

## Tutorials in English Language and Literature

### Author Study: Charles Dickens

This tutorial affords the rare opportunity of an extended study of the work of Charles Dickens in his cultural milieu. Students will trace the arc of his novelistic development from the delightful exuberance of the early *Pickwick Papers* and the searing Newgate novel *Oliver Twist* through the great social novels of the 1850s to culminate in the sophistication of *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*. There may also be a chance to look at some of his short stories and journalism, as well as his letters. As the tutorial develops, students will acquire a detailed understanding of the author's output and significance and the major critical debates in the field of Dickens studies.

### Author Study: Jane Austen

The novels of Jane Austen are much beloved throughout the Anglophone world and beyond. This tutorial offers students the chance to deepen their acquaintance with her life and work from a scholarly perspective. As well as studying the major novels in their cultural and intellectual context, analysing the themes and techniques of her sharp-witted social commentary, they will also be able to explore her letters, her juvenilia and early epistolary novel *Lady Susan*, and her two unfinished novels, *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*. The tutorial will familiarize students with the major critical debates surrounding Austen's work and ultimately guide them to an increased understanding of Austen's significance in the development of the nineteenth-century novel.

### Author Study: Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is an author so important that he has a tutorial all to himself, though it is important to remember that he was one of a number of playwrights working in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. These literary contexts are important and can be explored in this tutorial. We will be able to read a wide range of the plays, including the histories, the tragedies, the comedies, and the late plays, as well as his sonnets and narrative poems. It would be possible to read Shakespeare alongside contemporaries (for instance considering *Hamlet* alongside other revenge tragedies by Kyd, Webster, and others, or the sonnets in relation to Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*). We could also read Shakespeare according to themes emerging across his works, or consider stage and screen adaptations. The possibilities are exciting and almost endless.

### Author Study: T.S. Eliot

T.S. Eliot is undoubtedly a colossus in the landscape of both Modernism and poetry in English more generally, as poet, playwright, critic, and editor. An American who 'reinvented' himself as an Englishman, he became a Christian, in 1927, was baptized into the Church of England, and produced a series of Christian poems as well as

plays. These tutorial will explore his early poetry (for instance *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*, *The Waste Land*) in the context of emerging Modernist preoccupations, his early and later Christian poetry (culminating in the *Four Quartets*), his relationship to Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group, his literary criticism, his light verse (such as *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* — the basis for the later musical *Cats*), and his plays. Students will also have the chance to explore his important critical essays, many of which overhauled long-held critical opinions. Through exposure to the many perceptive critics of Eliot's work, students will acquire new understanding of the scholarly debates in the field and an enhanced appreciation of his significance in the history of English poetry. Eliot's work and life allow us to understand many of the key impulses in English literature in the twentieth century.

### **Author Study: Wordsworth**

During the average course on Romantic literature there is rarely time or space to do adequate justice to Wordsworth's longer poems such as *The Excursion* or the monumental *Prelude*, which are central to his poetic philosophy and influential in literary terms. In this extended study, students will be able to study these works in the context of his early works, his seminal and radical collaboration with Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, and his celebrated shorter lyrics. Students will explore his output in its intellectual and cultural context, as well as acquainting themselves with the major critical debates in the field of Wordsworth studies.

*More Author Study options may be available upon request, e.g. George Eliot, Alfred Tennyson, etc.*

### **The American Novel after 1945**

This tutorial focuses on recent (post-Second World War) novels in the USA and Canada. Great variety is on offer, and we can explore work engaging with the Second World War and its aftermath (for instance Heller's *Catch 22*, Styron's *Sophie's Choice* or O'Connor's *Wise Blood*). Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* offers a different, more confessional perspective which explores the experience of American women in the 1950s. The American South can be approached through the writing of Harper Lee, Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, and William Styron. We can also read work by African American writers such as Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and Alice Walker. Other possibilities include the 'metamodern' writing of David Foster Wallace and the feminist work of Margaret Atwood.

