



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

FACULTY OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

MSt & MPhil
Course Details
2026-27

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Version	Details	Date
1	Published	May 2026
2	Amendment of 1900-present A course, due to convenor change	June 2026

INTRODUCTION

Course convenors

650-1550 / MPhil (Medieval): Professor Rachel Burns; Professor Marion Turner

1550-1700: Professor Nandini Das; Professor Lorna Hutson

1700-1830: Professor Nicholas Halmi; Professor David Taylor

1830-1914: Professor Helen Small; Professor Ushashi Dasgupta

1900-Present: Professor Kate McLoughlin; Professor Patrick Hayes

English and American Studies: Professor Nicholas Gaskill; Professor Antoine Traisnel

World Literatures in English: Professor Elleke Boehmer

Post-doc mentors

In addition to the programme-convenors, each MSt strand will also have a dedicated postdoctoral (academic) mentor who will support the formal work of the convenors. The role of the mentor is to help foster a sense of group identity and cohesion; to establish an informal space for group interaction; to contribute to the academic mentoring and professional development of the students during the course; to help trouble-shoot and generally to help students navigate sources of information. Students are encouraged to approach the mentors over the academic year for advice and guidance. You will meet the postdoctoral mentor for your strand at the Graduate Induction at the beginning of Michaelmas Term.

Course outline

The course consists of four components, outlined briefly below. **Further detail regarding B (Bibliography courses) and C (option courses) will be provided over the summer.**

The **MSt/MPhil Handbook** will be circulated before the beginning of term and will provide further important information once you begin your course.

In every strand, attendance is compulsory. If you are unable to attend a class or seminar because of illness or other emergency, please let your course convenors know. Non-attendance without good cause may trigger formal procedures.

A-Course: Literature, Contexts and Approaches

This course is taught in 6 to 8 weeks of seminars in Michaelmas term, though students on the 650-1550 strand will continue with further seminars in Hilary term.

The precise format of the A-Course will vary across strands, but, in general, the course is meant to stimulate open-ended but guided exploration of key primary and secondary texts, of critical and theoretical debates, and of literary historiography. The A-Course is not assessed formally. However, the pedagogic formation fostered by the A-Course will be vital for the MSt as a whole, and will inform, support, and enrich the research you undertake for your B- and C-essays and the dissertation. For details of individual A-Courses, please see below. You are strongly recommended to begin reading for the A-Course before you commence the MSt. The reading lists included in this document may be quite comprehensive, and you can expect further on-course guidance from your course convenors and tutors according to your specific intellectual interests.

Please note: although there is no formal assessment for the A-Course, written work and/or oral presentations may be required. Convenors will enter their informal assessment of performance on GSR, the Graduate Supervision Report system, at the end of Michaelmas Term, and will provide feedback on class presentations.

B-Course: Research Skills

The B-Course is a compulsory and assessed component of the course. It provides a thorough foundation in some of the key skills needed to undertake research.

Michaelmas Term

Strand-specific classes on manuscript transcription, palaeography, material texts and primary source research skills are taught in Michaelmas Term. Students on the 650-1550 and 1550-1700 strands will sit a transcription test. While students on these strands must pass in order to proceed with the course, scores on the test will not affect their final degree result. Further details about the examination of the B-Course are provided later in this booklet and in the **MSt/MPhil Handbook**.

Hilary Term

In Hilary, students take their strand's specific B-Course.

Assessment

In Hilary Term, candidates will be required to submit an essay of 5,000-6,000 words on a topic related to the B-Course.

Detailed reading lists will be provided over the summer.

C-Course: Special Options

These will be taught as classes in weeks 1-6 of [Michaelmas](#) and [Hilary](#) Terms. Students must choose one of these options in each term. All C-Course options are open to students in all strands – you do not have to choose an option which sits neatly within your strand boundaries, although you may wish to consult with the option convenors if you are choosing an option outside of your area(s) of expertise.

The reading lists of C courses and a link to register preferences for C courses will be circulated over the summer.

Please note: If you wish to change any of your options, you must first contact the [Graduate Studies Office](#) who will seek approval from your convenor and the tutor for the course you wish to take. Requests for option changes for Hilary Term **must be submitted by the end of week 4 of Michaelmas Term**. We do not accept any changes after this time. Please note that undersubscribed Hilary term courses may be withdrawn before the start of Michaelmas term.

Remember that you can request any C-Course(s), depending on your interests and research plans. Priority for oversubscribed courses will be given to students enrolled on the relevant strand.

Assessment

In Michaelmas Term, candidates will be required to submit an essay of 5,000-6,000 words on a topic related to the C-Course studied in that term.

In Hilary Term, candidates will be required to submit an essay of 5,000-6,000 words on a topic related to the C-Course studied in that term.

Details on approval of topics and on the timing of submission for all components are found in the **MSt/MPhil Handbook**.

*The Faculty reserves the right not to run a Special Options C-Course if there are insufficient numbers enrolled or should a tutor become unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances. Please bear this in mind when selecting your options. Students cannot assume that they will be enrolled in their first choice of option, so please also bear this in mind when planning your reading before the course begins. We **strongly recommend** that you start with your A- and B-Course reading, and do not invest too much time in preparing for C-Course options until these have been confirmed.*

Dissertation

Each student will write a 10,000-11,000-word dissertation on a subject to be defined in consultation with the strand convenors, written under the supervision of a specialist in the Faculty, and submitted for examination at the end of Trinity Term.

By the end of 5th week of Michaelmas term, you should provide your convenors with a short account of your proposed dissertation project (initial lines of enquiry, reading/research so far, etc.) Convenors will meet with you for a one-to-one 'research conversation' for 30 minutes in week 7 or 8 of Michaelmas term. At this meeting you will be given feedback, suggestions for further reading, and possible ways to fine-tune/revise your ideas.

By the beginning of 0th week of Hilary term, you will submit a short document (250 words maximum) to course convenors outlining the final topic area for your dissertation. On the basis of

these documents course convenors will assign dissertation supervisors by the beginning of week 2 in Hilary term.

MSt dissertation workshops will take place in the latter half of Michaelmas and/or the early part of Hilary.

A student-led all-day conference will be held in Trinity Term (usually in the fourth week) at which all students will give brief papers on topics arising from their dissertation work, and will receive feedback from the course convenor(s).

MPhil in English Studies (Medieval Period)

In their first year, candidates for the MPhil in English Studies (Medieval Period) follow the same course as the MSt in English (650-1550) students. Provided they achieve a pass mark in the first-year assessments, students may proceed to the second year.

The second year of the MPhil offers great freedom of specialisation. Candidates choose three further courses to be studied during the year, and write a longer dissertation as the culmination of the degree. The three courses may include up to two of the MSt C-courses offered in that year (provided the candidate has not done the same course the year before); or they may choose to submit coursework essays in any medieval topic agreed with the convenors for which a supervisor is available. These courses are entered under the following titles (each of which may only be entered once, to ensure breadth as well as specialization). **Candidates are strongly encouraged to consult with their course convenors in Trinity Term or early in the Long Vacation of the first year in order to make an informed and feasible choice of options.**

1. The History of the Book in Britain before 1550 (Candidates will be required to transcribe from and comment on specimens written in English under examination conditions (1 hour).)
2. Old English
3. The Literature of England after the Norman Conquest
4. The Medieval Drama
5. Religious Writing in the Later Middle Ages
6. Medieval Romance
7. Old Norse sagas
8. Old Norse poetry
9. Old Norse special topic (only to be taken by candidates offering either paper 7 or paper 8 or both)
- 10./11. One or two of the C course special options as on offer in any year, as specified by the M.St. English, provided that they may not re-take any option on which they have submitted examined work as part of their M.St. course. The teaching and assessment of these options will follow the provisions and requirements outlined in the M.St. English exam regulations.
- 12./13. Relevant options offered by other Faculties as agreed with the Course Convenors. The teaching and assessment of these options will follow the provisions and requirements as set by the Faculty offering the option.
14. Another option as approved by the Course Convenors.

Second year assessment

Students will be required to submit three essays of 5,000-6,000 words each in either Michaelmas Term or Hilary Term (depending on the term in which the course was offered). Students will write a dissertation of 13,000-15,000 words on a subject related to their subject of study.

Each candidate's choice of subjects shall require the approval the Chair of the MSt/MPhil Examiners, care of the Graduate Studies Office. Details on approval of topics and timing of submission for all components are found in the **MSt/MPhil Handbook**.

Candidates are warned that they must avoid duplicating in their answers to one part of the examination material that they have used in another part of the examination. However, it is recognised that the dissertation may build on and develop work submitted for the first-year dissertation.

A-COURSES

MSt in English (650-1550) A-Course

Course Convenors: Professor Rachel Burns and Professor Marion Turner (rachel.burns@ell.ox.ac.uk and nicholas.perkins@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk)

This MSt A Course is designed to give you an introduction to key works, approaches, concepts and critical debates in the 650-1550 period. We will explore major questions about the long medieval period, looking at form, language, selfhood, identities, gender, and authority, amongst other things, and asking what are the contours – both temporal and spatial – of this period and this Master's. The A course aims to give you a broad knowledge of this period and to provide a historical, cultural and critical context for the specialist interests that you will develop in the C courses and your dissertation.

Each week, you are required to read some key primary and secondary texts. Further reading is also suggested, but you are not expected to read all this each week. We are aware that you may not have easy access to libraries over the summer; if you need to read alternative online editions in advance, please do so, and prioritize the primary reading over secondary discussion. The convenors will circulate suggestions for free online resources and cost-effective book purchases.

The topics, questions, and debates we shall cover are all relevant to the period as a whole, and even if your interests or academic experience so far is squarely in one specific part of the period, it is crucial that you engage with the breadth and depth of the course. Middle English texts should usually be read in the original; Old English texts can be read in the original or in translation depending on your experience; texts originally in other languages will usually be read in modern translation. Sometimes you will work with others in smaller groups, to bring materials for presentation and discussion, meeting as a group to plan this. Everyone is expected to participate in some way in each meeting. We aim for a lively and supportive environment where each student's voice is valued.

Topics at a glance:

Michaelmas Term

Week 1: Periodisation: When (and what) is the medieval?

Week 2: Space: Where is the medieval? Literature in English in global contexts

Week 3: Selfhood and Subjectivity

Week 4: Form and genre

Week 5: Places of reading and writing

Week 6: Authors and authority

Hilary Term

Week 1: Gender

Week 2: Language and Multilingualism

Week 3: Translation

Week 4: Medieval scholarship today: the state of the field

Weeks 5 and 6: Dissertation presentations

Michaelmas Term

Week 1: Periodisation: When (and what) is the medieval?

When does the medieval start, and when does it end? What does it mean to call something 'medieval' or to talk about the 'Middle Ages'? What kind of things – formal, religious, technological, linguistic, cultural – characterise the 'medieval'? What are the institutional stakes in dividing literature into periods? In this class, we will explore texts that bookend the period – poems from the beginning and end of the 'medieval' era, broadly conceived. These texts – ascribed to a man named Caedmon (late seventh century CE), and by Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542) – will be a starting point for discussing questions about how we all conceive of this period in cultural history.

Essential primary texts:

- *Caedmon's Hymn*
- selected poems by Wyatt

Editions of key primary texts

- Jones, Christopher A., ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume 1: Religious and Didactic*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 15 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) [this has a Northumbrian text and translation of *Caedmon's Hymn*; compare with West Saxon versions in many anthologies and editions]. For a recording alongside an edition/translation, see <https://stella.glasgow.ac.uk/readings/?oe-5>
- Colgrave, Bertram, and R. A. B. Mynors, ed. and trans., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), IV. 23–24 [for the story of Caedmon and Bede's Latin version of his hymn]
- Thomas Wyatt: 'Mine owne John Poyns'; 'They flee from me'; 'The pillar perish'd'; 'Blame not my lute'; 'Whoso list to hunte'; A Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms. From *The Complete Poems*, ed. R.A. Rebholz (London: Oxford University Press, 1976, and later edns); or *Collected Poems*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, and later edns)

Media

- 'The 50 Most Significant Events of the Middle Ages', Medievalists.net <<https://www.medievalists.net/2024/06/significant-events-middle-ages/>> [What do you think of this selection, and what events might you add from the sixteenth century?]

