

Keble College
Oxford
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4th May 2021

Dear Student,

We are very much looking forward to seeing you in October. In your first term at Keble you will be focusing on three areas: an Introduction to English Language and Literature (Paper 1), Early Medieval Literature (Paper 2), and a course that looks at prose fiction across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Oxford terms are short and very busy so it's vital that you **read and prepare as much as possible before term starts**. See the vacation reading-lists and advice from individual tutors for each course below. There is quite a bit of reading here (including some long novels for the prose course), so you should get started on this *asap* and work steadily over the summer. Cheap second-hand copies of many titles are available from abebooks.co.uk or from amazon.co.uk.

Paper 1: An Introduction to English Language and Literature

Thoughtful study of the following works is highly recommended (asterisks indicate *very* highly recommended titles). You should try to read at least 2 of the books from each section below. Theoretical perspectives:

- Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 5th edition (2016) * – A KEY TEXT – full provocative, short chapters on a whole range of topics (on the author, the uncanny, laughter, the tragic, character, voice, figures and tropes, ghosts, animals, the text and the world, secrets, pleasure, desire, beginnings and endings, sexual difference, and much more.) A careful reading of this book will stand you in very good stead.
- Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2011) – a great introduction *

Some excellent books on poetry:

- James Longenbach, *How Poems Get Made* (2018) * – KEY TEXT. Other highly recommended texts include *The Resistance to Poetry* (2004) and *The Virtues of Poetry* (2013)
- Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (1986) * – a collection of essays on different poets, so no need to read in chronological order; for starters, you might try the essays on Wordsworth, Housman, Larkin, Johnson, and Stevie Smith.
- Kay Ryan, *Synthesizing Gravity: Selected Prose* (2020) * – a wonderful selection of essays on poetry by a great poet-critic.

And three excellent books on fiction:

- James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (2008) *
- David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (1994)
- Peter Boxall, *The Value of the Novel* (2015) *

Although you won't be working directly on the Language side of Paper 1 in your first term's tutorials and classes, you might also read these 2 books over the summer:

- Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*, 4th ed. (2000)
- David Crystal, *The English Language*, 2nd ed. (2002)

Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature, c. 650 – 1350

Over the course of your first year you will study Old English language and literature, with the option to also explore some Early Middle English texts. The early English period was a time of tremendous change: between its rough beginnings in around 500 C.E. and the conventional end point of the Norman Conquest in 1066, we go from what is essentially an Iron Age society of little kingdoms, oral communication, and polytheistic beliefs, to a single medieval Christian kingdom that is highly literate and bureaucratic. We will trace the rich and varied literature produced as the land and its people encountered Christianity, endured Nordic attacks, and embraced the written word. The literature of this period involves a wide range of poetry and prose: heroic poetry, elegies, riddles, dream visions, saints' lives, wisdom poetry, and much more.

I would like you to do three things over the summer:

1. Start learning Old English. Primarily with the **Old English Online Course**
2. Brush up on historical events, religion, and culture of the period
3. Read the primary texts in translation

Old English:

While I don't expect you to be fluent in Old English before the summer is out, the more you work on understanding the basics before you arrive, the easier you will find our work in Michealmas.

***Compulsory Work*:** I expect you all to have worked through the **Old English Online Course** over the course of the summer.

The **Old English Online Course** can be found by following this link: <https://oldenglish.info/>. This website is designed to help you read Old English, even if you're a complete beginner. It will introduce you, topic by topic, to the structure and sound of the Old English language in easy to digest chunks with plenty of opportunity to practice along the way. While should work at your own pace, language learning is best done little and often over a long period of time, so I would recommend aiming to complete 1 or 2 topics per week.

Supplemental work:

There are lots of other resources out there that will help you get to grips with Old English. Below I've suggested a few that I particularly recommend. Some are a useful complement to the **Old English Online Course**, while others will help you stretch your language legs once you feel more confident.

