



## Reading Lists for English (2026-7)

In your first year at New College you'll be working towards 'Prelims', taken in Trinity Term. This consists of four papers. Paper 1 ('Introduction to English Language and Literature') will introduce you to the formal study of the English language and to some recurrent problems in literary theory and history. What is literature and who decides? How important is the figure of the 'author' in determining meaning? What makes literary language different from other kinds of language? Much of the teaching for this paper happens through compulsory faculty lectures and classes, and it is assessed by a portfolio of two essays submitted in week 5 of Trinity term. You will also have additional tutorials and classes in college, spread across the three terms. The other papers are Paper 2 (Old English), taught across Michaelmas and Hilary terms; Paper 3 (1830-1910), taught in Michaelmas; and Paper 4 (1910-present) taught in Hilary.

When you come up in October, you'll be expected to have read *everything* on the Core Reading List and some of the material on the General List, where you should follow up your own enthusiasms and interests. Tutorials at Oxford operate on Nabokov's principle that 'a good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a re-reader.' In term-time, then, we expect you to be rereading the basic primary texts alongside secondary criticism and more specialised material relevant to the essay topics you choose. There isn't time during busy Oxford terms with essays to write, criticism to read, lectures to attend (and any number of other things to do) to be desperately trying to get to the end of *Middlemarch*!

Close reading is at the heart of all our work as literary critics and so we encourage you to buy (hard) copies of as many texts as you can, and to read with a pencil in hand. Essays for Papers 3 and 4 will often begin by trying to make sense of a passage that puzzled you on a first reading. Try to take some time over the summer to build up a library. Frequent your local Oxfam shop; keep an eye out for libraries selling off old copies; consider buying second-hand rather than new copies of the more expensive texts on Amazon.

In your first term, you will be studying for the Victorian paper offline. Secondary reading will be available to you in libraries, you will be submitting hand-written essays, and you'll be making notes on your reading on paper. Although online resources and LLMS can be very useful for the study of English at an advanced level, we want to make sure that you develop the basic skills of reading, note-taking, and planning and organizing essays on your own.

We will have some classes at the beginning of term on grammar and essay-writing. To this end, it would be *very useful* if you could buy a copy of David Crystal's *Making Sense of English Grammar* (used copies in very good condition for £3 on Amazon). Unless you're confident that you've already mastered the material (possibly in Latin or a foreign language A-level) it would be a good idea to work through the book slowly, noting down any questions or difficulties as you go.

## CORE READING LIST

### Victorian

Charlotte Bronte: *Jane Eyre, Villette* [unless otherwise specified, I recommend that you buy the Oxford World's Classics editions]

Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

Paul Laurence Dunbar: *Selected Poems* (buy the Penguin Classics edition, edited by Herbert Martin)

George Eliot: *Middlemarch*

George Gissing: *New Grub Street*

Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure*

'Hap,' 'Neutral Tones,' 'Thoughts of Phena,' 'I Look Into My Glass,' 'Drummer Hodge,' 'The Darkling Thrush,' 'The Self-Unseeing' (I suggest the OWC edition of the *Selected Poems*, ed. Samuel Hynes)

Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'The Caged Skylark,' 'Felix Randall,' 'Carrion Comfort,' 'No Worst,' 'Pied Beauty,' 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves,' 'Spring and Fall,' 'The Windhover' [the OWC includes some useful selections from the prose]

Henry James: *The Portrait of a Lady*, short stories as collected in *Tales of Henry James*, edited by Christof Wegelin and Henry B. Wonham for the Norton Critical Edition.

Alfred Lord Tennyson: 'Ulysses,' 'Tithonus,' *In Memoriam*, *The Princess*. [The Penguin *Selected Poems* edited by Christopher Ricks is the best edition to buy]

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* [I suggest buying the Norton Critical Edition of *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*]

### Modern

W. H. Auden: *Selected Poems* [buy the revised 2010 Faber edition, ed. Edward Mendelson]

Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* [there is a new edition by Faber]

T. S. Eliot: *Collected Poems*, 1909-1962. You should buy the Faber edition and read everything up to p.80 (*Prufrock and Other Observations*, *Poems* [1920], *The Waste Land*), as well as *Sweeney Agonistes* and 'Burnt Norton'.