Required secondary reading

- O'Keeffe, Katherine O'Brien, 'Orality and the Developing Text of Caedmon's Hymn', *Speculum* 62 (1987), 1–20; repr. in her *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)
- *Medieval/Renaissance: After Periodisation: An Issue of the Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37:3 (2007) (selected contributions)

Optional further reading:

- Aers, David, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists or Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the History of the Subject,' in David Aers (ed), *Culture and History 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992)
- Davis, Kathleen, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularism Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)

- Frantzen, Allen J. and John Hines, eds, *Cædmon's Hymn and Material Culture in the World of Bede* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2007)
- Niles, John D. 'The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet', *Western Folklore* 62 (2003), 7–61; repr. in his *Old English Heroic Poems and the Social Life of Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 141–88
- Simpson, James, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, The Oxford English Literary History, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) (Introduction; and discussion of Wyatt)
- Stamatakis, Chris, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Rhetoric of Rewriting: 'Turning the Word'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- Walker, Greg, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Week 2: Space: Where is the medieval? Literature in English in global contexts

At the beginning of this period, this island was a loose collection of kingdoms. Its culture and language changed dramatically through encounters with and invasions from the Vikings (9th – 11th centuries) and the Normans (1066). Across the centuries, England's relationships with Wales, Scotland, and Ireland were violent and uneven and the crown ruled over major continental landholdings in what is now France (until 1558). England also traded objects and stories from all over the known world: fabrics and spices from as far afield as Indonesia arrived in medieval London; and by the end of this period, people from Britain – and the English language – were beginning to take part in colonial activity. Throughout this long period, writers told stories about distant regions, shaping perceptions on nationhood, race and otherness. In recent years, global approaches to the Middle Ages have become central to the field. This week we focus on texts and objects that give us some indication of the international contacts being made across borders throughout the long Middle Ages, and the ways in which readers of English perceived the wider world.

Key primary texts:

- Old English *Orosius* (excerpts)
- The Franks Casket
- *Mandeville's Travels* (excerpts)
- *The Travels of Ibn Battuta* (excerpts)

Editions of key primary texts

- Godden, Malcolm, ed. and trans., *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 44 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). [Read Bk. I, ch. 1, pp. 24–57 'Geographical Preface including Voyages of Othere and Wulfstan'; Bk. II, chs 1– 2, pp. 98–109 'The Four World Empires'; BK VI, chs 37–38 'The Goths Conquer Rome']
- Webster, Leslie, *The Franks Casket* (London: British Museum, 2010)
- *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, ed. Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Picador, 2003, or new edn, 2016), chapters 1–3 and 17–18
- *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. P. Hamelius (London, Early English Text Society, 1919-1923) (especially chapters 1-10, 16-19, 33-35); also available in an online TEAMS edition: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/kohanski-and-benson-the-book-of-john-mandeville>

Media

- 'Sutton Hoo bitumen links Syria with Anglo-Saxon England', BBC News (1st December, 2016) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-suffolk-38171657>>

- Turner, Marion. 'Stop talking englishh', *London Review of Books* 46.9 (9 May 2024) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n09/marion-turner/stop-talking-englishh>>

Required secondary reading

- Heng, Geraldine, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction*, Elements in the Global Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021)
- Atherton, Mark, Kazutomo Karasawa and Francis Leneghan, eds. *Ideas of the World in Early Medieval English Literature* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2022) [choose a few chapters that interest you]

Optional further reading:

- Akbari, Suzanne, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009)
- Bale, Anthony, [“ut legi”: Sir John Mandeville’s audience and three late-medieval English travellers to Italy and Jerusalem.](#) *Studies In The Age of Chaucer* 38 (2016), 201–37
- Bately, Janet, 'The Old English *Orosius*', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, Brill Companions to the Christian Tradition 58, ed. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 313–43
- Cassidy-Welch, Megan, 'Space and Place in Medieval Contexts', *Parergon* 27/2 (2010), 1–12
- Discenza, Nicole Guenther and Heide Estes, *Writing the World in Early Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).
- Khanmohamadi, Shirin A, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) [Chapter Five on Mandeville]
- Leneghan, Francis, 'Translatio Imperii: the Old English *Orosius* and the Rise of Wessex', *Anglia* 133 (2015), 656–705
- Massey, Doreen, *For Space* (Sage, 2005)
- Phillips, K. M., 'Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages', *History Compass* 14 (2016), 81–92
- Webster, Leslie, 'The Iconographic Programme of the Franks Casket', in *Northumbria’s Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 227–46

Week 3: Selfhood and Subjectivity

How was the self imagined in the Middle Ages? Many critics and historians have written about changing ideas of selfhood, positing, for example, 12th and 14th century renaissances and challenging outdated modes of thinking that suggested 'selfhood' was a much later invention. Subjectivity is historically contingent, and is not 'the same' in every period: across the Middle Ages, for instance, ideas of public and private were very different to today, and the rise of confession enabled a particular way of thinking about selfhood. Recent work on the 'permeable self' and the 'indexical self' has reinvigorated scholarly discussion about medieval selfhood. The 'self' is often imagined as white, male, heterosexual, neurotypical; we also explore normative ideas of selfhood and, continuing last week's discussions, the whiteness of many imagined medieval selves. We focus on four medieval texts: an Old English poem about exile and isolation; a ground-breaking romance; a poem about a breakdown of mental health; and a travel narrative that we discussed last week, a text that helps us to think about race and selfhood in medieval texts.

Key primary texts:

- *The Seafarer*
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- *Mandeville's Travels*
- Thomas Hoccleve, *Complaint*

Editions of key primary texts

- *The Seafarer*: text and translation in Bjork, Robert E., ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume II: Wisdom and Lyric*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 32 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); also in *Old and Middle English: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Treharne (Wiley Blackwell, any recent edition), and other anthologies
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: many possible editions e.g. ed. Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (Penguin); ed. J.J. Anderson (Everyman); or in *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter UP). All these include *Pearl*, which we will be reading next week. A lively translation as a starting point is the one by Simon Armitage (Faber).
- Thomas Hoccleve, *Complaint* (and glance into the next item, *Dialogue with a Friend*): in *'My Complainte' and Other Poems* ed. Roger Ellis (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2001); or in *Thomas Hoccleve's Collected Shorter Poems*, ed. Sebastian Langdell (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2023)
- *Mandeville's Travels* (as last week; extracts tbc)

Media

- Recorded interview: 'Medieval Disabled Bodies', Medievalists.net
<https://www.medievalists.net/2021/08/medieval-disabled-bodies/>

Required secondary reading

- Newman, Barbara *The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2021), introduction and conclusion

Optional Further reading

- Aers, David. '“In Arthurus days”': Community, virtue and individual identity in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in his *Community, Gender and Individual Identity* (London: Routledge, 1988)
- Bale, Anthony, '“A maner Latyn corrupt”': Chaucer and the Absent Religions' in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 52–64
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001)
- Dinshaw, Carolyn, 'Pale Faces: Race, Religion and Affect in Chaucer's Texts and Their Readers', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001), 19–41
- Dinshaw, Carolyn, 'Ecology,' in Marion Turner (ed.), *A Handbook of Middle English Studies* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013)
- Godden, Malcolm. 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 271–98
- Harbus, Antonina. *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002)
- Knapp, Ethan *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001), chapter 1
- Magennis, Hugh. 'The Solitary Journey: Aloneness and Community in *The Seafarer*', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 308–18
- Patterson, Lee, '“What is Me?”: Self and Society in the Poetry of Thomas Hoccleve', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001), 437–70

- Rajabzadeh, Shokoofeh, 'The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim erasure', *Literature Compass* 16: 9–10 (2019)
- Salih, Sarah, 'Embodying the Mandevillean voice', in *Medieval Literary Voices*, ed. Louise D'Arcens and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022)
- Spearing, A.C. 'Public and Private Spaces in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Arthuriana* 4 (1994), 138–45

Week 4: Form and genre

Medieval authors wrote in a very wide variety of forms and genres, from lyric to romance, saint's life to penitential tract, elegy to epic, beast fable to autobiography. For the first half of this period (to c.1100), the four-stress, alliterative Old English poetic line dominated; by the end of the period, rhyme, iambic pentameter, and sonnets had gained ground. We will focus on an Old English poem that appears in a manuscript and on a cross, and incorporates runes and unusual hypermetric lines; on a later Middle English poem that has been called the most formally intricate poem in the English language; and on a section of the *Canterbury Tales* that juxtaposes a dizzying selection of genres.

Key primary texts:

- *The Dream of the Rood* (in the Vercelli Book and on the Ruthwell Cross)
- *Pearl*
- Fragment VII of the *Canterbury Tales*

Editions of key primary texts:

- Clayton, Mary, ed. and trans., *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 27 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013) [for text and translation of *Dream of the Rood*, printed as *A Vision of the Cross*].
- *Pearl* (available in many editions; use the same as you have for *Gawain* last week)
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (or another good edition such as Jill Mann's or David Lawton's).

Media

- 3D annotated image of the Ruthwell Cross by Historic Environment Scotland: <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/ruthwell-cross-4227085477004f04aadb6b3082b41eb2>
- Wellesley, Mary. 'Juggling with Fire: The Poetry of the *Gawain*-Manuscript', British Library Medieval Manuscripts Blog (12 April 2018) <<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2018/04/juggling-with-fire-the-poetry-of-the-gawain-manuscript.html>>

Required secondary reading

- Cannon, Christopher, 'Form', in *Middle English: Twenty-first Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), pp. 177–90.
- Momma, Haruko. 'Old English poetic form: genre, style, prosody', in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 278–308.

Optional further reading:

- Aers, David, 'The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*', *Speculum* 68 (1993), 54–73
- Barr, Helen, 'Pearl or "The Jeweller's Tale"', *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000), 59–79 (reprinted in her *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001])

- Cooper, Helen, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- Bishop, Ian, *Pearl in Its Setting: A Critical Study of the Structure and Meaning of the Middle English Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968).
- Fulk, R. D. *Eight Old English Poems* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001) [commentary on *Dream of the Rood*, pp. 64-75; overview of Old English versification, pp. 129-44].
- Ó Carragáin, Éamonn, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (London: British Library/UTP, 2005)
- Pasternack, Carol Braun. 'Stylistic disjunctions in *The Dream of the Rood*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 13 (1984), 167–86
- Strohm, Paul, 'A Mixed Commonwealth of Style', in his *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1989)
- Turner, Marion, 'The Form of the *Canterbury Tales*', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Frank Grady (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Week 5: Places of Reading and Writing

Across the medieval period people read and wrote in monasteries and meadhalls, courts and city-streets, pubs and private houses. Reading was often communal and aural; it also offered space for private reflection.. This week we will explore some of the environments in which people had the space and time to write, and some of the places where texts were heard, performed, and discussed. We discuss not only the kind of context in which *Beowulf* was likely to have been written and read, but also the scenes of poetic performance within the poem; we look at a text designed to be read by enclosed anchoresses; and at the long medieval period's most 'public' texts – plays that were staged in the city streets.

