Hello!

I hope you are having a lovely summer. I’m writing as your tutor for Literature in English, 1830-1910 to pass on the reading list for this paper and for Early Medieval Literature, 650-1350, which you will be studying with my colleague Amy Faulkner.

Because the reading requirements for 1830-1910 are so heavy, I’ve attached the full schedule for Michaelmas term, along with the topics you will be asked to write on each week so that you know how to focus your reading of what are often very long texts. Where a week says ‘tutorial’, you write a full 1500-word essay; where a week says ‘class’, you write a short presentation for oral delivery.

Please try to complete as much of this reading as you can before you arrive in Oxford. Because the terms here are short and concentrated (we have only eight weeks on the Victorians before we move on to modern literature), we expect students to do much of the coming term’s reading over the preceding vacation. As you begin your reading, remember you need to take notes as you go on everything you read. Approach each text as though this were your only chance to read it all the way through (which might well be the case with long Victorian novels). Some students find that it helps to keep a reading journal in which you can document your ideas on each text, picking out anything that strikes you as especially interesting or significant, and noting down connections across these texts, and links to other works from this period that you have read in other contexts.

Because of its age, all the material on the reading list is out of copyright, so you’ll probably be able to find it free online – just be aware that what you are paying for when you buy a good edition of an out-of-copyright text is the editorial apparatus. Free/cheap editions don’t have, for example, an introduction and no endnotes explaining difficult references and allusions. At the other end of the spectrum, Norton Critical Editions have extensive notes, along with excerpts from critics, and so on; they’re more expensive than Penguin Classics and Oxford World’s Classics (which are also good), but you can usually find second-hand copies if you look around a bit.

If you have any questions, please do feel free to get in touch at marina.mackay@ell.ox.ac.uk. Meanwhile, enjoy what’s left of the summer – and happy reading. I’ll look forward to seeing you all again in October!

All very best wishes for now,

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1830-1910
(Michaelmas 2016)

The asterisked novels are long! Please make reading these a priority this summer if you know that you will not have time to work systematically through the list before the start of term.

Week 1: The Condition of England (tutorial)

Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South *
Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy

Essay questions:

• Is it fair to say that Victorian literature is a conduit of primarily middle class values?
• What do Victorian writers propose as the purpose or value of ‘culture’ (the Classics, the arts, and so on)?

Week 2: Poetry and Mind (class)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Maud
Robert Browning, Selected Poems (Penguin Classics)
Gerard Manley Hopkins, Selected Poetry (Oxford World’s Classics)

Class questions:

• Describe any unexpected or particularly significant uses of poetic form to represent mental processes.
• How far is religion a source of anxiety rather than consolation for Victorian poets?
• Is there anything significant about the relationships between body and mind in these poems?
• ‘I sometimes hold it half a sin/ To put in words the grief I feel: / For words, like Nature, half reveal / and half conceal the Soul within’ (Tennyson). Discuss any aspect of this quotation in relation to any of the works above.

Week 3: Mystery and Sensation (tutorial)

Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White *
Anthony Trollope, The Eustace Diamonds *

Essay questions:

• ‘When a woman is bumped off, her husband is always the first suspect – which gives you a little side-glimpse of what people really think about marriage’ (George Orwell). Is there anything significant or surprising about the presentation of marriage in Victorian sensation and mystery novels?
• ‘Inobtrusively supplying the place of the police in places where the police cannot be, the mechanisms of discipline seem to entail a relative relaxation of policing power. No doubt this manner of passing off the regulation of everyday life is the best manner of passing it on’ (D.A. Miller). How far is the Victorian novel interested in (or complicit in, as Miller argues) ‘the regulation of everyday life’?
Week 4: The Brontës (class)

Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*
Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* *
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

Class questions:

- Describe what in your view is the **single** most significant difference among the Brontës’ novels: you may choose to focus on their narrative/formal choices, or their treatment of a particular theme.
- Is there anything distinctive about the work done by visual description in the fiction of the Brontës?
- ‘Space is not the “outside” of narrative . . . but an internal force that shapes it from within’; ‘what happens depends a lot on where it happens’. Discuss any important aspect of space/place in the fiction of the Brontës.

