Six quick things:

(1) Some Victorian novels are very long, so you might need to read them out of the order below to prioritise those too long to manage in term-time (the longest works are asterisked);

(2) You may be reading all but the shortest works only once, so take very good notes as you go on everything that strikes you as interesting or worth following up;

(3) The prompts for tutorial essays and class presentations are included here, to help you organise your thoughts about these books as you read;

(4) The suggested secondary reading is predominantly online resources that you can access as soon as you have a Bodleian card (I hope Oxford’s full resources will be available by October, but at least here’s somewhere to start!). Bear in mind that the list is heavy on fairly introductory Cambridge-Companion-type chapters and that you’ll want to go beyond these;

(5) So long as a work fits into the specified period and was originally written in English, you are welcome to use it in Oxford assignments, including formal examinations, this summer would be a good time to think back to other works you know from the 1830-1910 period so you can use that prior knowledge to enrich your reading of the works below—add these to your notes now;

(6) On editions: only once is a particular edition named—because editions of Mayhew’s London Labour differ so much that it’s almost like reading a different book every time! Otherwise, it doesn’t matter which you use. Penguin Classics, Oxford World’s Classics, and (a bit pricier) Norton Critical Editions all have good explanatory notes; those notes and scholarly apparatus are what you’re paying for when you buy the book rather than reading it free online. Short essays, though, do just look up online, even if you have to consult a library version later in order to cite them properly.

**Week 1: The Scope of Victorian Literature (tutorial)**

**Required reading:**


**Suggested secondary reading:**

[N.B.: you needn’t read this all the way through, but consult the chapters most relevant to your topic, and make a note of those that will be useful for later topics.]

**Prompt:**

Please write an essay on the representation in *Middlemarch* of one of the following characteristically nineteenth-century concerns, demonstrating as you do so how Eliot’s formal/narrative choices advance and/or complicate her treatment of that topic: (1) vocation and/or education; (2) community and/or place; (3) class and/or class conflict; (4) duty and responsibility; (5) public life and/or institutions; (6) money and/or property; (7) domestic life and/or marriage; (8) religious belief and/or doubt; (9) inheritance and/or the past; (10) conformity and/or dissent. If you like, you could pick two of these topics and build your argument around how they intersect (just be careful not to take on too much!).
Week 2: Poetry and Selfhood (class)

Required reading:

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Maud*


Suggested secondary reading:


Prompts:

Describe any significant or surprising uses of poetic form to represent mental processes or the development of a particular emotion.

What do you make of the fact that these poems about extreme and usually pathological mental states—delusion and denial, for example, or self-loathing and grief—are so preoccupied by images of and ideas about the material body?

Week 3: The Subjection of Women (tutorial)

Required reading:

Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (any edition)*


John Stuart Mill, chapter 2 (on marriage) of *The Subjection of Women* (you can read the chapter online at: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27083/27083-h/27083-h.htm)

Suggested secondary reading:


Prompts:

What do you think Brontë’s and Collins’s novels gain and/or lose by using melodrama and sensationalism rather than more realist modes to address the abject civic and legal status of early-to-mid-nineteenth-century women?

Both novels deploy male narrators/editors to frame the writings of the women characters. From one angle, you could see this technique as an effort to reinstate masculine authority on stories about women’s experiences; from another, you could argue that it encourages us instead to doubt the authority of the narrators. Which perspective is more convincing, and why?

Week 4: Culture and Industry (class)

Required reading:

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (any edition)*
Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (any edition)*

Suggested secondary reading:


Prompts:

One familiar idea in secularisation narratives about the nineteenth century is that ‘culture’ starts to replace religion as a quasi-spiritualising force. How would you describe the treatment of Christianity and/or its relationship to culture in Arnold and Gaskell? Feel free to take ‘culture’ in this question to mean ‘high culture’ (as in the secularisation idea) or as ‘a whole way of life’ (as critic Raymond Williams defined it).

On the basis of their literature, it often feels as though many Victorians believed that they were living through a period of unprecedented crisis. What do their works suggest was generating that sense of crisis, and how do they imagine it might be mitigated?