Key primary texts:

- *Beowulf*
- *Ancrene Wisse* (Part 7 and Part 8)
- York plays (selected: Creation, Crucifixion, Last Judgement/Doomsday)

Media

- '[Beowulf: The Epic in Performance - Benjamin Bagby, voice](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WcIK_8f7oQ) and medieval harp', 92 NY https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WcIK_8f7oQ
- Recordings of The Medieval Mystery Cycle 2022, at St Edmund's Hall, Oxford <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNXj40GwnmWUaCE0vX5x9xWUtSGytqfWx>

Editions of key primary texts

- Liuzza, Roy, trans. *Beowulf: 2nd edition* (Broadview, 2012) [facing-page verse translation; avoid the first edition, which does not include the original Old English]
- *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Bella Millett; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) [this includes Part 7 and Part 8 of *Ancrene Wisse* in the original and with facing page translation. Millett's 2-volume edition of *Ancrene Wisse* is in EETS o.s. 325–6 (2005–6), and Millett has also published a translation of the whole text (Liverpool UP, 2009)].
- Beadle, Richard, *The York Plays* (London: Arnold, 1982); see also his Oxford World's Classics selection, edited with Pamela King
- Davidson, Clifford, ed., *The York Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: MIP, 2011) <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/davidson-the-york-corpus-christi-plays>

Required Secondary Reading

- Sauer, Michelle M., 'Architecture of Desire: Mediating the Female Gaze in the Medieval English Anchorhold', *Gender and History* 25 (2013), 545–64
- Whitelock, Dorothy, *The Audience of 'Beowulf'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951)

Optional further reading

- Ashley, K, 'Sponsorship, Reflexivity, and Resistance: Cultural Readings of the York Cycle Plays,' in *The Performance of Middle English Culture*, ed. J. Paxton, L. Clopper, and S. Tomasch (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1998)
- Beadle, Richard (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Beckwith, Sarah, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001).
- Bjork, Robert E., and John D. Niles, eds. *A 'Beowulf' Handbook* (Exeter: Exeter UP, 1997) [especially Chapter Two]
- Breeze, Steven J., *Performance in 'Beowulf' and other Old English Poems* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2022)
- Cannon, Christopher, 'Enclosure,' In C. Dinshaw & D. Wallace (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge Companions to Literature, pp. 109-123) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Georgianna, Linda, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1981)
- Hiatt, Alfred, 'Beowulf off the Map', *Anglo-Saxon England* 38 (2012), 11–40
- James, Mervyn. 'Ritual, Drama, and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Theatre,' *Past and Present* 98 (1983), 3–29
- King, Pamela, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2006)
- Leneghan, Francis. *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020)
- McGavin, John J., 'Performing Communities: Civic Religious Drama', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. Greg Walker and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: OUP, 2012)
- Niles, John D., *'Beowulf': The Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013), eg. chapter 2, 'The Art of the Germanic Scop', and chapter 11, 'The Listening Audience'

Week 6: Authors, authority, and authorship

Across the medieval period, writers theorized about what an author might be, and what conveyed authority. The past, certain genres, and certain languages, contained an inherent authority – although this was questioned, challenged, and subverted by many writers. This week we examine one text closely – *The House of Fame* – exploring what Chaucer does in this poem with previous writers and traditions, such as Virgil, Ovid, Dante, and the story of Troy, and how he responds to contemporary understandings of authority and authorship.

Key primary text

- Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, in *The Riverside Chaucer* (or another good edition)

Media

- The Kelmscott Chaucer Online: <https://www.kelmscottchauceronline.org/>

Required secondary reading

- Gillespie, Vincent 'Authorship,' in Marion Turner (ed.), *A Handbook of Middle English Studies* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2013)

Optional Further Reading

- Boitani, Piero, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)
- Bose, Mishtooni. 'Authority', in *Geoffrey Chaucer in Context*, ed. Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 58-64.
- Desmond, Marilyn, 'Chaucer and the Textualities of Troy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Chaucer*, ed. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)
- Minnis, Alastair *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (London: Scolar Press, 1984) (important last chapter on Chaucer and Gower as author and compiler)
- James Simpson, 'Dante's "Astripetam Aquilam" and the Theme of Poetic Discretion in *The House of Fame, Essays and Studies* n.s. 39 (1986), 1–18
- Taylor, Karla *Chaucer Reads the Divine Comedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) (Chapter 1)
- Turner, Marion, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) (chapters on Milky Way and Empire)

Hilary Term**Week 1: Gender**

This week we focus on a wide range of texts, including those written in the female voice, and narratives that describe the complex performance of gender across the period. We will discuss the kinds of roles that women occupied in society, and the opportunities that were open and closed to them, paying attention to what changed across this period. We will look at the historical legal case involving John / Eleanor Rykener – who is sometimes understood as a trans woman. We will also encounter an extraordinary romance, *The Squire of Low Degree* (also known as *Undo Your Door*), that explores constructions of masculinity and also challenges notions of the romance heroine.

Key primary texts:

- *The Wife's Lament*
- Ælfric, *Life of St Eugenia*
- *The Book of Margery Kempe* (selections from chapters 1-35)
- John / Eleanor Rykener
- *The Squire of Low Degree (Undo Your Door)*

Media

- Cooke, Rachel. 'Medieval Women: In Their Own Words review – a bracing cold shower with Joan of Arc and co', *The Guardian* (12 Jan 2025)
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/jan/12/medieval-women-in-their-own-words-british-library-review-as-bracing-as-a-freezing-cold-shower> [review of now-concluded exhibition at the British Library, with details and images of exhibits]

Editions of key primary texts

- Bjork, Robert E., ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume II: Wisdom and Lyric*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 32 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) [for text and translation of *Wife's Lament*; also in *OME*, ed. Treharne]
- Clayton, Mary, ed. and trans., *Old English Lives of Saints* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019) [for *Ælfric's Eugenia*]; or Skeat, Walter, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, *Early English Text Society* o.s. 76 (London: Oxford University Press, 1881) [available on wikisource; includes translation which Skeat says is the work of 'Miss Gunning, of Cambridge, and Miss Wilkinson, formerly of Dorking']
- Kooper, Erik, ed., *The Squire of Low Degree*, in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*: (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006):
<https://metseditions.org/editions/E6pge7KhrDE7HNbglqNigh6bm4ENQyg>
- Windeatt, Barry, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); or the TEAMS edition ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996):
<https://metseditions.org/editions/zYOMDpwC644aFmAQ7HvV73C41mbVAZeK>
- 'The Questioning of Eleanor Rykener (also known as John), A Cross-Dressing Prostitute, 1395', *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/1395rykener.asp>

Optional Further Reading

- Bale, Anthony, *Margery Kempe: A Mixed Life* (London: Reaktion, 2021)
- Anke Bernau, 'The Translation of Purity in the Old English Lives of St Eugenia and St Euphrosyne', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 86 (2014), 11–37
- Helene Scheck, 'Seductive Voices: Rethinking Female Subjectivities in *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*', *Literature Compass* 5/2 (2008), 220–7
- Desmond, Marilynn, 'The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy', *Critical Inquiry*, 16:3 (1990), 572–90
- Goldberg, Jeremy, 'John Rykener, Richard II and the Governance of London', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 45 (2016), 49-70
- Gulley, Alison, 'Cross-dressing, Sex-change, and Womanhood in *Ælfric's Life of Eugenia* 1', in *The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 67–81
- Jackson, Eleanor, and Julian Harrison, ed., *Medieval Women: Voices and Visions* (London: British Library, 2024) [recent exhibition catalogue with contextual essays (see review of the exhibition under Media)]
- Karras, R. M., and D. L. Boyd, '“Ut cum muliere”: A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London', in L. Fradenburg and C. Freccero (eds.), *Premodern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 99–116
- Karras, R. M., and T. Linkinen, 'John / Eleanor Rykener Revisited', in L. E. Doggett and D. E. O'Sullivan (eds.), *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies: Essays in Honor of E. Jane Burns* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), pp. 111–24
- Lochrie, Karma, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994)
- McDonald, Nicola, 'Desire Out of Order and *Undo Your Door*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 34 (2012) 247–75
- McDonald, Nicola, 'Gender', in Marion Turner (ed.), *A Handbook of Middle English Studies* (Blackwell, 2013), pp. 63–76
- Scheck, Helene, and Christine E. Kozikowsk, eds. *New Readings on Women and Early Medieval English Literature and Culture: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Honour of Helen Damico* (York: ARC, 2019)

- Turner, Marion, *The Wife of Bath: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) (esp. chapters on Working Women, the Female Storyteller and the Wandering Woman)
- Watt, Diane, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019)
- Watt, Diane and Corinne Saunders (eds.), *Women and Medieval Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)

Week 2: Language and Multilingualism

Across the long medieval period, England was always multilingual. Before the Conquest (1066), English, Latin, and Norse were particularly important; post-Conquest, English, French, and Latin were the three key languages. Most authors were influenced by texts written in multiple languages, and many produced multilingual or macaronic texts. Across the period, Welsh, Irish, and Scots texts also intersected with the use of English. English itself, of course, changed dramatically across this almost-thousand-year period, and also varied hugely across regions – but by the fifteenth century we can discern a much more ‘standardised’ language. The texts that we focus on this week include the macaronic coda to *The Phoenix*, some macaronic lyrics, an excerpt from *Piers Plowman* that stages different roles for English and Latin, one of Caxton’s Prologues (to the *Eneydos* [the *Aeneid*]), in which he discusses the changing English language, and the Scottish poet Douglas’s Prologue to his own *Eneados* – where he takes aim at Caxton.

Key primary texts:

- *The Phoenix*
- Selected lyrics
- *Piers Plowman* (Prologue)
- Caxton, Prologue to his *Eneydos*
- Gavin Douglas, Prologue to his *Eneados*

Editions of key primary texts:

- Jones, Christopher A., ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume 1: Religious and Didactic*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 15 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) [for *The Phoenix*]
- <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/fein-harley2253-volume-2> (Harley lyrics: *Dum ludis floribus; Mayden moder mild*)
- Langland, William, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, 2nd ed (London: Dent, 1995) [Prologue]
- *Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. W.J.B. Crotch [Early English Text Society, orig. ser., no. 176] (London: Humphrey Milford, 1928; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 107–110. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/49884/pg49884-images.html#INCIPIT_PROLOGUS [Gavin Douglas’s Prologue]

Media

- Lindy Brady, ‘History shows that Britain has always been multilingual’, *The Conversation* <<https://theconversation.com/history-shows-that-britain-has-always-been-multilingual-230474>>

Required Secondary Reading

- Schendl, Herbert. ‘Code-switching in Early English Literature’, *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 24 (2015), 233–248.

- Townend, Matthew. 'Contacts and Conflicts: Latin, Norse and French', in Lynda Mugglestone, *The Oxford History of English* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 75-105

Optional further reading:

- Appleton, Helen, 'The Insular Landscape of the Old English Poem *The Phoenix*', *Neophilologus* 101 (2017), 585–602.
- Bawcutt, Priscilla, Gavin Douglas: *A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976).
- Gorst, E. K. C., 'Latin Sources of the Old English *Phoenix*', *N&Q* 53. 2 (2006), 136–42.
- Horobin, Simon. 'Mapping the Words,' in Alexandra Gillespie & Daniel Wakelin (eds.), *The Production of Books in England 1350–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 59–78.
- Horobin, Simon and Jeremy Smith. *An Introduction to Middle English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).
- Machan, Tim William. 'Language Contact in *Piers Plowman*', *Speculum* 69 (1994), 359–85.
- Turville Petre, Thorlac, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290–1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Week 3: Translation

Medieval writers and readers understood translation as a flexible and creative practice. The line between translation and 'original' composition differed from our own in an era in which people had a distinct understanding of innovation, and of the way that texts could be re-used, adapted, and appropriated. This week, we will look at three case studies: Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, especially in the translations by Chaucer and by King Alfred's circle; Bible translation, focusing on discussions by Aelfric and in the Wycliffite Bible; and post-medieval translations of the *Wife of Bath*, sampling translations by Dryden and Zadie Smith.

Key primary texts:

- Boethius: Alfred and Chaucer (excerpts)
- Bible translation: Aelfric's Preface, Wycliffite Preface
- *Wife of Bath's Tale*: Dryden's and Zadie Smith's versions

Editions of key primary texts:

- Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Boece* (in *The Riverside Chaucer*) (Book I; Book 2, Metrum 7); *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (in *The Riverside Chaucer*)
- Dryden, *The Wife of Bath Her Tale*: <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/wife-bath-her-tale>
- Irvine, Susan, and Malcolm Godden, ed. and trans. *The Old English Boethius: With Verse Prefaces and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 19 (Cambridge MA; Harvard University Press, 2012) [Read Bk I, Prose 1–4 (Prefaces and opening section, pp. 2–28; Metre 10 ('Where now are the bones of wise Weland?'), pp. 110–15.)]
- Marsden, Richard, ed. *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's 'Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo'*, 2 vols, EETS os 330 (Oxford, 2008) [text and translation of Ælfric's Preface to Genesis].
- Minnis, Alastair, *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993)
- Smith, Zadie, *The Wife of Willesden* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2021)
- Wilcox, Jonathan, ed. *Ælfric's Prefaces*, (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts 9, 1994).