### **C.S. Lewis in Context**

This tutorial involves a study of the life and major works of C.S. Lewis. Lewis wrote in a number of genres. These include works of fiction, most famously the *Narnia* books, the *Space Trilogy* and *Till We Have Faces*. He also wrote works of imaginative Christian apology such as *The Great Divorce* and *The Screwtape Letters*, apologetic and philosophical prose works such *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain*, and a

number of academic works, as well as the autobiographical texts *Surprised by Joy*, *A Grief Observed*, and *The Pilgrim's Regress*. This tutorial will allow all these facets to be explored, as they all interrelate. Lewis's fiction will be discussed in relation to some of his key literary influences, including the Victorian fantasy writer George MacDonald, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Early Modern texts such as Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and John Milton's *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*. Students will encounter different biographical perspectives on Lewis (for instance those of Walter Hooper, A.N. Wilson, George Sayer, and Alister McGrath) and a range of criticism on Lewis — positive and negative. Literary topics under consideration may include for instance allegory versus applicability, travellers' tales, myth making, the role of didacticism in children's literature, and Horatian versus Juvenalian satire.

## Creative Writing

In this tutorial, students will cover a variety of approaches to creative writing, with a focus on developing their own practice. Through the study of various literary models, considering aspects of different forms and styles in terms of craft and technique, they will go on to produce their own portfolio of new work. Students may write in any genre, from fiction and poetry to life writing and the lyric essay, and can choose to focus on one substantial work or several shorter pieces. Alongside working on new writing projects, they will also be encouraged to develop revision and editing skills.

## Detective Fiction from Poe to the Golden Age

In this tutorial, students will have the opportunity to trace the development of a genre from its origins in the Newgate and other early crime novels, through the foundational figure of Poe's Dupin and early detectives in the fiction of Dickens and Collins to the celebrated partnership between Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. The tutorial will then take in radical female detectives of the *fin de siècle* en route to what is generally considered to be the Golden Age of detective fiction, featuring such luminaries as Agatha Christie, G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, and Ngaio Marsh. Along the way, students will contemplate the cultural conditions of the genre's creation, explore its relation to the institutions of law and order, and consider it in the light of literary theory positing that it forms a model for the fundamental processes of reading.

## English Christian Autobiographical Writing

Since the early centuries of the Church, Christians have left accounts of their lives and spiritual experiences in autobiographies, memoirs, letters, and poetry. In this tutorial, we have the opportunity for careful study of Christian autobiographical texts from the medieval period to the twentieth century. We will start with two of the earliest texts every written in English by women, the *Revelations of Divine Love* of Julian of Norwich (late fourteenth century) and the *Book of Margery Kempe* (early fifteenth century). We will then move to the seventeenth century to explore *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) by John Bunyan, the Baptist author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. We will also consider the poems and meditations of the seventeenth-century authors John Donne, George Herbert, and Thomas Traherne. In the nineteenth century

we will work on the poems of the nature poet John Clare and the Victorian Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose experiments in form anticipate Modernism. In the twentieth century we have a range of possible texts to work with, especially C.S. Lewis's autobiographical texts *Surprised by Joy*, *A Grief Observed*, and *The Pilgrim's Regress*.

## English Literature and the Natural World

Throughout the history of English literature, the natural world has been a constant presence. In this tutorial we will be able to study texts from every historical period. Among earlier works, we can for instance study the medieval poem *Gawain and the Green Knight* and Early Modern nature writers such as Thomas Traherne. The Romantic period of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century boasts some of the greatest nature poetry ever written, including the work of John Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the 'peasant poet' John Clare. Later in the nineteenth century we can read the nature poetry of Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins as well as the 1854 text *Walden* by the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau. In the twentieth century we have a feast of nature writing to choose from, including for instance the First World War poet Edward Thomas, the major Irish poet of the late twentieth century Seamus Heaney, and the academic and nature prose writer Robert Macfarlane. We will also have the opportunity to study ecocriticism, a recent and growing phenomenon in literary theory.

## English Literature of the Romantic Period

The general backdrop to this course is that of revolution, both politically and intellectually, and students will have the opportunity to study a wide range of texts in their dynamic historical and cultural context. Prose works covered range from the influential polemic of Burke, Paine and Wollstonecraft to the inventive output of the Romantic essayists such as Hazlitt and Lamb. There are multiple developments in the novel during this period, spanning Fanny Burney's conduct novels, Godwin's political thriller *Caleb Williams*, Edgeworth's didacticism, the efflorescence of the gothic novel – including such classics as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – Sir Walter Scott's influential historical romances and Jane Austen's celebrated novels of manners. Any of these may be studied in detail. The Romantic poets are, of course, some of the most celebrated in the language, and students may consider the groundbreaking qualities of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, trace the development of the Byronic hero, explore the visions of Blake and radical idealism of Shelley, or revel in the morbid sensuality of Keats.

