peak of its power in 1913 was directly or indirectly ruling 23 per cent of the world's population.
- After the conclusion of the Second World War, Great Britain worked towards a policy of 'decolonization' where many countries achieved or were granted independence. Many see the real end of the British Empire as only taking place in 1997 when Britain handed control of Hong Kong to China. There are many ex-British Empire countries who are independent but have opted to become a part of the 'Commonwealth of Nations' which are united under the monarchy of the United Kingdom.
- The colonial governments of many of the countries that were colonized by Great Britain enforced the compulsory use of the English language in educational institutions, the legal system and other public offices in order to control the native population of those countries. This imposition of one language upon the speakers of another language is called '**linguistic imperialism**'.
- Arguably as a result of this practice, English is the world's most learned second language and is the official, or one of the official, languages of over 60 different countries. It is recognized as a global **lingua franca** meaning that if two people do not speak the same language as each other, they are likely to use English as a way of communicating with one another. For example, in the United Nations where there are native speakers of many different languages, English is often used as the language in which to conduct discussions and negotiations as most delegates will at least know and understand it as a second language.
- Another impact of the British Empire upon the evolution of the English language is the creation of **pidgin** and **Creole** forms of the language in places that were colonized. As global trade took

place between these countries, there was a need for officials, traders and consumers to communicate with one another. A **pidgin** language is a language that is created in this process and is a mixture between two or more languages. Pidgin is a language that is exclusively oral, with no native speakers and which does not adhere to conventions of **orthography** or **grammar**. However, as time passes these pidgin languages can become the first language of descendants of the speakers of the original pidgin language and become a stable language that has conventions regarding **orthography** and **grammar**. These languages are called **Creole** languages.

- English-based Creole variants are now a national language or most-spoken first language of many ex-British Empire colonies. **Jamaican Patois**, **Guyanese Creole** and **Tok Pisin** (from Papua New Guinea) are all examples of this.

Further reading

Like **dialectal** and **colloquial** language, there are some writers who believe that their ideas are best expressed and are more authentic when they write using an English-based pidgin or Creole language. Some of these writers are listed below:

- Amitav Ghosh – we explored an extract from Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace* in Chapter 3.1. He has also written a trilogy of books called *Ibis* which explore the opium trade in the nineteenth century, and includes characters who converse in English-based **pidgin** languages.
- Marlon James – in *A Brief History of Seven Killings* James often uses **Jamaican Patois** in the dialogue between various characters.
- John Agard – a poet, playwright and children's writer who often uses **Guyanese Creole** in his writing, for example, in the poems 'Checkin' Out Me History' and 'Half Caste'.
- Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan – in *Sarong Party Girls* Tan writes entirely in **Singlish** which is a **pidgin** form of English mixed with different languages spoken in Singapore, such as Putonghua, Cantonese, Hokkien, Malay and Tamil.

Like **dialectal** and **colloquial** English, the acceptability in the use of English-based **pidgin** and **Creole** languages is a contentious issue for some people. However, in 2017 BBC News decided to launch a digital platform for readers in West and Central Africa that would be written entirely in pidgin. Pidgin is the name given to an English-based Creole language which is spoken as a first language by an estimated three to five million people and by an estimated 75 million in Nigeria alone. Visit the website via the QR code in the margin. You may want to use the notes that you made in the previous chapter about online news websites to help you analyse and understand this source.



CONCEPT CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSFORMATION

If you are not already a speaker of pidgin, can you understand the text on the homepage? The likely answer to this question is 'yes' as the transformation of Standard English into pidgin is more of a modification than a wholesale rewrite of the language. Many of the keywords within the sentences such as nouns, verbs and adjectives (words such as 'activist', 'escape', 'new', for example) are the same as Standard English and so the key message is still easily communicated even to someone who doesn't speak pidgin fluently or natively. Despite using a different, sometimes elliptical, syntax ('dey beg for war', for example) and phonetic versions of Standard English words ('don', 'di', 'dey') it is easy to see how the language of Nigerian Pidgin has evolved from Standard English through the lingua franca process described in the above information box.

Earlier, we discussed the debate surrounding the responsibility of educators and curricula writers to include works and texts that represent a variety of

readers instead of a small minority. We could extend this debate to ask the question about how much of a responsibility do media outlets have to communicate information in a way that is most accessible to those reading it. The transformation in language that you can see in this text may make some people feel uneasy as they may feel that it compromises the integrity and importance of Standard English too much. They may argue that media outlets using a pidgin language could signpost to readers that they do not need to use Standard English at all, and that it may lead to a deterioration in the quality of English used in the place where this change in medium of communication occurs. Others would see that the transformation is necessary to avoid linguistic imperialism and to ensure that a wide variety of people are able to access important information and news, instead of a small minority.

ACTIVITY 5

Imagine that you come from, or live in, a country where English is spoken as an official language but the majority of the population's first language and most widely spoken language is an English-based Creole language. Think about the reasons why this language should become an official language and why it should be used in official settings. Then think about the arguments against this idea. Spend ten minutes coming up with these ideas – being able to see a singular issue from multiple viewpoints clearly connects to the key concept of perspective. Some ideas for this task are provided below.