- Dean, James M., ed. *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996) [See 'The Wycliffite Bible: from the Prologue', under 'Anticlerical Poems and Documents': <https://metseditions.org/editions/v0drdXIIIMjNzsgLRFmdMDcmZj2pDRAX>]
- <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=volume&vid=216#introduction> [website that allows you to compare Boethius translations]

Required secondary reading:

- Bately, Janet. 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 189–215.
- Dhouib, Mohamed Karim. 'Re-Telling Chaucer in Zadie Smith's *Wife of Willesden*', *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession* 4 (2023).

Optional further reading:

- Copeland, Rita, "Rhetoric and the Politics of the Literal Sense in Medieval Literary Theory: Aquinas, Wyclif, and the Lollards." In M. Hyde and W. Jost, eds., *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 335–57.
- Discenza, Nicole Guenther. *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English 'Boethius'* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).
- Hall, Thomas N. 'Ælfric as Pedagogue', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 193–216.
- Hudson, Anne, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Johnson, Eleanor, *Practising Literary Theory in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013)
- Stephenson, Rebecca. 'The Politics of Ælfric's Prefaces', in her *The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Ælfric and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform* (Toronto: UTP, 2015), pp. 135–57.
- Turner, Marion, *The Wife of Bath: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), chapters 8 and 10.

Week 4: Medieval scholarship today: the state of the field

This class will be focused on very recent books and articles, to be decided together

Weeks 5 and 6: Dissertation presentations

Students give short talks about their dissertation topics, getting feedback and ideas from the whole group

MSt in English (1550-1700) A-Course

Critical Questions in Early Modern Literature

Course Convenors: Professor Nandini Das (nandini.das@exeter.ox.ac.uk), Professor Lorna Hutson (lorna.hutson@ell.ox.ac.uk) and others

This course is designed to introduce you to major critical debates concerning the interpretation of Renaissance/early modern literary texts and to help you start to frame your own research questions in relation to a possible dissertation topic.

Classes weeks 1-6 will focus on a key primary text or texts, situating these within a framework of critical debate. These classes will be led by the convenors, joined in Week 5 by Prof Lorna Hutson, in Week 2 by Prof Ted Tregear, in Week 3 by Prof Bart Van Es and in week 6 by Prof Margaret Kean. In the final two classes, weeks 7-8, you will have a chance to apply some of what you've learned about existing debates to the framing of your own research questions.

The first part of the course is an opportunity to engage with leading scholars who are actively shaping the critical reception of early modern literature and formulating the questions that define it as an object of study. This part will give you a sense of the shifts in critical, editorial, and cultural-historical frameworks through which writings of the period have been interpreted. It will also introduce you to, or re-acquaint you with, some exciting literary texts – famous and less well known – of the period.

You should expect to read, *at a minimum*, one longer or two shorter primary texts for each week, along with roughly two critical articles. These will be marked 'essential' in the reading list. You can get ahead by reading the primary texts during the vacation, freeing up time for the articles.

The A-course as a whole will contribute to your preparation for the dissertation which you will write in Trinity Term. There is no formal assessment, but there will be feedback on your participation in the course in the convenors' reports on the Graduate Supervision System (GSS) system.

General notes: The first class is taught by the two course convenors. Thereafter classes are either taught by convenors, or by another period specialist with a convenor. This ensures coherence, oversight and exposure to a range of expertise.

Topics and Texts at-a-glance:

Week 1	Introduction: 'Renaissance Subjects'. [handout]
Week 2	'Spenser and Allegory'. [Spenser, <i>Faerie Queene</i> , book 1]
Week 3	'New Ways of Looking at Theatrical Texts' [Marlowe, <i>Doctor Faustus</i> , A Text]
Week 4	'Travel, Race, Power' [Fletcher, <i>The Island Princes</i> ; Jonson, <i>The Masque of Blackness</i> ; Middleton, <i>Triumphs of Honour and Industry</i>]
Week 5.	'The Female Signature: Gender and Style'. [Mary Queen of Scots; K. Philips]
Week 6.	Early Modern Violence: a critical argument [Milton, <i>Samson Agonistes</i>]
Week 7	Exploring dissertation questions
Week 8	Exploring dissertation questions

Week 1: Renaissance Subjects (Nandini Das and Lorna Hutson)

A handout of short critical extracts will be distributed at the pre-course meeting for this introductory seminar.

Week 2: Meddling with Allegory (Ted Tregear with convenors)

William Hazlitt, writing about readers of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, famously wrote: "If they do not *meddle* with the *allegory*, the *allegory* will not *meddle* with them." As modern readers of Spenser we can hardly help meddling with his allegorical fictions, but, this seminar will suggest, the question of how best to do so remains an open one. Should we look backwards, towards Spenser's classical and medieval predecessors? Or forwards, towards theoretical meddlers like Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man? Focusing on Book I, the Book of Holiness, we will consider the interpretative questions that Spenser's allegory seems both to pose and elude, and how these can inflect our wider approaches to early modern texts.

Essential:

- *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1 and proem; dedicatory sonnets; 'Letter to Raleigh.' Please read this in the Longman edition of *The Faerie Queene*, second revised edition, ed. A.C. Hamilton, with Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki & Shohachi Fukuda (Longman, 2007).
- Gordon Teskey, entry on 'Allegory,' in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (University of Toronto Press, 1990).
- Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), ch.2: 'Digging Down and Standing Back'.

Closer to the seminar we will circulate a document of short extracts on allegory from Quintilian, Puttenham and others.

Recommended Reading:

- Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Cornell University Press, 1979), esp. ch.1: 'The Text.'
- Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Cornell University Press, 1996)

Further Reading:

- Judith Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton* (Fordham University Press, 2010)
- Walter Benjamin, 'Allegory and Trauerspiel,' from *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Harvard University Press, 2019).
- Bill Brown, 'The Dark Wood of Postmodernity (Space, Faith, Allegory),' *PMLA* 120.3 (2005), 734–50.
- *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland & Peter T. Struck (Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially the chapters by Zeeman, Cummings, Murrin and Caygill.
- Paul de Man; 'The Rhetoric of Temporality,' from *Blindness and Insight* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983)
- Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Princeton University Press, 1964)
- David Parry, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Allegory* (Oxford University Press, 2026)
- Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Harvard University Press, 1987)

Week 3: New Ways of Looking at Theatrical Texts (Bart van Es and convenors)

This is an exciting time for Theatre History. Many orthodoxies in the story of British drama are currently being challenged and the compositional dates and authorial attributions of specific plays are no longer fixed in the way they were once thought to be. *Arden of Faversham*, *Edward III*, and *The History of Cardenio*, for example, are all included in the 2016 *Oxford Complete Works of Shakespeare*, while *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure* are featured, as ‘genetic texts’, in the Oxford *Thomas Middleton: the Collected Works*. Previously monolithic entities such as ‘the playtext’ or ‘dramatic character’ are now claimed by many scholars to be much less fixed as categories. There is, however, also resistance to the new approaches, above all to the claims made for the reliability of algorithm-based attribution software or ‘Stylometrics’. This week we will look at the case of *Doctor Faustus*, written sometime between 1589 and 1592, with recorded performances at the Rose Playhouse in 1594. Philip Henslowe, who was financially responsible for the Admiral’s Men at the Rose theatre, and whose son-in-law Edward Alleyn played Faustus, has left telling contextual documents about this playtext. Using a play for which Henslowe paid for writing, props and revisions, we will consider what contextual documents can reveal about the authorship, dating, and textual integrity of plays.

Essential:

The ‘A text’ and ‘Introduction’ in Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus A- and B-texts* (1604, 1616) ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993)
 ‘Introduction’ to R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe’s Diary*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Closer to the seminar we will circulate handouts with facsimile sections from the ‘B Text’, a map of theatrical London, and extracts from Henslowe’s ‘Diary’

Recommended:

- Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 4th edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Further Reading:

Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project: <http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/index.html> (Links to an external site.)

1. W. Greg, ed., *Henslowe Papers: being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe's Diary* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1907)
2. P. Cerasano, ‘Henslowe’s “Curious” Diary’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 17, (2005), 72-85
3. P. Cerasano, ‘Philip Henslowe, Simon Forman, and the Theatrical Community of the 1590s’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44 (1993), 145-158
4. Natasha Korda, ‘Household Property/Stage Property: Henslowe as Pawnbroker’, *Theatre Journal*, 48 (1996), 185-195
5. Gerard Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare’s Time* (Princeton UP, 1986)
6. Gerard Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare’s Time* (Princeton UP, 1986)

Week 4: Travel, race, power (Nandini Das and Lorna Hutson)

How did mobility – both enforced and voluntary – shape early modern English perceptions of human identity and race based on cultural identification and difference, and how did literature facilitate and resist such categorisations? Our current world is all too familiar with the concepts that surfaced or evolved as a result: ‘foreigners’, ‘strangers,’ and ‘aliens’, ‘converts’, ‘exiles’, and ‘traitors,’ or even ‘translators’, ‘ambassadors’ and ‘go-betweenes’. This class will focus on John Fletcher’s *The Island Princess* (1621), with Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* (1605) and Thomas Middleton’s *Triumphs of Honour and Industry* (1617) hovering in the background, to explore how issues of race and identity, difference and belonging, intersected with economic and political forces on the early modern stage. We will engage with the work undertaken by the ERC-TIDE project in recent years, and theoretical debates around critical race studies, the global Renaissance, and ‘connected histories’. When you are reading the plays, think about (1) how difference is visualised (and what happens when it resists visualisation), (2) the importance of performance space (popular stage, court, and city) and geo-political place (‘old’ and ‘new’ worlds), and (3) critical/methodological perspective and the difference it makes.

Essential Reading:

- John Fletcher, *The Island Princess* (1621), ed. by Clare McManus (2012)
- Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online* (2014)
- Thomas Middleton, *The Triumphs of Honour and Industry* and Orazio Busino’s eyewitness account, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor et al (2012)

Recommended Reading:

- Nandini Das et al, *Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021). Read, in particular, the following: ‘alien/stranger’, ‘blackamoor/moor’, ‘Indian’, ‘Mahometan’, ‘native’, ‘savage-barbarian’
- Erickson, Peter, and Kim F. Hall. “‘A New Scholarly Song’: Rereading Early Modern Race,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67.1 (August 2016), 1–13.
- Hall, Kim F., Chapter 3: ‘Commerce and Intercourse’ in *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- Raman, Shankar. “Imaginary Islands: Staging the East.” *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 26, no. 01, 1995, pp. 131-166.

Further Reading:

1. Barbour, Richmond, *Before Orientalism: London’s Theatre of the East 1576-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
2. Britton, Dennis Austin, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014)
3. Das, Nandini, “‘Apes of Imitation’: Imitation and Identity in Sir Thomas Roe’s Embassy to India’, in *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, ed. by Jyotsna Singh (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell., 2009) pp. 114-28
4. Dimmock, Matthew, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad in Early Modern English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
5. Iyengar, Sujata, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
6. Jowitt, Claire. “*The Island Princess* and Race.” *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, edited by Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 287-97.
7. Loomba, Ania and Jonathan Burton (eds), *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

8. Loomba, Ania. "'Break her will, and bruise no bone sir': Colonial and Sexual Mastery in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2 (2002): 68-108.
9. Nocentelli, Carmen, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
10. Smith, Ian, 'White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage,' *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003), 33-67.
11. Stevens, Andrea, 'Mastering blackness: Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, the Windsor Text of *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*, and Brome's *The English Moor*', *English literary Renaissance.*, 39 (2009), 396-426
12. Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) [electronic access available]
13. Thompson, Ayanna, *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
14. Tran, J. N., 'Does this become you, princess?: East Indian ethnopoetics in John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*', in Jonathan Gil Harris and Jyotsna Singh, eds., *Indography : writing the "Indian" in early modern England* (2012), 197-207

Week 5: The Female Signature (Lorna Hutson and Nandini Das)

This class is not about adding women into the canon; rather, it asks students to think about how we gender literary utterance, assigning it 'feminine' or 'masculine' characteristics. After all, for many people, the most compelling 'feminine' voices of the period are those of Shakespeare's women characters and criticism often treats these as 'women's voices'. Boys were taught at grammar school to imitate the 'women's' voices created by Ovid's *Heroides* or *Letters of Heroines*; Sidney and Donne imitate Sappho. At the same time, good style is linked to masculinity, as we see in Jonson's *Discoveries* (1641). Can women themselves produce a 'woman's voice'? Can they be said to achieve their own 'style'? For this class, we will consider Elizabeth Harvey's theorization of the 'ventriloquized voice' and will focus on two case studies: first, the so-called 'Casket Sonnets', attributed to Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587), and second, selected poems by the royalist Katherine Philips (1632-1664). For Mary Stewart, students will compare the sonnets as they appear in *Ane detectioun of the doingis of Marie Quene of Scottis* (1572 – you can consult this on EEBO, or in the Weston Library) with one modern edition, such as that by Clifford Bax or Antonia Fraser. What generic characteristics and paratextual framings encourage the Casket Sonnets to read these as 'a woman's voice'? For Katherine Philips, you will read a selection of poems, some of which turn on the questions of permission, authority and liability for writing and circulating poetry, as well as questions of judgement in reading and listening to it. How do these poems constitute the femininity of the writer and of the scene of poetic judgement?