1. You Tube Videos

- a. Alaric Hall's videos explaining Old English grammar:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLh4c8jCBsSHSvXoytWEL-DN78_NoWMyMZ. These videos are based on Peter Baker's magic sheet, which you can download here:
http://www.oldenglishaerobics.net/resources/magic_letter.pdf. (**Note:** Alaric's videos (except the last one) use a previous version of the magic sheet, where some of the words that Baker uses as examples are different: where your sheet says *stān*, *stānes*, *stāne* etc. Alaric's says *bāt* (boat) and where your sheet says *sorg*, *sorge* etc. Alaric's says: *glōf* (glove).
- b. Thijs Porck's Old English Grammar Bytes:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWhWk2HmVWxftG6bb9p3uspwcCGOJh>.
- c. Old English Readings:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCc4039hpZ8rnV2ed9F2zPWg/featured>. Listen to poetry read in Old English.

2. Websites

- a. Peter Baker's book *Introduction to Old English* and the associated website:
<http://www.oldenglishaerobics.net>. [This text assumes more background language skills than the **Old English Online Course**, but also goes into more detail. It is well organised and thorough. The website contains interactive texts, an Old English glossary, workshops, and exercises.]
- b. King Alfred's Grammar:
<https://www.csun.edu/~sk36711/WWW/KAG/index.html>. [This website provides another 'course' in Old English. The 'Translation Tricks' page is particularly handy.]
- c. The University of Glasgow's 'Essentials of Old English' course:
<https://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/STELLA/apps/web/eoe/>. [A bit dense, probably more suitable for those with previous grammar training, but does come with exercises.]
- d. Teachers of Old English in Britain and Ireland:
<http://www.toebi.org.uk/resources/>. [A great list of resources is available here, including and expanding on the links above.]

3. Apps

- a. Thijs Porck ranks Old English apps:
<https://thijsporck.com/2016/09/04/anglo-saxon-apps/> [Useful run-down of some of the main Old English apps.]
- b. Memrise
 - i. Peter Baker's *Intro to Old English*:
<https://app.memrise.com/course/1659715/introduction-to-old-english/>
 - ii. Saint Andrews' Uni Core Vocab:
<https://app.memrise.com/course/32931/anglo-saxon-old-english-core-vocabulary/>
 - iii. Old English: <https://app.memrise.com/course/1937587/old-english-anglo-saxon/>

Historical Context

It is very likely that your only experience with Early English history is from way back in year three of school or maybe through the BBC's *Horrible Histories*. This is unhelpful as, in order to develop nuanced and interesting readings of Old English literature, it would be useful if we knew what on earth was going on around at the time.

1. YouTube Videos. These videos all go over the (rough) events of our period.
 - a. Horrible Histories: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s5MkSv5_P4. [Least nuanced, maybe most fun.]
 - b. History Summarized: England: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XWom9errMs>. [Useful overview of the whole medieval period, good combination of quick and relatively nuanced. This channel's playlists on European and American History (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDb22nVXGgcoEyYf9CdYbEgeVNauzZkz>) and Asian History (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDb22nVXGgc9piWuJp86E66rlXVjv_A-) are also worth a look
 - c. Ten Minute History of English and Britain: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLm8I5TkIJrVkyO8zFWWIsgH1yuwSUER-S>. [More detailed and nuanced than either of the previous videos. Definitely worth a look.]
 - d. Crashcourse: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6-qo-Irnbdj_FDsmc9sOaQs4Q_TR_v_7. [While there aren't many videos focused on Early England the Crashcourse videos are fab for getting a wider sense of what was going on in the world at the time.]
2. Podcasts
 - a. In Our Time. [This BBC podcast hosts three academics talking about a particular subject for about 45 minutes. Come for the nuance and detail. Stay for those moments when the host, Melvin Bragg, gets in a huff because one of the academics disagrees with him.]
 - i. Early Medieval: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01hb35l>
 - ii. Medieval: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01hb3y1> [Not all of these are from our time period, but do have a flick through because some are.]
 - b. You're Dead to Me. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07mdbhg>. [Another BBC podcast. Although not many episodes on exactly our period, I would recommend the ones on 'Old Norse Literature', 'Ancient Greek and Roman Medicine', 'Boudica', and 'Mansa Musa'.
 - c. The Medieval Podcast: <https://www.medievalists.net/category/podcast/> [Again, you will need to look through to find stuff specifically for our era, but some nice general stuff of practicalities of life i.e. beer, laundry etc.]
 - d. Medieval Death Trip: <https://www.medievaldeathtrip.com/> [Some nice focus on exploring the primary texts.]
3. Academic Textbooks
 - a. *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, edited by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (CUP, 2nd edn, 2013) [extremely useful]
 - b. Daniel Donoghue, *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* (Blackwell, 2004) [good intro]