## English Literature of the Victorian Period

This tutorial gives students the opportunity of exploring various aspects of a particularly rich period of English literary history, and one to which Oxford has made no small contribution. From the developing social criticism in the novels of Dickens and Gaskell, to the Gothic engagements of the Brontës and the realism of George Eliot, the novel is a significant and monumental form of the period. The tutorial also covers important

poetic developments such as the dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning and the metrical and stylistic innovations of Gerard Manley Hopkins, as well as the close links between literature and art through the work of writers associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the related Aesthetic Movement, such as Pater and Wilde, both of whom have strong Oxford connections. Other topics that may feature, depending on the student's interests, include the vogue for sensation fiction, the experimental fiction of the 'New Women' writers, developments in fantasy such as the work of Lewis Carroll and the burgeoning interest in fairy tales, and the restless, anxious literature of the *fin de siècle* by such authors as Stevenson, Gissing, and Symonds.

## The Essay in English Literature

In this tutorial, students are given the opportunity to trace the development of one particular form throughout literary history, considering its various manifestations according to different eras, locations, and contexts. Focusing on essays written in English, but considering the influence of essays in other languages, particularly the French origins of the form, students will read essays covering a range of styles and subjects, from the philosophical to the impressionistic, the political to the personal, the critical to the creative. The texts covered will also roam across historical periods and may include the intellectual explorations of Renaissance humanists, the moral exhortations of Samuel Johnson, the creative developments of Romantic and Modernist essayists, the work of political activists such as Audre Lorde, and contemporary examples by such writers as Rachel Cusk and Rebecca Solnit.

## The History of the English Language to c.1800

The history of the English language is intimately connected to the history of the British Isles themselves and also to the histories of Britain's imperial colonies. This tutorial allows us to trace the evolution of English from its beginnings in the Anglo-Saxon period, through Chaucer and the Gawain Poet and their use of Middle English, the age of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, the advent of the Royal Society and scientific English in the late seventeenth century, and the age of Dr Johnson and the first English dictionaries, to the use of English by Jane Austen and her contemporaries. There are many opportunities for studying later Victorian, modern, and postcolonial versions of the language. We can also make use of Oxford's rich historical collections (for instance the famous Anglo-Saxon Alfred Jewel in the Ashmolean Museum) to go deeper into the history of the English-speaking peoples.

## The Icelandic Sagas

There are several corpora of Icelandic Sagas, texts composed in the Old Norse language that tended to be written down in the later Middle Ages about quasi-historical or mythic events set in the earlier medieval Scandinavian world. This tutorial will typically focus on the *Íslendingasögur* ('sagas of Icelanders'), a substantial and popular group of texts concerning conflicts and feuds of Icelanders which, broadly speaking, are set between 870 AD (the beginning of the settlement of

Iceland) and a few decades after 1000 AD (Iceland's conversion to Christianity) but were written down in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These sagas are often prosimetric: they are written in laconic prose embedded with sophisticated skaldic verse. Students are likely to study, for example, *Egils saga*, an account of the life of the cantankerous poet Egill Skallagrímsson and his family's turbulent relationship with rulers; *Njáls saga*, a narrative driven by complex feuds, legal cases, and Iceland's Christianization; and *Laxdæla saga*, a text in which formidable female characters take centre stage. Often included in the *Íslendingasögur* corpus are the Vinland Sagas, which detail the Norse exploration of North America. There may also be the opportunity to study sagas from other corpora, such as the more fantastical *fornaldarsögur* ('sagas of ancient times') or the *riddarasögur* ('chivalric sagas'), which belong to the genre of European medieval Romance. Tutors will tailor the tutorial according to their own areas of expertise and students' interests. Students will also be expected to engage with secondary scholarship on the sagas.

Themes and topics integral to the discussions will include mythology and religion, the construction and problematization of gender ideals, heroism, emotionality, and Icelandic cultural identity. In this tutorial, the sagas will primarily be studied in translation, though students will be encouraged to scrutinize the Old Norse originals where relevant for a more complete appreciation of their literary and aesthetic qualities. Whereas the Old Norse tutorial will include study of the language itself and introduce students to a range of texts (including poetry written in eddaic and skaldic metres), this tutorial takes a different focus by immersing students in the saga world specifically.