Essential:

- Mary Stuart, Casket Sonnets in *Ane detectioun of the doingis of Marie Quene of Scottis : tuiching the murther of hir husband, and hir conspiracie, adulterie, and pretensit mariage with the Erle Bothwell. And ane defence of the trew Lordis, M.G.B.* (St Andrews: Robert Lekprevik, 1572 or London, John Day, 1571) [On EEBO, and in the Weston Library]*
- Katherine Philips, from *The Collected Works of Katherine Phillips: the Matchless Orinda* ed. Patrick Thomas (Stump Cross Books, 1990), read the following: 1. 'Upon the double murder of K. Charles, in answer to a libellous rime made by V. P.'; 33. 'To Antenor, on a paper of mine w^{ch} J. Jones threatened to publish to his prejudice'; 36. 'To my excellent Lucasia, on our friendship. 17th July 1651'; 38. 'Injuria amici'; 54. 'To my dearest Antenor on his parting.'; 59.

'To my Lucasia, in defence of declared friendship'; 69. 'To my Lady Elizabeth Boyle, Singing --- Since affairs of the State &c°.' *

- [You can also find these in *Poems by the most deservedly Admired Katherine Philips: The matchless Orinda* (London: 1667) which you can find on EEBO]

Recommended:

- Elizabeth Harvey, 'Travesties of Voice: Cross-Dressing the Tongue' and 'Ventriloquizing Sappho, or the Lesbian Muse' in *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (Routledge, 1992), pp. 15-53, 116-139.
- Rosalind Smith, 'Generating Absence: The Sonnets of Mary Stuart' in *Sonnets and the English Woman Writer: The Politics of Absence, 1561-1621* (Palgrave, 2005) 39-60, 132-139.
- Carol Barash, 'Women's Community and the Exiled King: Katherine Philips's Society of Friendship', in *English Women's Poetry 1649-1714* (Oxford, 1996).

Further Reading:

- James Emerson Philips, *Images of a Queen: Mary Stuart in Sixteenth Century Literature* (University of California Press, 1964) ch. 3 pp. 52-84.
- Sarah Dunningan, *Eros and Poetry at the Court of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI* (Palgrave, 2002)
- Valerie Traub, "'Friendship so curst": *amor impossibilis*, the homoerotic lament, and the nature of lesbian desire', *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2002) 276-325.
- Lorna Hutson, 'The Body of the Friend and the Woman Writer: Katherine Philips's Absence from Alan Bray's *The Friend* (2003)', *Women's Writing*, 14:2 (August, 2007) 196-214.
- Kate Lilley, 'Fruits of Sodom: The Critical Erotics of Early Modern Women's Writing', *Parergon* 29.2 (2012) 175-192.
- Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith, eds., *Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing* (Palgrave, 2014) [NB: chapters on Mary Stuart and Katherine Philips]
- On masculine style, see Patricia Parker, 'Virile Style', in *Premodern Sexualities* ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (1996).

Week 6: Early Modern Violence: a critical argument (Margaret Kean and convenors)

Read John Milton's poem, *Samson Agonistes* (1671), and his prose tract *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649). Laura Knoppers, ed., *The 1671 Poems* (2008), vol.2 of *The Complete Works of John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008-).

You must use this volume for the introduction and notes – what does it tell you about current scholarly approaches to early modern studies in general, and Milton in particular? This will be a key section of our class discussion. [you might find it helpful to compare another earlier editorial approach, eg. John Carey *Milton: Complete Shorter Poems* (1968, 1997: Longman)]. N.H. Keeble & Nicholas McDowell, eds. *Vernacular Regicide and Republican Writings* (2013), vol. 6 of *The Complete Works of John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008-). [You might wish to contrast this with the previous standard multivolume edition of Milton's Prose Works from Yale.]

- Sharon Achinstein 'Samson Agonistes and the Drama of Dissent' *MS 33* (1997). 133-58.
- Janel Mueller 'The Figure and the Ground: Samson as Hero of London Nonconformity, 1662-1667' in Grahan Parry and Joad Raymond, eds *Milton and the Terms of Liberty* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002) 137-62.

- Victoria Kahn *Wayward Contracts: the crisis of political obligation in England, 1640-1674* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), chp 10 'Critique', 252-78.
- Victoria Kahn, 'Milton and the Problem of Belief', *The Trouble with Literature* (Oxford, 2020) 77-94.
- Julia R. Lupton 'Samson Dagonistes' in *Citizen Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2005), 181-204.
- John Carey 'A Work in Praise of Terrorism' *TLS*, Sept 6 2002, 16-17
- Alan Rudrum 'Milton Scholarship and the Agon over *Samson Agonistes*' *HLQ* 65 3-4 (2002), 465-88.
- Feisal Mohamed 'Confronting Religious Violence in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*' *PMLA* 120.2 (2005), 327-40.

Weeks 7 & 8

In weeks 7 & 8 there will be no more set reading for the A course, while you are working on your C course essays. Instead, we would like each of you to prepare a short, very informal presentation towards the dissertation project you are preparing to discuss with the course convenors in your 'research conversation'. You can handle this presentation in any way you like: notes, power point, questions for the class. It's an opportunity to share thoughts about questions you might ask and approaches you might take to your topic. This is a good opportunity to test critical approaches we have been encountering on the course if that seems appropriate to your topic. This is a free space in which to brainstorm and try out ideas.

MSt in English (1700-1830) A-Course

Course Convenors: Professor Nicholas Halmi (nicholas.halmi@ell.ox.ac.uk) and Professor David Taylor (david.taylor@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk)

The A-Course is not formally assessed, but offers a chance for the whole MSt group to read, explore, and discuss the period both widely and closely: it should therefore stimulate and support work for the B-Courses, C-Courses, and dissertation. All students will give one presentation in the course of the term.

The primary readings are coupled with at least one essay or chapter each week (subject to some changes) which we see as a 'provocation' that invites you to think about contemporary critical work in the field. These provocations are not endorsed by us as the best interpretations of the material, but rather have been chosen to provoke thinking about the fields of eighteenth-century and Romantic literary studies now. They represent approaches and readings that you may want to challenge or assimilate or extend.

In weeks 7 and 8 the convenors will hold individual meetings with you to discuss your dissertation plans.

Week 1 – MOCKING

- Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (1714)
- John Gay, *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716)
- Jonathan Swift, 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed' (1734)
- Jane Collier, *The Art of ingeniously Tormenting* (1753)
- *Provocation:*
- Frederic Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Cornell UP, 2001), pp. 1–40
- Ashley Marshall, *The Practice of Satire, 1658-1770* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), pp. 174–80

Week 2 – FEELING

- Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (1768)
- Phillis Wheatley, 'To the Right Hon. William Earl of Dartmouth' (1773)
- William Cowper, 'A Negro's Complaint' (1788)
- Hannah More, 'Slavery, A Poem' (1788)
- William Blake, 'The Little Black Boy' from *Songs of Innocence* (1789)
- *Provocation:*
- Simon Gikandi, 'Overture: Sensibility in the Age of Slavery', in his *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton UP, 2017), pp.1–49

Week 3 – PERFORMING

- Susanna Centlivre, *The Busie Body* (1709)
- George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Sardanapalus* (1821)
- *Provocations:*

- Jacky Bratton, 'Reading the Intertheatrical, or, The Mysterious Disappearance of Susanna Centlivre', in *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (Manchester UP, 2000), pp. 7–24
- Helen Dallas, 'The Haunted Closet: Romantic Drama and the Absent Body', *Studies in Romanticism* 64.4 (2025), 409–30

Week 4 – PROFESSING

- Phillis Wheatley, 'To S.M.' (1773)
- Mary Robinson, *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), including the Preface and 'To the Reader'
- Anna Letitia Barbauld, 'Washing Day' (1797)
- William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Advertisement, 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', 'We are seven', 'The Thorn', 'Expostulation and Reply', 'The Tables Turned', and 'Tintern Abbey' from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and 'Preface' from *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, with additional passages from 1802 edition)
- William Hazlitt, 'Mr. Wordsworth' from *The Spirit of the Age* (1825)
- *Provocations:*
- Anahid Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: On Poetry and Social Life* (U of Chicago P, 2021), pp. 1–22
- John Guillory, 'Conclusion: Ratio Studiorum', in his *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (U of Chicago P, 2022)

Week 5 – THINKING

- Adam Smith, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), parts 1 and 3
- Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1814)
- *Provocations:*
- Stephanie Degooey, "'The Eyes of Other People": Adam Smith's Triangular Sympathy and the Sentimental Novel', *ELH* 85.3 (2018), 669–90
- Gillian Russell, 'England in 1814: Frost Fairs, Peace, and Persuasion', in her *The Ephemeral Eighteenth Century: Print, Sociability, and the Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge UP, 2020), pp. 214–50

Week 6 – CONTESTING

- George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold*, cantos 1 and 2 (1812)
- Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, A Poem* (1812)
- *Provocations:*
- Mary Favret, chap. 1 ('Introduction: A Sense of War') in her *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton UP, 2010), pp. 9–48
- Jonathan Sachs, 'Future! Decline', *Poetics Today* 37.3 (2016), 355–68.

MSt in English (1830-1914) A-Course

Course Convenors: Professor Helen Small (helen.small@ell.ox.ac.uk) and Professor Ushashi Dasgupta (ushashi.dasgupta@ell.ox.ac.uk)

This A-Course aims to further students' knowledge of the literature in the period 1830-1914, and to deepen their sense of established and emerging critical debates in the field. The course ranges across genres and modes, engaging with theatrical works, poetry, and prose writing. Each class will open with presentations by students, who are asked to engage critically with the material, not just to summarize it.

"Primary Reading" is what you need to prepare for each seminar. "Further Reading" is entirely optional; you are not expected to read these materials unless you are interested in pursuing the topics further on your own. Students are welcome to bring their own copies of the primary texts to class, but the editions listed below are highly recommended.

Access to most materials will be provided via two routes: either via the URLs below, or on the ORLO page for this course: <https://oxford.rl.talis.com/index.html> (search using the course name).

Weekly Student Presentations and Responses

During each of the first 6 weeks, up to 3-4 students will present for 5-10 minutes each on ONE of the seminar's primary readings. Presenters are required to engage critically with the material, not just to summarize it.

After these presentations, up to 3-4 other students will each offer a 5-minute response on the most salient aspects of ONE presentation as well as what it hasn't considered and could. Respondents should have a good knowledge of the primary reading under discussion and be prepared to point to specific passages in the text(s) to substantiate their responses.

This means that over the course of this seminar, each student will present once on one of the seminar's primary readings and, on another occasion, act as a respondent for another student's presentation.

Each student must sign up to be a presenter ONCE and to be a respondent ONCE. A sign-up sheet will be circulated at the first meeting. Students who have not signed up as presenters and respondents by the beginning of week 1 will be assigned slots by the convenors.

Michaelmas Term Week 1: Victorian Reading/Reading the Victorians (HS and UD leading)

- Primary Reading:
- John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), Lecture 1. Dinah Birch's Oxford edition of the *Selected Writings* is available electronically via SOLO.
- John Stuart Mill, *An Autobiography* (1873)— *Collected Works*, Volume I - Autobiography and Literary Essays, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, introduction by Lord Robbins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), CHAPTER V: A Crisis in My Mental History. One Stage Onward. [Online via Liberty Fund]
- Nancy Yousef, 'Mill Alone', in *Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2018), Ch. 6.