E. M. Forster, *Howards End* [I recommend the Norton Critical Edition]

David Foster Wallace, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* [any edition]

James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* [You should buy Jeri Johnson's edition of the 1922 text for Oxford World's Classics.]  
 Robert Lowell: *Life Studies* [buy the Faber *New Selected Poems*]  
 Ezra Pound: 'In a Station of the Metro', 'The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter', 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' [If pushed, you can read these on the Poetry Foundation website, looking carefully at the formatting of the original pages. But I would also recommend buying the Penguin edition of Pound's early writings, ed. Ira B. Nadel.]  
 Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*, 'A Sketch of the Past' (in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind)  
 W. B. Yeats: all of the poems in the Faber 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, ed. Seamus Heaney

## GENERAL READING LIST

### Victorian

Matthew Arnold: 'To Marguerite—Continued,' 'The Buried Life,' 'Dover Beach,' 'To a Friend,' 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'  
 Emily Bronte: *Wuthering Heights*, 'Remembrance,' 'The Prisoner'  
 Elizabeth Barrett Browning: *Sonnets from the Portuguese*  
 Robert Browning: 'Porphyria's Lover,' 'My Last Duchess,' 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,' 'The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church,' 'Love among the Ruins,' 'Fra Lippo Lippi,' 'Andrea del Sarto,' 'A Toccata of Galuppi's,' 'How it Strikes a Contemporary'  
 Wilkie Collins: *The Woman in White*  
 Charles Dickens: *Hard Times*, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Our Mutual Friend*  
 George Eliot: *Mill on the Floss*, *Daniel Deronda*  
 Elizabeth Gaskell: *Mary Barton*, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*  
 Thomas Hardy: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*  
 Gerard Manley Hopkins: *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (Oxford paperback)  
 Henry James: *Washington Square*, *The Europeans*, *The American*, *The Aspern Papers*, 'The Middle Years,' 'The Next Time,' *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*  
 John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*  
 Alfred Lord Tennyson: 'The Lady of Shalott,' 'The Lotos-Eaters,' 'Break, Break, Break,' 'Frater Ave Atque Vale,' *Maud*.  
 Bram Stoker: *Dracula*  
 Oscar Wilde: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 'The Critic as Artist'

### Modern

Samuel Beckett: *Murphy*, *Watt*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *All That Fall*  
 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Agent*

Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* [the Fourth Estate edition is fine but if you can afford it, I would recommend the hardback Everyman edition of the collected prose]

Ford Madox Ford: *The Good Soldier*

E. M. Forster: *The Longest Journey, A Passage to India*

Ernest Hemingway: *The Sun Also Rises*

Christopher Isherwood: *Berlin Stories, Prater Violet*

James Joyce: *Dubliners*

D. H. Lawrence: *Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, 'The Woman Who Rode Away,' Women in Love*

Katherine Mansfield: 'Bliss,' 'The Little Governess,' 'The Tiredness of Rosabel,' 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel,' 'The Fly'

Ezra Pound: 'Homage to Sextus Propertius,' 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', *Cantos* I-XVI

Virginia Woolf: *Jacob's Room, Mrs Dalloway, The Waves, Between the Acts*. Non-fiction prose: 'Character in Fiction,' 'Modern Fiction,' *A Room of One's Own*

Among post-1950 writers, you should know the work of some of the following:

Martin Amis, James Baldwin, Sybille Bedford, Saul Bellow, J. M. Coetzee, Bret Easton Ellis, Allen Ginsberg, William Golding, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, Ian McEwan, Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Vladimir Nabokov, V. S. Naipaul, Frank O'Hara, Harold Pinter, Sylvia Plath, Philip Roth, Tom Stoppard, John Updike, Derek Walcott.

At this stage, I don't think it is helpful to focus on secondary reading (beyond the introductory essays to your editions of individual texts). But if you want to get an overview of *some* of the historical and cultural issues we will discuss, I recommend Robin Gilmour's *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-90* (Longman, 1994) and Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1991).

## OLD ENGLISH READING LIST

*A Guide to Old English*, ed. B. Mitchell and F.C. Robinson 8th ed. (Oxford, 2012).

Please read as much of its Introduction as possible before arriving.

T.A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London, 1972)

S.B. Greenfield & D.G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York, 1986)

*The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden & M. Lapidge, (Cambridge, 1991)

*A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. P. Pulsiano & E. Traherne, (Oxford, 2001)