Week 5: The Making of Americans (tutorial)

Required reading:

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (any edition)
Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16643/16643-h/16643-h.htm#SELF-RELIANCE)

Suggested secondary reading:

Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1978), 3-30. [Note publication date—American Studies avoids this sort of ‘exceptionalism’ now—but a useful account of the Puritan mental atmosphere Hawthorne was trying to recreate.]

Prompts:

‘Liberty must either cut the throat of Slavery or have its own throat cut by Slavery’ (Frederick Douglass). Or, as Douglass asked in a famous speech, ‘What to the slave is the fourth of July?’ How do Douglass’s and Hawthorne’s works address the political contradictions of American ‘liberty’?

Kenneth Warren (see secondary reading above) situates Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* in a wider context of individualism in American literature. Are there any useful comparisons to be made on those or similar grounds between Douglass’s memoir and Hawthorne’s almost-contemporary novel?

**Week 6: Urban Poverty and Wealth (class)**

**Required reading:**

*Charles Dickens*, *Our Mutual Friend* (any edition)

**Suggested secondary reading:**


**Prompts:**

How far are Dickens’s and Mayhew’s perspectives on social class and/or poverty shared by the other nineteenth-century British writers you have read?

Mayhew was a journalist and—of course—Dickens was a novelist, but what can be described as literary about Mayhew’s work and, conversely, what is journalistic or documentary about that of Dickens?

**Week 7: Drama and Other Social Performances (tutorial)**

**Required reading:**

*George Bernard Shaw*, *Arms and the Man* (any edition)
*John Millington Synge*, *The Playboy of the Western World* (any edition)
*Oscar Wilde*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (any edition)
Suggested secondary reading:

Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 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 UP, 2006. (Chapters 6, 8, and 9 are on Synge, Shaw, and Wilde respectively.)

Prompts:

Why might it be significant that these male-authored plays are all concerned with women’s fantasies about men and men’s fictions about themselves?

These plays are all the work of Irish authors, although only Synge’s is set in Ireland. Would it be clarifying or reductive—or something between these extremes—to see their otherwise comic concerns with identity and/or artifice in relation to their late-colonial context?

Week 8: Late-Imperial Identities (class)

Required reading:

**Joseph Conrad**, *Lord Jim* (any edition)*

**Rudyard Kipling**, *Kim* (any edition)

**Cornelia Sorabji**, ‘Love and Death’ and ‘The Pestilence at Noonday’ (you can find these here: https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sorabji/purdah/purdah.html#death)

Suggested secondary reading:


Prompts:

‘Once a Sahib, always a Sahib’, a character pronounces in *Kim*. How does turn-of-the-century literature on empire treat cultural ‘purity’ and/or hybridity?

‘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, writing in *The Novel and the Police* about the omniscient narrator of the Victorian novel). How would you describe the relationship between official and unofficial surveillance in these texts?
This paper will be taught across all three terms. The aim of the paper is to introduce you to the earliest English literature, from the alliterative poetry of the Anglo-Saxons to the emergence of new genres such as romance, beast fable and lyric after the Norman Conquest. We call the language of the Anglo-Saxons ‘Old English’; after 1066 this comes into contact with ‘Anglo-Norman’, producing the phase in the language that we call ‘Early Middle English’. As we move through the first ‘half’ of English literary history, we will encounter epics and romances, dream visions and hymns, riddles and charms, chronicles and battle poems, laments and lyrics.

In Michaelmas and Hilary terms, we will focus mainly on the Old English period (650-c. 1100). Then, in Trinity Term we will 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 of these texts are included in this edition, which you must get hold of before Michaelmas:


You will probably find the section on Old English language challenging. A more user-friendly book on the same topic is:


Before you come to Oxford for Michaelmas Term you should read a selection of Old English texts in translation. In particular, you MUST read a translation of *Beowulf* before you get to Oxford, as this is the best introduction to the themes and styles of Old English verse. For a good verse translation, try this:


You could also read the excellent, by very different, verse translations by Seamus Heaney, Michael Alexander and Richard Hamer.

Please also buy a copy of this book, which provides Old and Early Middle English texts with facing-page, prose translation:


Further recommendations include:
• *Old English Shorter Poems II: Wisdom and Lyric*, trans. Robert Bjork (Harvard, 2014) [part of the very useful Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library series, with facing-page Old English and modern English translation]

• *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.

I look forward to meeting you all in October!

Rachel Burns
rachel.burns@ell.ox.ac.uk