- Eliza Cook, 'Lines Suggested by the Song of a Nightingale' (collected in the *Poetical Works*, 1870). This can be found in *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology*, ed. Florence Boos.
- Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2016), Ch. 1: 'Canned Literature'
- **Further Reading:**
 - The two 'Keywords' Special Issues of the journal *Victorian Literature and Culture*—
 - ---- 'Keywords', ed. Rachel Ablow and Daniel Hack, 46.3-4 (Fall/Winter 2018).
 - ---- 'Keywords Redux', ed. Rachel Ablow and Daniel Hack, 51.3 (Fall 2023).
 - Leah Price, 'Victorian Reading', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012 (pp. 34-55)
 - Nicholas Dames, 'On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol', in Rachel Ablow (ed.), *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2010).
 - Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), Ch. 2, 'Theory and Women's Reading'.
 - Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001).
 - Daniel Tyler, 'On Style: An Introduction', in Daniel Tyler (ed.), *On Style in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022).

Michaelmas Term Week 2: National, Transnational and Global Literatures (HS leading)

- **Primary Reading:**
 - Bruce Robbins, *Atrocity: A Literary History*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2025, Ch. 3: 'Self-Scrutiny in the Era of High Imperialism'
 - Josephine McDonagh, *Literature in a Time of Migration*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2021 (Introduction and Conclusion, which contains a reading of 'Amy Foster')
 - George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Chs 16 and 51
 - Joseph Conrad, 'Amy Foster' (1901)
 - Lafcadio Hearn, 'A Street Singer' from *Kokoro* (1896)
- **Further Reading:**
 - Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011
 - Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan Patriots', *Critical Inquiry*. 23:3 (1997), 617-39
 - David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003
 - David Finkelstein, 'The Globalization of the Book, 1800-1970.' *A Companion to the History of the Book* (2007): 329-40.
 - Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Michaelmas Term Week 3: Space, Time, and Genre (UD leading)

- **Primary Reading:**
- Clare Pettitt, *Serial Forms: The Unfinished Project of Modernity, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), Ch. 4, 'Vesuvius on the Strand'.
- Douglas Jerrold, *The Rent Day: A Domestic Drama, in Two Acts* (1832). Available electronically via the HathiTrust, Archive.org, or SOLO (LION, ProQuest One).
- Charles Dickens, 'Our Next Door Neighbours [Our Next-Door Neighbour]', in *Sketches by Boz* (1833-6). See either the Clarendon edition (ed. Paul Schlicke and David Hewitt), available electronically via SOLO, or the Penguin edition (ed. Dennis Walder).
- Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864). The Penguin edition (ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee) is difficult to find, but is the best option; the novel also is available on WikiSource (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Rajmohan%27s_Wife). Ideally, please try to read the whole thing. If this isn't possible, focus on the following chapters: Ch. 1 ('The Drawer of Water'), Ch. 2 ('The Two Cousins'), Ch. 4 ('The History of the Rise and Progress of a Zemindar Family'), Ch. 6 ('Midnight Plotting'), Ch. 7 ('Love Can Conquer Fear'), Ch. 9 ('We Meet to Part'), Ch. 21 ('The Last Chapter in Life's Book—And in This'), and the 'Conclusion'.
- **Further Reading:**
- Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), Ch. 1, 'The Melodramatic Imagination'.
- Supriya Chaudhuri, 'Beginnings: *Rajmohan's Wife* and the Novel in India', in Ulka Anjaria (ed.), *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015).
- Nicholas Dames, *The Chapter: A Segmented History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2023), Ch. 7, 'The Days of Our Novelistic Lives'.
- Elaine Freedgood, *Worlds Enough: The Invention of Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2019), Conclusion, 'Decolonizing the Novel'.
- Amanpal Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).
- Audrey Jaffe, 'Scenes of Clerical Life: The Genealogy of George Eliot's Realism', in Juliette Atkinson and Elisha Cohn (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2025).
- Clare Pettitt, *Serial Revolutions 1848: Writing, Politics, Form* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2022).

Michaelmas Term Week 4: Culture and Its Critics (HS leading)

- **Primary Reading**
- Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy, and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), Preface and Chapter 1
- Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist' (1891). *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994).
- Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2001), Ch. 3
- Grace Lavery, 'On Being Criticized', *Modernism/modernity* 25/3 (2018), 499-516
- **Further Reading**
- John Ruskin, From *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3) Eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1903-1912. Vol. 2, chap. 6: The Savageness of Gothic Architecture
- The series of exchanges between Stefan Collini and Francis Mulhern in *New Left Review*, starting with Collini, 'Culture Talk', *NLR* 7 (Jan-Feb 2001). Online at <http://newleftreview.org/11/7/stefan-collini-culture-talk>[Links to an external site.](#)

- Susan Zieger, *The Mediated Mind: Affect, Ephemera, and Consumerism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham UP, 2018), Ch. 3: Ink, Mass Culture, and the Unconscious
- Nicholas Dames, 'Why Bother?', *n + 1*, issue 11, *Dual Power* (Spring 2011), <http://nplusonemag.com/why-bother> [Links to an external site.](#)

Michaelmas Term Week 5: Narrating Enslavement (UD leading)

- **The texts for this week—in particular, the Mayhew extract—contain racist language and stereotypes and depictions of racial violence. Please speak to the course convenors should you have concerns.**
- **Primary Reading:**
- Julia Sun-Joo Lee, *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), Ch. 5, 'Fugitive Plots in *Great Expectations*'.
- Henry Mayhew, 'The Negro Crossing-Sweeper, who had lost both his Legs' (in the 'Crossing-Sweepers' section), in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1849-52; volume editions in 1851 and 1861-2). Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's Oxford edition is available electronically via SOLO.
- William Wells Brown, 'Letter IX: The British Museum—A Portrait—Night Reading—A Dark Day—A Fugitive Slave on the Streets of London—A Friend in the Time of Need', in *Three Years in Europe: Or, Places I have Seen and People I Have Met* (1852). Available electronically via SOLO.
- Zadie Smith, *The Fraud* (2023). Please read the following chapters:
- Vol. 1 Ch. 1 ('A Very Large Hole'), Ch. 5 ('Liking William'), Ch. 6 ('The Mystery of Pain'), Ch. 18 ('Talking "Cant" in Chesterfield'); Vol. 2 Ch. 9 ('Hilary St. Ives, 1869'), Ch. 14 ('Agreeing to Disagree'), Ch. 24 ('Andrew Bogle'); Vol. 3 Ch. 5 ('Compensations'), Ch. 8 ('The Ethiopians'), Ch. 11 ('What Can We Know of Other People?'), Ch. 12 ('Consider Bogle!'); Vol. 4 Ch. 2 ('Contemporary Fiction'); Vol. 5 Ch. 1 ('London Daily News, Friday 10th November 1871'), Ch. 13 ('A Public Spectacle'), Ch. 14 ('A History of Bogle'); Vol. 6 Ch. 19 ('A Young Negro Archer'); Vol. 7 Ch. 7 ('Who Am I, Really?'), Ch. 19 ('The Door Opens Inwards'); Vol. 8 Ch. 2 ('Freedom!'), Ch. 39 ('The Great Indignation Meeting').
- **Further Reading:**
- Two recent Special Issues of journals—
- ----'Undisciplining Victorian Studies', ed. Ronjaune Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong, *Victorian Studies*, 62.3 (Spring 2020).
- ----'The Wide Nineteenth Century', ed. Sukanya Banerjee, Ryan Fong, and Helena Michie, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 49.1 (Spring 2021).
- Caroline Bressey, 'The Next Chapter: The Black Presence in the Nineteenth Century', in Gretchen Gerzina (ed.), *Britain's Black Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2020).
- Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2006), Ch. 1, 'Souvenirs of Sadism: Mahogany Furniture, Deforestation, and Slavery in *Jane Eyre*'.
- Gretchen Gerzina, *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003.)
- Daniel Hack, *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2017), Introduction and Ch. 1, 'The African Americanization of Victorian Literature' and 'Close Reading *Bleak House* at a Distance'.

Michaelmas Term Week 6: The Visual and Material Imagination (HS leading)

- **Primary Reading:**
- Isobel Armstrong. *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Introduction: The Poetics of Transparency
- John Ruskin, 'The Slave Ship', from *Modern Painters* (1843-60)
- Walter Pater, 'Conclusion', in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873)
- Vernon Lee, 'Amour Dure' from *Hauntings* (1890)
- Michael Field, 'Preface', 'A Portrait', and 'Saint Sebastian' from *Sight and Song* (1893)
- Kate Flint, 'Victorian Flash!', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 23/4 (2018), 481–489

- **Further Reading:**
- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)—first edition + <https://www.britishlibrary.cn/en/works/picture-of-dorian-gray/>
- Hilary Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking like a Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. Introduction
- Jill Ehnenn, "Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in Michael Field's *Sight and Song*." *Victorian Poetry* 43 1 (2005): 109-154
- Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film around 1900* (2007)
- Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007
- John Ruskin, 'The two Boyhoods', from *Modern Painters* (1843)
- Jonah Siegel, *Material Inspirations: The Interests of the Art Object in the Nineteenth Century and After* (2020); also his *Overlooking Damage: Art, Display and Loss in Times of Crisis* (2022) for a different political vantage point on art (pressingly contemporary)
- Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literature Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (2009)
- Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (2003)

Michaelmas Term Week 7: Student meetings

- No later than Monday week 7, students should email the convenors two paragraphs describing the current state of their dissertation research. This should be no more than half a page. You should address the following questions:
 - What is your research question?
 - What are the questions that remain open?
 - What are the challenges you're encountering?
 - What would you like our input on?

Michaelmas Term Week 8: Student meetings

- No later than Monday week 7, students should email the convenors two paragraphs describing the current state of their dissertation research. This should be no more than half a page. You should address the following questions:
 - What is your research question?
 - What are the questions that remain open?
 - What are the challenges you're encountering?
 - What would you like our input on?

General information:

- You might also prepare for the A-Course by reading the edited collections below:
 - Collins and Rundle, eds., *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* (1999)
 - Josephine Guy, ed., *The Victorian Age: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (1998)
 - Bristow, Joseph, ed., *The Victorian Poet: Politics and Persona* (1987)
 - Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry 1830-1870* (1972)
 - Edwin Eigner and George Worth, eds., *Victorian Criticism of the Novel* (1985)
 - Edmund Jones, ed., *English Critical Essays: The Nineteenth Century* (1971)
 - Carol Hares-Stryker, ed., *Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings* (1997)
 - Jenny Bourne-Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (1998)
 - Laura Otis, ed., *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (2002)
 - Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History* (2000)
 - Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, eds., *Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Late Victorian into Modern* (2016)

- Three particularly useful general studies:
 - Walter Houghton *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-70* – highly recommended
 - Philip Davis, *The Victorians 1830-1880* (2004) – highly recommended
 - Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period* (1993)

- Other ‘companions’, handbooks, etc. – useful for initial orientation:
 - Herbert Tucker, ed., *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (1999)
 - Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing, eds., *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2002)
 - Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Anthony Harrison, eds., *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (2002)
 - Matthew Bevis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry* (2013)
 - Lisa Rodensky, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel* (2013)

- See also the *Cambridge Companions Online* archive (available through SOLO). It contains all the *Cambridge Companions to Literature*, including volumes on *Victorian Culture*, *Victorian Poetry*, *Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, and the *Victorian Novel*, as well as volumes on individual authors (Dickens, Wilde, Brontes, Eliot, Hardy, etc).

- The *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Victorian Literature* is an excellent resource, accessed via SOLO and covering key authors and topics.
- Also have a look at *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Victorian Era* – useful sections on Darwin, Photography, The Aesthetic Movement, and much else besides.
- Finally, two other superb sources of material:
- •The Norton Critical and Broadview editions of particular texts.
 - The *Critical Heritage* series on particular authors – highly recommended. A really good way to get a sense of how contemporaries responded to the work of writers. See, for example, volumes on Tennyson (ed. Jump), George Eliot (ed. Carroll), Browning (ed. Litzinger), Hopkins (ed. Roberts), Dickens (ed. Collins), and Ibsen (ed. Egan).