■ Table 3.2.3

Reasons for the English-based Creole language becoming an official language	Reasons against the English-based Creole language becoming an official language
As the majority of the population understand the English-based Creole better than Standard English it would be fairer if the Court of Law was conducted in this language as currently people are at a disadvantage if they have to argue their case through an interpreter or in a language that they are unfamiliar with.	Making the English-based Creole an official language would be disastrous for the economy. Businesses would be reluctant to base themselves in a country where institutions important to business like the Court of Law and other public offices were conducted in a language that is understood by very few people globally. It would also be difficult to attract talented workers to come to the country if they knew that their work contracts, their tax returns and other important bureaucratic processes were in a little used language that barely anyone outside of the country can understand.

GLOBAL ISSUES

Field of Inquiry: Culture, Identity and Community

THE ACCEPTABILITY OF NON-STANDARD ENGLISH

Some examples of noted writers who use **colloquial** and **dialectal language** in their writing are listed below:

- Ken Loach – a film director from the UK, often uses regional dialects in his films. For example, his film *Sweet Sixteen* is written entirely in Scottish dialect, particularly that belonging to Glasgow and the surrounding areas.
- Willy Russell – playwright who wrote *Educating Rita*, *Blood Brothers* and *Our Day Out* includes many characters who speak using a dialect native to the city of Liverpool in north-west England called 'Scouse'.
- Simon Armitage – poet who wrote a collection of poems called *The Not Dead* based on testimonies from ex-soldiers. Many of these poems include examples of colloquial and dialectal language from various regions of the United Kingdom.
- Anna Burns – author of *Milkman*, which is written entirely in Northern Irish dialect.
- Donald Glover – a musician, actor and writer from the USA, created the critically and commercially successful television sitcom *Atlanta* whose characters often speak in African-American Vernacular English (also known as AAVE).



The acceptability of **non-Standard English** is a contentious issue in many countries around the world. You could use an extract from one of the literary works listed above and use a non-literary text (perhaps from a writer who writes a series of texts about the confluence of language and culture), such as 'Why did Singapore writers festival bar a Singlish novel on girls looking for white western husbands?', (Muhammad Cohen, SCMP) that is focused on this topic, to explore the global issue of the acceptability of non-Standard English. You can access this article and two others by Cohen through these QR codes alongside. This series of articles by Muhammad Cohen can constitute a body of work.



Now that you have finished this chapter, let's review the key ideas in it and practise the several skills that it introduced. You may want to look back at the key features of gothic fiction box in the previous chapter (page 385) before reading the next extract.

The next text is an extract from *My Sister, The Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite (2017). The novel tells the story of a woman whose sister continually murders her boyfriends and always enlists her sister's assistance when trying to cover up these murders.

Femi's family sent a cleaner to this home, to ready it to be put on the market – to move on, I guess. But the cleaner discovered a bloody napkin down the back of the sofa. It's all there on Snapchat, for the world to see that whatever happened to Femi, it did not happen of his own volition. The family is asking again for

5 answers.

Ayoola tells me she may have sat there. She may have put the napkin on the seat to keep from staining the sofa. She may have forgotten about it ...

10 'It's fine, if they ask me I'll just tell them he had a nosebleed.' She is sitting in front of her dressing table tending to her dreadlocks and I am standing behind her, clenching and unclenching my fists.

'Ayoola, if you go to jail—'

'Only the guilty go to jail.'

'First of all, that's not true. Second of all, you *killed* a man.'

15 '*Defending* myself; the judge will understand that, right?' She pats her cheeks with blusher. Ayoola lives in a world where things must always go her way. It's a law as certain as the law of gravity.

I leave her to her makeup and sit at the top of the staircase, my forehead resting on the wall. My head feels as though there is a storm brewing inside it. The wall should be cool, but it is a hot day, so there is no comfort to be had there.

20 When I'm anxious, I confide in Muhtar – but he is in the hospital, and there is no one to share my fears with here. I imagine for the millionth time how it would go if I were to tell my mother the truth:

'Ma ...'

'Hmmm.'

25 '*I want to talk to you about Ayoola.*'

'*Are you people fighting again?*'

'No, ma. I ... there was an incident with erm Femi.'

'*The boy who is missing?*'

'Well, he isn't missing. He is dead.'

30 '*Hey!!! Jésù Ẹàánú fún wa o!*'

'Yes ... erm ... but you see ... Ayoola was the one who killed him.'

'What is wrong with you? Why are you blaming your sister?'

'She called me. I saw him ... I saw his body, I saw the blood.'

'Shut up! Does this look like something you should be joking about?'

35 '*Mum ... I just ...*'

'*I said shut up. Ayoola is a beautiful child with a wonderful temperament ... Is that it? Is it jealousy that is making you say these horrible things?*'

(Oyinkan Braithwaite)

ACTIVITY 6

- 1 It has been suggested that this work could be categorized as a modern example of the gothic fiction genre (see Chapter 3.1, page 385). In what ways does the work modify the conventions associated with these genre classifications? Why do you think the writer has done this and how does it link to changes that have occurred in society since the first gothic fiction works were published?
- 2 In what ways does the work question stereotypical depictions of life in Nigeria?
- 3 Are there any uses of non-Standard English in the work? If so, how and why is it used?

When you have finished, compare your responses with those at the back of the book.

Oyinkan Braithwaite

Oyinkan Braithwaite is a Nigerian author who was born in 1988 – she grew up living between Nigeria and the UK. Her story *The Driver* was nominated for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize in 2016. If you would like to read more about Braithwaite then use the QR code to read this interview with her from *The Guardian*.



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