16 August 2019

Hello!

I hope you are having a lovely summer—with a little time to celebrate your great results! It may not be much time, since I’m writing as your tutor for Literature in English, 1830-1910, to pass on the reading list for this paper. At the end of the document you will find the preliminary reading list for Early Medieval Literature, 650-1350, which you will also be studying this coming term, with my colleague Dr Francis Leneghan. There is also another first-year paper that runs across the year (Prelims Paper 1: ‘Introduction to English Language and Literature’), but it is a bit different from the period papers in ways that mean, happily, that it doesn’t require reading upfront.

However, because the reading load for 1830-1910 is so heavy (all those huge Victorian novels!), I’ve attached the full schedule for the coming term, along with the topics that you will be asked to write on each week so that you can focus your reading of what are often really substantial books. Where a week says ‘tutorial’, you write a 1500-word essay; ‘class’ means you’ll be asked to sketch out a short oral response to one of the class questions.

Please try to complete as much of this reading as you can before you arrive in Oxford. The terms here are so intense—we have only these eight weeks on the Victorians/Edwardians before we move on to literature after 1910 in Hilary (spring) Term—that we expect students to do much of the coming term’s reading over the vacation. Remember that 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 novels). Document your ideas on each text, picking out anything that strikes you as especially interesting, and noting down links across these texts and with other works from this period that you have read in other contexts. What’s below is divided into ‘required reading’ and ‘supplementary reading’: obviously you need to read all of what’s in the first section (marked ‘required reading’); the other texts represent a few approachable places to start your essay research once you have library access.

The primary material on the reading list is out of copyright, so you’ll be able to find it free online—just be aware that what you are paying for when you buy a good edition is such editorial apparatus as an introduction and explanatory endnotes. (The one exception is with short odds and ends like essays, where it makes more sense to read them online rather than buy whole collections.) Norton Critical Editions have extensive notes, along with useful excerpts from critics; they’re more expensive than Oxford World’s Classics or Penguin Classics (which are also excellent), but you can usually find second-hand copies.

If you have any questions, get in touch at marina.mackay@spc.ox.ac.uk.
Meanwhile, enjoy what’s left of the summer—and good luck with your reading. I’ll look forward to seeing you again in October!

With very best wishes

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1830-1910
(Michaelmas Term 2019)

The asterisked novels are very long! Please make reading these a priority this summer. And—again—take good notes on everything you read!

**Week 1: Culture and Crisis (tutorial)**

*Required reading:*

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*
Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* *
John Ruskin, ‘The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century’.
(You can find it here: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20204/20204-h/20204-h.htm)

*Supplementary reading:*


*Essay questions:*

- On the basis of their literature, it seems as though many Victorians believed that they were living through a period of unprecedented crisis. Where was that sense of crisis coming from, and how do they suppose it might be mitigated?
- How do Victorian writers address relationships between human beings and their natural and/or built environment?

**Week 2: Poetry and Selfhood (class)**

*Required reading:*

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Maud*

*Supplementary reading:*


Class questions:

- Describe any significant or surprising uses of poetic form to represent mental processes, or the relationship between body and mind.
- When Victorian poets write about religious belief, what else are they writing about?

**Week 3: Crimes and Sensations (tutorial)**

**Required reading:**

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

**Supplementary reading:**

Pamela K Gilbert, *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). (One to browse for the chapters on e.g.: *The Woman in White*; science, religion, race, class, medicine, disability, empire, the law, detection, etc.)
Andrew Mangham, *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). (Another to browse according to the angle that you’re taking on Collins.)

**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 important or surprising about the presentation of marriage in these 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). Discuss the representation in these novels of formal/official legal procedures and/or what Miller calls ‘the regulation of everyday life’?

**Week 4: The Brontës (class)**

**Required reading:**

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

Patricia Ingham, *The Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). (Chapters 7 and 8 are on *Villette*.)

Class questions:

- What, in your view, is the single most significant difference or most useful point of comparison among the Brontës’ novels? You may choose to focus on their narrative/formal devices, or on their treatment of a particular theme.
- Is there anything distinctive about the work done by visual description and/or the treatment of the visual arts in the Brontës’ novels?

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

**Required reading:**

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* *

**Supplementary reading:**


**Essay questions:**

- ‘But why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?’ Discuss the significance of narrative perspective in the realist novel.
- ‘We’re each of made up of some cluster of appurtenances’, Madame Merle tells Isabel Archer: ‘What shall we call our ‘self’? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again . . . I’ve a great respect for *things*.’ Make an argument for the significance of material ‘things’ in Eliot and James.
Week 6: Beyond Realism: American and British (class)

Required reading:

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

Supplementary reading:

David Paroissian, *A Companion to Charles Dickens* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008). (One to browse: chapters on biography, literary contexts, and Dickens in relation to topics such as contemporary law, gender, family, government, Christianity, etc.)

Class questions:

- ‘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)

Required reading:

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

Supplementary reading:

Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). (Chapters 2, 3, and 10 are on Wilde, Shaw, and Synge respectively.)
Shaun Richards, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. (Chapters 6, 8, and 9 are on Synge, Shaw, and Wilde respectively.)
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 would it be fair—or feel free to argue that it would be unhelpfully reductive—to suggest a connection between these playwrights’ shared (Anglo-)Irish background and the estranged and satirical qualities of their work?

Week 8: Imperial Adventures (class)

Required reading:

Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*

Supplementary reading:


Class questions:

- ‘Once a Sahib, always a Sahib’, pronounces 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). How far should see these novels as training manuals or propaganda for normative models of imperial masculinity?
Prelims Paper 2: Early Medieval English Literature (650-1350)

This paper will be taught across all three terms. The aim of the paper is to introduce you to earliest English literature, composed in the period stretching from the conversion of the migrant Anglo-Saxons in the sixth and seventh centuries through to the High Middle Ages. We call the language of the Anglo-Saxons ‘Old English’; after 1066, English came into contact with Anglo-Norman, producing the phase in the language that we call ‘Early Middle English’. Old English literature provides us with a very wide range of genres including epic, dream vision, riddle, chronicle, battle poem, lament and saints’ life, while the Early Middle English period sees the flourishing of beast fable, lyric and romance.

We will focus mainly on the Old English period (650-c. 1100), though we will also look at some Early Middle English texts. The set texts we will translate are The Wanderer, The Dream of the Rood, The Battle of Maldon and an extract from Beowulf (the fight with Grendel). All are included in this edition, which you must get hold of:


You will probably find the section on Old English language challenging. A more user-friendly book on the same topic which you should also get a copy of is this:


Before you come to Oxford for Michaelmas Term you should read a selection of Old English texts in translation. In particular, read a translation of Beowulf. For a good verse translation, try this:


You might also wish to compare the (very different) verse translations by Seamus Heaney or Michael Alexander.

A very useful book, which prints a both Old and Early Middle English texts with facing-page, prose translation:

- Elaine Treharne, Old and Middle English c.890-c.1400: An Anthology, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2009)

Further recommendations include:


- A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse, transl. Robert Hamer (Faber, 2006) (facing page verse translations of major short poems; very cheap on amazon)

- Anglo-Saxon Prose, ed. and transl. Michael Swanton (Everyman, 1993)

In order to get a sense of who the Anglo-Saxons were and what Old English literature is like, have a look at some of these books:


More detailed information about the course, including a sample exam paper, reading lists and other useful resources, can be found by clicking this link on the English Faculty’s webpage: https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/site/humdiv:engfac:prelims-2

If you have any questions about the course, please do not hesitate to get in touch (my email address is below). I look forward to meeting you in October.

Dr Francis Leneghan

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