MSt in English (1900-Present) A-Course

Course Convenors: Professor Kate McLoughlin (kate.mcloughlin@ell.ox.ac.uk) and Professor Patrick Hayes (patrick.hayes@ell.ox.ac.uk)

This course will explore significant texts, themes, and critical approaches across the period. You should read as much in the bibliography over the summer as you can—certainly the primary literary texts listed in the seminar reading for each week and those others that you can access easily. Access to most materials will be provided via two routes: either via the Canvas system once you have university login, or on the ORLO page for this course: <https://oxford.rl.talis.com/index.html> (search using the course name). Each class will open with brief presentations by students, who are asked to engage critically with the material, rather than summarising it. Further guidance is provided at the end of this syllabus.

By the end of 5th week of MT, students must email both convenors a short account of their dissertation project as a Word document (initial lines of enquiry, reading/research so far, etc.). As a guideline, the document should identify the main areas of research and development for the dissertation. Typically, it could include:

1. an opening gambit (What is the dissertation about? What are the texts and authors that may be under consideration? What questions will the dissertation be seeking to answer? Why might these questions be wanted/ relevant/ interesting/ insightful/ productive?)
2. a brief outline of different sections the dissertation could encompass, and
3. a bibliography.
4. up to 3 names of possible dissertation supervisors; consult to see Faculty postholders

<https://www.english.ox.ac.uk/faculty-postholders>

This should be between 500-1,000 words.

There will be no class in weeks 7 and 8. Instead, the convenors will meet individually with students to discuss their dissertations.

Week 1: Words Fail (KM leading)

One definition of modernity is that humankind became, in Walter Benjamin's words, 'not richer, but poorer in communicable experience' ('The Storyteller', 1936). But what do those terms mean precisely and did Benjamin get the date right? In this seminar we will be thinking about the nature of experience and its communicability, and exploring the role of impact of mass, industrialised warfare on what is now considered the 'Language Crisis'.

Seminar reading

- William Wordsworth, 'The Discharged Soldier' (1850)
- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) [Presentations should focus on scenes involving Septimus Warren Smith]
- Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', ('Der Erzähler') [1936], trans. Harry Zohn, *Selected Writings. Volume 3: 1935-38*, ed., Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 143-66
- Kate McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics: British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapters 3 & 5

- Shane Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 1

Week 2: Judgment in Crisis (PH leading)

This seminar develops the question of communicability from week 1 by reflecting on the problem of judgment in modernity. Through readings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jean-François Lyotard, and Hannah Arendt, we will explore competing accounts of common sense, interpretation, aesthetic judgment, and political responsibility, as well as the conditions under which judgment succeeds or fails. By placing philosophical and literary questions in dialogue, we will explore judgment not as the application of established norms but as a practical, imaginative, and often precarious activity which mediates between individual experience and a shared world.

Seminar reading:

- On handout, extracts from: Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Guiding Concepts of Humanism' from *Truth and Method* (1960); 2nd ed., trans. Weinsheimer and Marshall) pp.8-31; Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Sensus Communis' (1992).
- Read and bring copies of Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963).

Wider reading (optional):

- Stephen Acreman, *Political Theory and the Enlarged Mentality* (2018)
- Andrew Norris, 'Arendt, Kant, and the Politics of Common Sense', *Polity* 2 (1996)
- Karin Schutjer, *Narrating Community after Kant* (2001)
- Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (2016)

Week 3: The horror! The horror! (KM leading)

Following on from week 2, we will look further at the role of rational judgement in the period. The Counter-Enlightenment began in the eighteenth century as a reaction against the prioritising of reason that was the achievement of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment itself. In this seminar, we will be examining the darker side of human 'progress', considering, in particular, depictions of the scarifying effects of colonial industrialism taking place at the same time as Freud's taxonomising of the human psyche.

Seminar reading

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)
- John Sinjohn, pseud. John Galsworthy, 'The Silence', *A Man of Devon* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1901), 187-233
- Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (SE)*, trans. and gen. ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 20 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74), 4.12-66
- Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford

University Press, 2002), 1-62 ('The Concept of Enlightenment' and 'Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment')

- Seo Hee Im, *The Late Modernist Novel: A Critique of Global Narrative Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) ch. 1 'Conrad, Faulkner, and Gothic Incalculability'

Week 4: Disinterestedness (PH leading)

This seminar further pursues the questions about progress and enlightenment raised in week 3 by asking about what happens to the ideal of disinterestedness, which in the nineteenth century was often regarded as an enabling factor in progressive social hope. The concept has a long history, originating in accounts of religious experience, and eventually becoming important to the development of ideas about the distinctiveness of aesthetic experience; yet it has long been subject to criticism, from Nietzsche's attack on the 'country vicar' mentality in the *Genealogy of Morality* (1886), to Bourdieu's critique of the suppression of class difference in *Distinction* (1980). Here we will consider one of the classic formulations of disinterest in the English tradition by Matthew Arnold, and responses by later writers including Virginia Woolf, Louise Glück and Rachel Cusk.

Seminar reading:

- On handout: extracts from: Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and its Enemies', in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869); Louise Glück, 'Disinterestedness', in *Proofs and Theories* (1999); Mary Devereaux, 'Feminist Aesthetics' (2003).
- Read and bring copies of Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1928; preferably the OUP edition); Rachel Cusk, *Outline* (2014)

Wider reading (optional):

- Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1984); 'On the Historical Genesis of the Pure Aesthetic' in *The Rules of Art* (1996)
- Mary Devereaux, 'Feminist Aesthetics' in *Oxford Companion to Aesthetics* ed. Levinson 647-66 (2003)
- Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics* (2004)
- Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (1984)

Week 5: Opacity and Post-Critique (KM leading)

This week, we continue to think about Enlightenment ideals in a post-Enlightenment world. Following the lead of Édouard Glissant and others, critics such as Judith Butler and Dorothy Hale have argued for the right of the literary character to remain silent. Instead of speculating why Catherine Sloper doesn't marry Morris Townsend in Henry James' *Washington Square* (1880), for example, critics should, in their view, honour her refusal to explain herself. But where do such refusals-to-explicate leave literary criticism? The recent post-critical turn, led by Rita Felski, suggests that answers lie in Actor-Network Theory and notions of affective attachment, while others working in Relevance Theory have other ideas as to how and why literary works sing to us over time. In this seminar, we apply these ideas to consider the extent to which they illuminate three poems by women about the First World War (and a fourth poem that will be revealed for the first time in class).

Seminar Reading

- Mina Loy, 'Der Blinde Junge' (1915)
- Carol-Ann Duffy, 'Last Post' (2014)
- Malika Booker, 'Her Silent Wake' (2018)

- Judith Butler, 'Values of Difficulty', *Just Being Difficult: Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, ed. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 199-215
- Wai Chee Dimock, 'A Theory of Resonance', *PMLA*, 112.5 (1997), 1060–1071
- Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), chapter 5 'Context Stinks!'
- Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020). chapter 1 'On Being Attached'
- Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 'For Opacity' (188-93)
- Dorothy Hale, *The Novel and the New Ethics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), chapter 5 'The New Ethics in the Academy: The Lesson of the Master, the Master as the Lesson'
- Raphael Lyne, 'Relevance Across History', *Reading Beyond the Code*, ed. Terence Cave and Deirdre Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 37-51

Week 6: Education (PH leading)

This final seminar turns the implications of the various questions we have considered onto the question of education—the activity to which we are all committed, but upon which we too rarely reflect. Modern educational theory is torn between competing ideals: the transmission of knowledge, the cultivation of culture, the formation of character, and the emancipation of individual freedom. Each of these ideals is tested by the problems we have considered about communicability, judgment, progressive hope, and the logic of critique. Through readings of such figures as Nietzsche, D. H. Lawrence, Jacques Rancière, and J. M. Coetzee, we will tilt our discussions towards debates over the nature and purpose of education: Can education foster freedom without becoming a form of domination? Is the teacher a guide, an authority, or an obstacle? Might aesthetic experience offer an alternative to both instruction and discipline as a model of human formation?

Seminar Reading

- On handout, extracts from Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator' (1874); D.H. Lawrence, 'Education of the People' (1921); Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator' (2008).
- Read and bring copies of J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013).

Wider Reading (optional)

- If you have time, try to read the other two books in Coetzee's trilogy: *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016) and *The Death of Jesus* (2019)
- For the deep origins of the debate, go back to Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795)
- Paul de Man, 'Aesthetic Formalization', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1982)
- Michael Bell, *Open Secrets: Literature, Education and Authority* (2007)
- John Guillory, *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022)
- Stefan Collini, *Literature and Learning* (2025)

Weeks 7 and 8: Individual 'Research Conversation' Dissertation Meetings (PH and KM co-leading)

Convenors will meet with students for a one-to-one 'research conversation' for 30 minutes in week 7 or 8. They will discuss the dissertation account the student submitted in week 5.

At this meeting the student will be given feedback, suggestions for further reading, and possible ways to fine-tune/revise their ideas.

By the beginning of 0th week of HT, students will submit a short document (250 words max) to course convenors outlining the final topic area for their dissertation.

On the basis of these documents course convenors will assign dissertation supervisors by the beginning of week 2 in HT.

Work with supervisors on the dissertation will begin in HT.

Guidance for Presenters and Respondents in weeks 1-6

During each of the first 6 weeks, students will present for 5-10 minutes each on one of the seminar's primary readings. Presenters shouldn't summarise the reading. Instead, they are asked to engage critically with the material. This could mean examining an aspect in detail, considering wider or different critical frames, or something else still.

No matter what, the presentation should be driven by a clear line of enquiry. What is the question being asked of the text? What lines of argument might be pursued to answer it? Why does the question matter? Whether implicitly or explicitly, these questions should be addressed in the presentation. These are a few of the building blocks of critical inquiry and will help you develop your own critical voice.

After these presentations, other students act as respondents. Each will offer a 5 minute response on the most salient aspects of one presentation, as well as what it hasn't considered and could. Respondents should have a good knowledge of the primary reading under discussion and be prepared to point to specific passages in the text(s) to substantiate their responses.

Students who have not signed up as presenters and respondents by the beginning of week 1 will be assigned slots by the convenors. This means that over the course of the seminar, each student will have the opportunity to present once on one of the seminar's primary readings and, on another occasion, act as a respondent for another student's presentation.

Each student will sign up to be a presenter once and to be a respondent once. You can only be a respondent for a text that already has a presenter.

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MSt in English and American Studies A-Course

Course Convenors: Professor Nicholas Gaskill (nicholas.gaskill@oriel.ox.ac.uk) and Professor Antoine Traisnel (antoine.traisnel@ell.ox.ac.uk)

This course will introduce students to some of the major topics and texts in the study of American literature. We will begin with Melville's *Moby-Dick*, which we will read alongside critical readings selected give us a rough sense of some of the how American literary studies has developed since its institutionalization in the mid-twentieth century. We will then look at texts from a range of genres and forms, each of which will provide an opportunity to engage with a particular sub-field or critical debate. These may include debates around race and nationhood, hemispheric approaches, Indigenous studies, Black feminist thought, ecocriticism, queer theory, or affect studies—depending on the week's materials.

One of our goals will be to gain a sense of how the field of American literary studies has been constructed—and of how fields are constituted and contested more generally. What motivated the embrace of American Studies at mid-century? How were the initial assumptions of its practitioners challenged by later generations of scholars? And how do we think that the study of American literature should proceed today? What are our objects of study? What geographical, national, institutional, or cultural frames are best suited to analyze those objects? How do these questions change depending on if we're talking about novels, essays, or poetry?

Each week we will expect you to have read the full primary text and selections from the secondary texts as listed below the bibliographic entry. If you do not have access to a library with the secondary materials before arriving in Oxford, you should concentrate on reading (or re-reading) the primary texts, all of which should be readily available. If you do have access to the secondary materials, we would recommend you start your reading of them as soon as possible.

In advance of Week 1, we will distribute a list of questions we'll use to guide our discussion of that week's readings. We will provide a brief introduction to the readings at the beginning of each meeting. In Weeks 2-5, two or three students will work together to produce and distribute four discussion questions in advance, along with a relevant critical or primary text that they have chosen to accompany the week's readings (preferably an excerpt around 25 pages, though longer readings can be recommended). They will also lead the discussion after our brief introduction.