Week 5: The Realist Novel: American and British (tutorial)

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* *
Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* *

Essay questions:

- ‘But why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?’ Discuss the significance of perspective in the realist novel and/or how and to what effect realist novels foreground the limits of their famous ‘omniscience’.
- Realist fiction is often extremely populous. Make a case for any important function served by ‘minor characters’ in the realist novel.

Week 6: Beyond Realism: American and British (class)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*
Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* *

Class questions:

- ‘Many authors lay very great stress upon some definite moral purpose, at which they profess to aim their works. Not to be deficient in this particular, the Author has provided himself with a moral – the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones’ (Nathaniel Hawthorne). How does that ‘moral’ find expression in Dickens’ and Hawthorne’s narrative styles or techniques?
- ‘The world is everywhere heavy with the debris of history . . . the great inescapable weight of history’ (J Hillis Miller on *Our Mutual Friend*). Discuss the significance of ‘debris’ and/or ‘the weight of history’ in Hawthorne and Dickens.
- *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Our Mutual Friend* keep returning to ideas of repetition, reproduction, and recycling. Why do Dickens and Hawthorne find images of doubling so useful?
Week 7: Subversion and the Stage (tutorial)

George Bernard Shaw, Arms and the Man
Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest
J. M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World

Tutorial questions:

• One way or another, all these male-authored plays include women’s erotic or romantic fantasies about men. What might that be significant?
• How far does their shared Irish background help us to account for the satirical subversiveness of these turn-of-the-century dramatists?
• Describe how knowing the context of their original staging can help us to understand these plays better.

Week 8: Late Imperial Adventure (class)

Robert Louis Stevenson, Kidnapped
Rudyard Kipling, Kim
Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim

Class questions:

• ‘Once a Sahib, always a Sahib’, says a character in Kim. What’s the relationship between cultural ‘purity’ and cultural hybridity in the turn-of-the-century adventure novel?
• ‘The [turn-of-the-century adventure story] was presented as restoring the manhood of British fiction’ (Nicholas Daly). Can we see these novels as propaganda or training manuals for normative models of imperial masculinity?
• These three novels run a kind of spectrum from the popular children’s book (Kidnapped) to the early modernist classic (Lord Jim). How far would you want to complicate or retain the implied distinctions here, for example: ‘easy’ versus ‘difficult’; ‘formally traditional’ versus ‘formally experimental’; ‘nostalgic’ versus ‘unsettling’?
Early Medieval Literature, c. 650 - 1350

This paper offers an introduction to the literature of the early medieval period, with the option to cover both Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest material. The literature of the Anglo-Saxons is written in Old English, and learning to read this language is an important part of this paper. After the conquest of 1066, this language changes through contact with the invading Normans, becoming what we call Early Middle English.

In the first term, we will be focusing on Old English, both studying the language and discussing the literature of the period. Anglo-Saxon literature encompasses a wide range of genres, ranging from the epic to the elegy, the riddle to the dream vision. The Old English set texts for this paper are *The Wanderer*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Battle of Maldon* and the fight with Grendel in *Beowulf*.

All of these set texts can be found in:


It is important that you get a copy of this edition, as this is the book that we will be working from in classes. Though there is a section on learning Old English in this book, it is not the easiest to use. Therefore, we will be learning Old English grammar from:

- *Introduction to Old English*, 3rd edition, Peter S. Baker (Chichester, 2012)

This also contains a number of short passages which are excellent for practising your Old English.

Before arriving in Oxford you should have a look at both of these books, as well as reading some Old English texts in translation. One useful edition that includes all of our set texts - except the *Beowulf* extract - in Old English with a facing page modern English translation is:


For translations of *Beowulf* you might like to read either (or both) of:

- *Beowulf*, Seamus Heaney (London, 2007) - which is in verse
- *Beowulf*, Michael Swanton (Manchester, 1997) - a prose translation

Some other very helpful collections of translated Old English texts include:


For more about the Anglo-Saxons and their literature, see:

There’s also lots more information about this paper available on the English Faculty website, which you can access by following this link: http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/node/544.html

Do not hesitate to get in touch with any questions you may have about the suggested reading or the course itself. I very much look forward to meeting you in October.

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