- c. *Formative Britain: An Archaeology of Britain, Fifth to Eleventh Century AD*, by Martin Carver
- d. *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, edited by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne
- e. *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, edited by R.M. Liuzza
- f. James Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (1982, repr. Penguin, 1991) [illustrated history]
- g. Robert Bartlett, ed., *The Medieval World Complete* (Thames & Hudson, 2010) [broad introduction to medieval culture via art]
- h. Useful history books in the OUP Very Short Introduction series:
 - i. John Blair, *The Anglo-Saxon Age*
 - ii. John Gillingham and Ralph Griffiths, *Medieval Britain*

Texts and Translations:

While you will likely encounter Old English literature as you start your journey to learning Old English, you will likely want to read some Old English literature in translation before you arrive at Oxford.

1. Treharne, Elaine, ed. and trans., *Old and Middle English: An Anthology, c.890-1400* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) [I highly recommend that you get your hands on your own copy of this as we'll be using it throughout the year. This one covers Middle English as well as Old, so will help you start to think about the cross-overs between the two. It contains translations of the Old English texts and glossed versions of the Middle English.]
2. *Beowulf*. [Beowulf is, as we say, a big damn deal. There are so many flavours of Beowulf translation out there, try and read at least two. Seamus Heaney's (1999) is probably the best known, but I would also really recommend Maria Dahvana Headley's (2020) as a fun contrast. I dare you not to want to read it out-loud. Other useful ones are Crossley-Holland (1999); or Liuzza (2000); or Swanton (1997) or Klaeber, 4th ed. (2008)]
3. *The Word Exchange: Anglo-Saxon Poems in Translation*, ed. by Greg Delanty and Michael Matto (New York and London: Norton, 2011) [Unlike the Treharne translations, which aim to be more of a literal translation, these are literary translations. This means that you may find them easier to read as poems, so if you want to get into the texts quickly this book is a good (and cheap) way to do so. The thoughts on translation at the back are also highly recommended.]

For Fun:

I find that one of the best ways of imagining the past and its people in a complex fashion is to read fiction inspired by or set in the period in question. Many, although not all, of these books are written by scholars of the age in which the tales are set. With that said, it is worth remembering that these books are fiction, and they should be judged on whether or not they make a good story not on their adherence to our knowledge of the period. I suggest you read at least one of the books below:

- Griffith, Nicola, *Hild* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013)
- Whitworth, V. M., *The Bone Thief*: (Ebury Digital, 2012) and the sequel *Traitor's Pit*

Papers 3 & 4 – Prose Fiction

The following underlined texts, around which our sessions will be based, must be read before the start of Michaelmas term. Suggestions for additional reading follow each set text, but these are not obligatory; rather, they should be treated as guides for further exploration. A complete syllabus will be provided at the beginning of term.

- Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales (1833-1845)*. The Oxford University Press World's Classics edition is best, but if you're not able to procure it, please ensure that you read the following stories: 'The Masque of the Red Death,' 'The Man of the Crowd,' 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' and 'The Black Cat.' After gaining some familiarity with Poe's stories, you might take a look at the non-fiction, such as his 'Review of *Twice-Told Tales*' and the essay 'Philosophy of Composition.' Poe's poems might also be of interest, particularly: 'The Raven,' 'Dream-Land,' 'Ulalume: A Ballad,' 'Annabel Lee,' and 'The Bells.'
- Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41)*. After you've tackled this, you might consider reading *Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield*, particularly if the *Bildungsroman* genre sparks your interest. *Sketches by Boz (1833-1836)* is also noteworthy, as it sheds light on Victorian life in the metropolis. You do not have to read *Sketches* in full, but it would be helpful to familiarise yourself with it.
- Charlotte Brontë, *Villette (1853)*. For background reading, you might consult Brontë's letters, her drawings and watercolour paintings, and her juvenilia. For the latter, see *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal* in the the Oxford World's Classics edition. You are also encouraged to read her sister Emily Brontë's poetry as preparation, much of which can be found online.
- Henry James, *Daisy Miller (1878)*. If James' depictions of childhood and youth interest you, try *What Maisie Knew (1897)* or 'Turn of the Screw' (1898). Other stories and novellas of note include: 'The Aspern Papers,' 'The Jolly Corner,' and 'The Beast in the Jungle,' as well as his classic essay 'The Art of Fiction.' James' travel sketches, such as those found in *English Hours* and *Italian Hours*, also make for good preparatory reading. If you're keen to explore the syntactically adventurous late work, try either *The Wings of the Dove* or *The Ambassadors*.
- James Joyce, *Dubliners (1914)* and the first six episodes of *Ulysses (1922)* (up to and including 'Hades'). In *Dubliners*, please pay special attention to 'Eveline,' 'Araby,' 'A Painful Case,' and 'A Little Cloud.' If you wish to range farther afield, seek out Joyce's collection of poetry, *Chamber Music* or try your hand at the notoriously difficult *Finnegans Wake*, particularly the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' section. Happily, there are recordings of Joyce reading the latter online.
- Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time (1925)*, which you can find in either *The Collected Stories* (Everyman's Library) or in the Scribner edition. (It is also available in the British Arrow edition of *Snows of Kilimanjaro* from 'On the Quai at Smyrna' onwards.) Please also read Tim O'Brien's story 'The Things They Carried' in his short story collection of the same name (1990). Once

you've read the Hemingway and O'Brien, you might try a range of other authors on conflict and war, including: Ambrose Bierce, Rose Macaulay, Evelyn Waugh, Martha Gellhorn, C.L.R. James, Graham Greene, Christopher Isherwood, Mary McCarthy, Yusef Komunyakaa, Tim O'Brien, Michael Herr, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Edwidge Dandicat, Bảo Ninh, and Nico Walker.

- For an intriguing long-form investigation into a case of desertion in the U.S. War in Afghanistan, see the second season of the podcast *Serial*.
- Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (1933). Please also read Woolf's essay 'The Death of the Moth' (1942), as well as Annie Dillard's 'The Death of the Moth', published in *Harper's* (1976). A helpful contextual piece is John Berger's 'Why Look at Animals?' (1977), a pdf of which is available online. (Don't fret if you can't find it; a scan will be provided in Michaelmas.) For more writing on animals, ranging from realist to nonsense to non-fiction, see: Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Eileen Myles' *Afterglow: A Dog Memoir*.
- James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1956). See also Baldwin's short stories, such as 'Sonny's Blues', and essay collections like *Notes of a Native Son* and *The Fire Next Time*. You might also want to seek out other Black American authors of the early- to mid-twentieth century, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, and Richard Wright, as well as of the contemporary moment, such as Toni Morrison, Claudia Rankine, and Ta-Nehisi Coates. For theory and criticism of the Black diaspora, see Aimé Césaire, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Sylvia Wynter, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy.
 - The *LRB* podcast also has an excellent interview with Jesse McCarthy called 'Blind Spots' (28 April 2021).
- Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (1963). Plath's poems, such as those found in *Ariel* (1965, posthumously) and *The Colossus* (1960), will make for useful background reading. You might also consult the two-volume *Letters of Sylvia Plath*, edited by Peter K. Steinberg and Karen V. Kukil, as well as *The Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962*, edited by Kukil. The most recent biography is Heather Clark's *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath*.

