

OpenLearn Free Course:

Introducing the psychology of our relationships with fictional villains

Zoë Walkington, Graham Pike, Ian Rankin, Val McDermid:

ZOË: Who is your favourite fictional villain? And have you ever wondered what the psychological impacts might be of hanging out with villains in the books you read? This Free OpenLearn course invites you to explore the psychology of your relationships with the fictional villains you love.

GRAHAM: You will hear from crime writers such as Ian Rankin and Val McDermid about how they create characters in their best selling books:

IAN RANKIN: My hero, John Rebus, lives in the street I lived in when I was an impoverished student and started writing these books. But when I got successful, I started to move into the circles, the social circles that Cafferty, the successful businessman / gangster, moves in. So I had a big Victorian house and a lovely tree lined street. And that's where he lived. And then he moved to a penthouse apartment in a new development in central Edinburgh. And blow me down a couple of years later. I moved there as well. Now, I could say to you that wasn't my choice. That was my wife's idea for us to downsize and move to this area of town.

But maybe subconsciously, I've been following the bad guy around Edinburgh rather than following the good guy around Edinburgh. So, potentially, if a psychoanalyst got me on the couch, they would find there's a lot more of the evil character, the bad character, the nasty character in me, than there is the goodie.

GRAHAM: You will also hear about how they make their Villains relatable to their readers

VAL MCDERMID: When I'm writing a character, I want it to make sense to the reader so it feels authentic to them when they're reading it. It feels believable to them. So, in that sense, I have to-- if not quite, have my readers identify with the character to find what they do comprehensible and believable.

ZOË: Throughout the course you will hear from both crime writers and psychologists, who will explore how we relate to the characters we read about in books. You will learn about the relationships you form with fictional characters, alongside the ways in which reading about villains may actually change you as a person.

GRAHAM: The course is packed full of fascinating content, and for any budding writers you will also take part in writing exercises where you can reach into the depths of your imagination to create your own villainous characters. And the course will also help you better understand the relationship your readers will have with those villains as they jump off the page and into the readers lives.