In the final weeks of the course, each of you will present a report on a recent scholarly text. The list of texts you may choose from and the format of the reports are found at the end of this reading schedule. In addition to your A, B, and C Courses and Dissertation, you are expected to attend the American Literature Research Seminar which usually meets four time per term. Any conflicts with attending the ALRS should be cleared in advance with us.

Week 1: *Moby-Dick* and the Institution of American Literary Studies

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick* (1851): Norton Critical Edition (3rd ed.), ed. Hershel Parker (Norton, 2018). If you cannot use this edition, please use the Oxford World Classics edition.

- Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Oxford UP, 1941), Book 3, Ch. X, sections 2-6 (pp. 402-59)

- Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1957), ch. 1, 'The Broken Circuit'
- Toni Morrison, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* (1989), sections I and II (pp. 123-46, especially 135-46). Available at <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-z/m/morrison90.pdf>.
- Fleissner, Jennifer. *Maladies of the Will: The American Novel and the Modernity Problem* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), ch. 3, 'General Willfulness: *Moby-Dick* and Romantic Sovereignty'

Week 2: Publics and Persons in Nineteenth-Century Poetry

Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Little, Brown and Company, 1960).

- Get to know *at least* twenty Dickinson poems well; make sure to include among them 'Essential Oils - are wrung,' 'After great pain, a formal feeling comes -,' 'They shut me up in Prose -,' 'A Spider sewed at Night,' 'Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,' and 'A Route of Evanescence.'

George Moses Horton, *The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry*, ed. Joan R. Sherman (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

- Get to know *at least* twenty Horton poems and prose pieces well; make sure to include among them 'On Liberty and Slavery,' 'The Slave's Complaint,' 'On the Poetic Muse,' 'The Creditor to His Proud Debtor,' 'The Fate of an Innocent Dog,' 'George Moses Horton, Myself,' 'The Slave's Reflections the Eve before His Sale,' and 'Individual Influence.'

Critical Case Study: Virginia Jackson and Historical Poetics

- Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton UP, 2005), 'Beforehand' and chs. 1
- Virginia Jackson, *Before Modernism: Inventing American Lyric* (Princeton UP, 2023), 'Preface' and chs. 1-2.

Week 3: Gothic Tales: America's Haunted Landscapes

Edgar Allan Poe, "Murders in the Rue Morgue"; "The Black Cat," "The Premature Burial." If possible, use *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (Norton Critical Edition, 2004)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Minister's Black Veil"; "The Birthmark." If possible, use *Tales and Sketches* (The Library of America, 1982)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1891)

Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild," in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995).

- Ren Heintz, "Transitioning Queer Studies in Nineteenth-Century American Literature," in *The New Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2025)
- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1991), esp. "Romancing the Shadow."
- Simon C. Estok, "Pulped and Reduced, Dried Out and Flattened: the Horrors of Aborted Agency in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" (2023)

- Alys Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery* (2019), chapter 4, “The Problem of Reproductive Freedom in Neoliberalism.”

NB: Ranked selection of 3 books for the presentations due at the end of week 3.

Week 4: Cather’s Numinous Modernism and the Writing of History

Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and ‘The Novel D meubl ’ (1922)

- Enrique Lima, “Willa Cather’s Rewriting of the Historical Novel in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*,” *NOVEL* 46.2 (2013): 179-92.
- T. Austin Graham, “Blood on the Rock: Cather’s Southwestern History,” *American Literary History* 28.1 (2015): 46-68.
- Jean Lutes, “Legendary Affect: Intimacies in Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*,” *Studies in the Novel* 51.3 (fall 2019): 391-411.

Week 5: Indigeneity, Ecology, Futurity

Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (2017)

Nathalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (2020)

- Kyle Powys Whyte, “Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises” (2019)
- Mark Rifkin, *Fictions of Land and Flesh* (2019), introduction and ch. 1
- Grace Dillon and Pedro Neves Marques, [“Taking the Fiction Out of Science Fiction: A Conversation About Indigenous Futurisms”](#) (2021)

NB: Dissertation outline document due by the end of Week 5.

Week 6: Presentations on Secondary Texts and Discussion

Week 7: Presentations on Secondary Texts and Discussion

Week 8: 30-minute 1-to-1 research conversations

Presentations

Select three texts from the following list, keeping in mind what would be most useful for your dissertation work. You will be asked to submit your selections in rank order at the end of Week 3, and we will assign texts by Week 4. If there’s a book from the last five years that you would like to present on that’s not included below but that will be important to your dissertation work, we will consider proposals to present from material not on the list. *In Week 6 or 7 you will present a ten-minute summary and analysis of your assigned text.*

- Brady, Mary Pat. *Scales of Captivity: Racial Capitalism and the Latinx Child* (Duke UP, 2022)
- Brooks, Daphne. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Harvard UP, 2021)
- Carroll, Rachel Jane. *For Pleasure: Race, Experimentalism, Aesthetics* (NYU Press, 2023).
- Chuh, Kandice, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities “After Man”* (Duke UP, 2019)

- Constantinesco, Thomas. *Writing in Pain in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Oxford University Press, 2022)
- Dinnen, Zara. *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture* (Columbia UP, 2021)
- Dworkin, Craig. *Radium of the Word: A Poetics of Materiality* (Chicago 2020)
- Edwards, Erica R. *The Other Side of Terror: Black Women and the Culture of US Empire* (New York UP, 2021)
- Ensor, Sarah. *Queer Lasting: Ecologies of Care for a Dying World*. (NYU Press, 2025)
- Fleissner, Jennifer. *Maladies of the Will: The American Novel and the Modernity Problem*. (U of Chicago P, 2022)
- Goyal, Yogita. *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery* (New York UP, 2019)
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (Norton, 2019)
- Herring, Scott. *Aging Moderns: Art, Literature, and the Experiment of Later Life* (Columbia University Press, 2022)
- Ibrahim, Habiba. *Black Age: Oceanic Lifespans and the Time of Black Life*. (NYU P, 2021).
- Kelly, Adam. *The New Sincerity: American Fiction in the Neoliberal Age* (Stanford UP, 2024)
- Manshell, Alexander. *Writing Backwards: Historical Fiction and the Reshaping of the American Canon* (Columbia UP, 2023)
- McCarthy, Jesse. *The Blue Period: Black Writing in the Early Cold War* (Chicago UP, 2024)
- McClanahan, Annie. *Beneath The Wage: Tips, Tasks, and Gigs in the Age of Service Work* (Zone Book, 2026)
- McGurl, Mark. *Everything and Less: the Novel in the Age of Amazon* (Verso, 2021)
- McHenry, Elizabeth. *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship*. (Duke UP, 2021)
- Nealon, Jeffrey. *Fates of the Performative: From the Linguistic Turn to the New Materialism* (U of Minnesota P, 2021)
- Norman, Will. *Complicity in American Literature after 1945: Liberalism, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, 2025)
- Post, Tina. *Deadpan: The Aesthetics of Black Inexpression* (NYU Press, 2023)
- Reed, Adolph, Jr. and Kenneth W. Warren, *Black Studies, Cultural Politics, and the Evasion of Inequality: The Farce This Time* (Routledge, 2025)
- Rifkin, Mark. *Fictions of Land and Flesh Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation* (Duke UP, 2019)
- Quashie, Kevin. *Black Aliveness, Or a Poetics of Being*. (Duke UP, 2021)
- Schuller, Kyla. *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Duke UP, 2018)
- Sinykin, Dan. *Big Fiction: How Conglomeration Changed the Publishing Industry and American Literature* (Columbia, 2023).
- [Song](#), Min Hyoung. *Climate Lyricism*. (Duke UP, 2022)
- Spires, Derrick. [The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States](#) (U of Pennsylvania Press, 2019)
- Tamarkin, Elisa. *Apropos of Something: A History of Irrelevance and Relevance* (U of Chicago P, 2022)
- Yao, Xine. *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Duke UP, 2021)

MSt in World Literatures in English A-Course

Course Convenor: Professor Elleke Boehmer (Elleke.boehmer@ell.ox.ac.uk)

The A-Course for the MSt in World Literatures in English will introduce you to the key methodological questions in World Literary research. It is designed to scaffold and support the process of developing students' dissertation projects. The course intersperses "teaching" seminars, in which we will explore together these theoretical and methodological questions with "craft" seminars, in which researchers will present on research in progress and discuss how they negotiated these questions in designing and carrying out their research.

Across the term, you will complete a number of research tasks and reflective exercises which will help you formulate and develop your dissertation project in dialogue with your peers. You will have the opportunity to workshop your developing dissertation project with your peers, drawing on the work we have done through term, in Week 8.

Pre-reading

- Johann Peter Eckermann, 'Goethe on *Weltliteratur*', *Conversations with Goethe*, translated by Allen Blunden, Penguin 2022, pp.183-192.
- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', *The Political Writings* vol.1, ed. David Fernbach, Verso 2010, pp.67-79.
- Rabindranath Tagore, 'World Literature', in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language* ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri, OUP 2001.

Week 1: Scale

- In week one we will think about size and shape of a corpus we might draw on for research projects. In so doing, we will think about different scales of attention that scholars pay to texts. Does looking at texts in the context of "World Literature" necessarily entail a "distant" or synthetic mode of reading?
- Erich Auerbach, "Philology and World Literature" [1952] trans. Marie and Edward Said *Centennial Review* 13.1 (Winter 1969).
- --- "The Brown Stocking" in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946, trans 1953).
- Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" *New Left Review* 1 (January 2000) 54-68.

Week 2: The Logic of Comparison

- What are the circuits, systems or wholes from which texts emerge and of which they form a part? What is the logic of connection, comparison or interaction between texts from different parts of the world? In this class, we will look at some of the different systems which scholars of world literature use to understand and analyse texts.
- Pascale Casanova, "Principles of a World History of Literature", in *The World Republic of Letters* (1999; English trans. 2004).
- Elleke Boehmer, "Anti-Imperial Interaction Across the Colonial Borderline" in *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial* (2002).
- Lisa Lowe, "A Fetishism of Colonial Commodities" in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. (2015).
- Warwick Research Collective (WReC), 'World-Literature in the Context of Combined and Uneven Development', in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature* (2015).

Week 3: Craft Seminar One

- In this seminar, Peter D. McDonald will be discussing his book *Artefacts of Writing* (OUP, 2017), exploring the overall shape of this book project. Students should read both the Introduction and the chapter on Arvind Mehrotra, 'Against Naturalisation' in advance of the seminar.

Week 4: Language

- In week 5 we will address the issue of language in the study of World Literature. How does linguistic competency circumscribe our corpora? What are the opportunities and risks of studying texts in translation? Has "World Literature" become an Anglophone concept? How might it be practiced otherwise?
- Jonathan Arac, "Anglo-Globalism" *NLR* 16 (2002).
- Aamir Mufti, "Global English and its Others" in *Forget English: Orientalisms and World Literature* (2016) [Only read pp. 146-180]
- Francesca Orsini, "A Multilingual Local in World Literature" in *East of Delhi: Multilingual Literary Culture and World Literature* (2023).
- Supriya Chaudhuri, "Translating Loss: Place and Language in Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie" *Etudes Anglaises* 62.3 (2009).

Week 5: Craft Seminar Two

- In this seminar, Elleke Boehmer will be discussing her 2026 book *Southern Imagining: A Literary and Cultural History of the Far Southern Hemisphere* (2026), extracts from which will be circulated in advance of the seminar. Students should read in particular the Introduction.

Week 6: Form

- How do literary forms register, circulate within, shape, or interact with, the world? In this class, we will look at some exemplary or influential theories of the relationship between the form of a literary work and the social or geographical forms of the world which they register or participate in.
- Benedict Anderson, "Cultural Roots" in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Capitalism* (1983)
- Roberto Schwarz, "Beyond Universalism and Localism: Machado's Breakthrough" in *Two Girls and Other Essays* ed. Francis Mulhern (2012)
- Graeme McDonald, "Containing Oil: The Pipeline in Petroculture" in *Petrocultures: Oil, Culture, Politics* (2017).
- Anahid Neressian, "Two Gardens: An Experiment in Calamity Form" in *MLQ* 74.3 (2013).

Week 7 and 8: Research Conversations