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August 2023

Dear Student

I'm writing to say how much we are looking forward to welcoming you to the college, and to explain how the course works in your first year. You may still be waiting for exam results to know if your place on the course is confirmed, but I am writing now to allow you more time to make a start on some reading over the summer.

As Director of Studies for English I will be coordinating your day-to-day academic activities once you arrive, together with my colleagues in English. The tutors who will work directly with you during your first term are Ms Alice Huxley, who teaches Victorian and modern literature, and Approaches to Literature, and myself; I teach medieval literature and the English language. Later in the year you will also be taught by Professor Kirsten Shepherd-Barr for the Victorian and Modern papers alongside Ms Huxley. The College Office will be in touch with you about more practical things such as accommodation and term dates. However, if you have any concerns about work or personal matters then please feel free to contact me about those: email [admissions@stcatz.ox.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@stcatz.ox.ac.uk) and your queries will be forwarded to me. If you want to know more, the college website ([www.stcatz.ox.ac.uk](http://www.stcatz.ox.ac.uk)) is also a good source of information about St Catherine's and about English specifically. You can also find out more about the English course and explore the diversity of our work at the Faculty of English's website ([www.english.ox.ac.uk](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk)).


The main paper that you will study on first arriving at Oxford will be on literature in English between 1830 and 1910. We are enclosing Ms Huxley's reading list for this paper, which sets out the required reading: it is fairly substantial, so I do recommend that you make a start as soon as you can.

You will also begin work on two other papers in your first term. As these are taught all through the year, there is not as much reading you need to have under your belt before the course starts. One is Introduction to Language and Literature, and in the first term you will be studying Approaches to Literature. There will be a series of university lectures, and classes in college, which will acquaint you with a wide range of theoretical issues and reading skills, and encourage you to think for yourself and to exercise critical scrutiny. To help you get a sense of the topics and approaches of this course, we recommend that you read Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction, Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

There is also a paper on early medieval literature. This includes looking at older English texts in their original language, from the very earliest ones in the seventh century CE. There will be classes and lectures to help you with this, but you will benefit from some reading over the summer to get a preliminary feel for the language, and you might also enjoy starting to explore the literature in translation, and learning about the historical context. You'll find a short introductory reading list for this paper enclosed.

I hope you're looking forward to arriving in Oxford. All being well, we will see you in October; meanwhile, have an excellent summer.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy Dimmick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'D'.

Dr Jeremy Dimmick  
Fellow by Special Election and Lecturer in English

## Early Medieval Literature (c. 650–1350)

### Introduction and suggestions for summer reading

One of the unique features of the Oxford English course is the opportunity it gives us to explore literature in English from the very beginnings, in the original language. We get to investigate the rich imaginative worlds of people who lived in parts of Britain over a millennium ago, when the English language—far from being a dominant international one—was only one among several spoken and written in Britain and had no fixed, standard form. And we can think, too, about connections and discontinuities with more recent literature, and how the world of the Middle Ages can speak to the questions and priorities of today's readers.

Before I start recommending books to read, I'd like to point you towards the British Library's website. In 2019 they held a fabulous exhibition called 'Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', and created a set of web pages to go along with it, which you can explore here: <https://www.bl.uk/anglo-saxons>

Old English – most famously the language of the epic poem *Beowulf* – will probably be completely new to you, and we will offer plenty of teaching to help you get used to it, but you will really benefit from doing some reading and private study ahead of time, just to start to get a feel for the language, literature and historical context. This will also help you with your study of the English Language and later medieval English literature as the course goes on. ('Old English' is used to refer to varieties of English up to about the year 1100, 'Middle English' roughly 1100 – 1500.)

A lovely place to start is a recent book by **Hana Videen**, *The Wordhord: Daily Life in Old English* (London: Profile, 2021) – the paperback isn't out yet but there's a hardback and a cheaper Kindle edition. Not a vocabulary of OE (though you'll plenty from it), it works like a book of little essays on different aspects of society, history and culture keyed into particular words. Videen also has a Twitter feed with an 'Old English word of the day', @OEWordhord.