Please also read the following short stories:

- Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Wakefield' in *New England Magazine* (May 1835)
- Sherwood Anderson, 'Book of Grotesques', 'Hands', 'Paper Pills,' and 'Adventure' in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)
- Zora Neale Hurston, 'The Gilded Six-Bits' in *Story* (1933)
- Carson McCullers, 'A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud' in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951)
- Ottessa Moshfegh, 'Slumming' in *The Paris Review* (2014); also found in *Homesick for Another World* (2017)
- George Saunders, 'Adams' in *The New Yorker* (2004); also in *In Persuasion Nation* (2006)
 - The New Yorker Fiction podcast features Joshua Ferris reading and discussing Saunders' story (episode dated 10 Aug. 2009).

N.B. Most of these stories are available online, if no hard-copy can be found ahead of Michaelmas.

There will be room in the classes and tutorials to pursue your enthusiasms, so I suggest reading as widely as possible across the period (1830 to the present) during the summer. In addition to the core texts above, you might explore some of the following authors: Thomas Hardy, Lewis Carroll, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Muriel Spark, Chinua Achebe, and Zadie Smith. I am very happy to accommodate essay topics on North American authors, including: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Edith Wharton, Jean Toomer, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Edward Albee, Claudia Rankine, Elizabeth Smart, Alice Munro, and Anne Carson.

Before the course begins, it is important to familiarise yourself the broader preoccupations of the Victorians and Modernists, as well as to get a basic handle on narrative theory. Here are a few recommendations for further reading:

Studies of the Victorian/Modern periods:

- Philip Davis, *The Victorians 1830-1880* (2004)
- Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement* (2005)
- Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms* (1995)
- Peter Brooker (ed.), *Modernism/Postmodernism* (1992)

Books on fiction:

- James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (2008), especially the chapters ‘Narrating’, ‘Detail’, and ‘Character’.
- Ian Watt, ‘Realism and the Novel Form’ in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957)
- Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (2004)

More focused studies:

- Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (1992)
- Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 4th ed. (2017)
- Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961)
- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (1992)

And, looking beyond your first term . . .

In your second term at Oxford you will be studying Poetry and Poetics from 1830 to the present. If you have time over the summer, anthologies are a very good place to start. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 2 volumes, 3rd edition (2003) [especially volume 1], is a good place to start. You might sample bits and pieces of the following poets (see also the ‘Poetics’ section at the back of both volumes):

- Alfred Tennyson
- Robert Browning
- Walt Whitman

- Emily Dickinson
- Christina G. Rossetti
- Gerard Manley Hopkins
- Thomas Hardy
- Charlotte Mew
- Robert Frost
- Edward Thomas
- D. H. Lawrence
- T. S. Eliot
- Ezra Pound
- W. B. Yeats
- Langston Hughes
- Gertrude Stein
- William Carlos Williams
- Wallace Stevens
- Marianne Moore
- W. H. Auden
- Elizabeth Bishop
- Lorine Niedecker
- Gwendolyn Brooks
- Audre Lorde
- Philip Larkin
- Stevie Smith
- Sylvia Plath
- Frank O'Hara
- James Schuyler
- Lucille Clifton
- Carl Phillips
- Thom Gunn
- A. R. Ammons
- John Ashbery
- Derek Walcott
- Seamus Heaney
- Claudia Rankine
- Kay Ryan

Other anthologies you might explore:

- *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle and Song*, ed. Kevin Young
- *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, ed. Christopher Ricks
- *Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, ed. Rita Dove
- *Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry*, ed. Keith Tuma

The Keble English Team
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