After that, I hope you'll be ready for a more systematic introduction to what English was like at the time. The best I know of is **Carol Hough and John Corbett's *Beginning Old English*** (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; 2nd edition, 2013). This is admittedly a little pricey; the cheapest way to get it will probably be a Kindle eBook (currently about £23), but you might be able to find a second-hand copy online for a little less. The book is designed to be approachable for people with little or no experience with languages, but don't worry if you find it hard to start with. If you can read up to chapter 5 of Part I by the start of term you will be doing well.

Towards the end of the first term you'll be starting to write critical essays about early English texts as well as getting reading practice in the language. There will be time to read more around the subject during term, but if you have the leisure and want to get a feel for some Old English texts in modern translation, **Kevin Crossley-Holland's *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology*** (Oxford University Press, 2009) is fascinating to browse. It includes a very good complete translation of *Beowulf* as well as several other texts we'll study together in the original language.

Dr Jeremy Dimmick, St Catherine's College

### **Prelims Paper 3: Literature in English 1830–1910**

**Alice Huxley**

Please find below the reading list for Prelims Paper 3, which you will take over your first term (Michaelmas Term). It is vital that you complete a substantial amount of reading before coming to Oxford as many of the texts are too long to read during term time. Over the summer, I recommend that you prioritise reading the longest novels on the list, then read as many of the shorter texts as possible. I have asterisked texts over 200 pages and double asterisked texts over 500 pages.

You should be able to buy most of these books cheaply on AbeBooks or in charity book shops. If possible, try to purchase reliable editions, such as those published under the following imprints: Oxford World's Classics, Norton Critical Editions, and Penguin Classics. It is helpful to have your own hard copies of primary texts so that you can annotate them. Alternatively, you can read most of the set texts online for free on Project Gutenberg or Internet Archive (Internet Archive often has scanned copies of reliable editions). Whether you read hard or digital copies, make notes and record key quotations as you go.

While the below texts are arranged in chronological order, the course is mostly organised by theme or genre. At the start of term, I will provide a more detailed schedule, specifying which texts we will study under which theme.

Please note that we will also have classes on poetry as part of Prelims Paper 3. I will distribute the reading for these classes a week in advance, so it is not listed below.

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)\*

Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (1852)

Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (1855)

Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1859–60)\*\* AND/OR Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897)\*\*

George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860)\*\* AND/OR Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874)\*

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1860–61)\*

Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868)

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871–72)\*\* (We will read *Middlemarch* together over the term, but you are also welcome to read it in advance.)

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)

Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888)

Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* (1890)

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)\*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-paper' (1892)

Elizabeth Robins and Florence Bell, *Alan's Wife* (1893)

George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893)

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1894–95)

Oscar Wilde, 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' (1897)

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)\*

Charlotte Mew, 'A White Night' (1903)

Elizabeth Robins, *Votes for Women* (1907)

## Further reading

### Starting points for thinking about literature:

Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (2008)

James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (2008)

Jonathan Bate, *English Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2010)

John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014)

### Starting points for thinking about nineteenth-century literature:

Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830–1890* (1993).

Stephen Regan, *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Critical Reader* (2001).

Deirdre David (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, second edition (2012).

## A word about content

**Please note that the reading list contains a wide range of texts from the period, and some of them contain potentially upsetting material.** The Faculty of English has requested that the following message be attached to all course materials where relevant: *The course explores potentially challenging topics. Literature and the other materials we study sometimes portray extreme physical, emotional and psychological states; depict, question, and/or endorse racist, misogynist and prejudiced views or language; and can include graphic representations of inequality and violence (of all kinds). As a Faculty, we believe that one of the important roles of study in the humanities is to explore and challenge ideas that are shocking or uncomfortable, and to understand their origins, expression and influence. We also recognise that these texts will affect students differently depending on their particular backgrounds and experiences. If anything about the materials troubles you, please contact your tutors.*

Please let me know if you are concerned about potentially upsetting material and would like more detailed content warnings about particular texts.