## The Old Norse

The influence of the Old Norse language — the North Germanic ancestor of modern Scandinavian languages — is detectable in many aspects of modern English, including nouns (e.g. 'window'), verbs (e.g. 'ransack'), and pronouns ('they', 'their', and 'them'). Consequently, study of Old Norse is regularly included in English language and literature degrees with a medieval focus. Forms of Old Norse would have been known, spoken, and read — at various times — across continental Scandinavia, parts of Ireland, parts of Scotland, and northern England. It is the language of the so-called Viking Age, though the majority of Old Norse literature derives from manuscripts written in Iceland in the later Middle Ages. This tutorial, then, offers an introduction to the subject. If they wish, students will have the opportunity to examine the influence of Old Norse on the English language and study its salient grammatical features.

Whereas the Icelandic Sagas tutorial focuses on a single literary genre, this tutorial allows for study of a wider range of Old Norse literature written in prose and verse. In addition to some of the saga literature detailed in the overview of the Icelandic Sagas tutorial and relevant historical context, students will study a selection of mythological poems from the *Poetic Edda*, such as *Þrymskviða* ('The Lay of Þrymr'), a comic poem describing how Þórr disguises himself as the goddess Freyja to retrieve his stolen hammer. Another text which this tutorial invariably covers is Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, a kind of poetic handbook written in the thirteenth century which contains detailed mythological narratives. Students will also study the highly intricate

poetry written in skaldic metres, perhaps most famous for its complex kennings. While primary texts will mostly be read in translation, there will be the opportunity for students to produce their own translations of shorter works.

Old Norse literature offers a fascinating window not only into medieval Scandinavian culture, but also into medieval European culture more widely, with many texts featuring interactions beyond the Scandinavian world. There are also many similarities (and differences) to be seen between this tradition and the wider tradition of culture and mythology that is shared across the 'Germanic' groups of central and Northern Europe, including Anglo-Saxon England. Likewise, careful consideration of the Christian milieu in which Old Norse literature was written down is essential to its study. The tutorial can be tailored according to students' interests and the expertise of the tutor.

## Literature and Faith in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century witnessed great religious turmoil, triggered by radical developments in the fields of history, theology, and science. From the growing impetus of Evangelicalism to the far-reaching influence of the Oxford Movement, and from the challenges of rationalism to the repercussions of destabilizing scientific advances such as Darwin's evolutionary breakthroughs, students who take this tutorial will have the chance to explore the complex landscape of religious engagement and challenge in some detail and to read a variety of authors across a range of genres set against that background. Texts covered may include the intense Tractarian poetry of Keble and Newman, the restrained devotional verse of Christina Rossetti, the innovative and sensual work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Tennyson's fragmented elegy *In Memoriam*. Such affirmations of faith may be countered by the wistful disillusionment suffusing the work of Arnold and Hardy. Aspects of the novel explored might include Carlyle's philosophical musings on German idealism in *Sartor Resartus*, the universalism of Anne Brontë, the 'muscular Christianity' of Thomas Arnold and Charles Kingsley, the scepticism of Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*, the preacher portraits of George Eliot, and the liberal interrogations of Mrs Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere*. This is a century which produced literature both of profound negotiation with faith as well as momentous crises of conscience that still affect our outlook today.

## Literature in English, 1350–1550

In this tutorial we visit medieval England to study the most important English texts of the Middle Ages. At the heart of the tutorial will be the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer and the Gawain Poet, whose real name has never been discovered. We may also read *Piers Plowman* by William Langland, or the Arthurian tales of Thomas Mallory, or the Scots poets Dunbar and Henryson. We can also discuss the first two books ever written by women in English: *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*. Kempe's *Book* allows us unique glimpses into the life of a medieval woman, and Julian's text is one of the most theologically profound Christian works ever written. Wyatt, Skelton, and Thomas More, writers in the tyrannical court

of Henry VIII, conclude the period. We will also have the opportunity to go as far as we wish in encountering the texts in their original language, Middle English.

## Literature in English, 1500–1700

This tutorial covers one of the most exciting periods in all of English literature. It moves from the court of Henry VIII and its writers Thomas Wyatt, John Skelton, and Thomas More, through the Elizabethan and Jacobean decades to the English Civil War and the libertine literature of the Restoration.

Shakespeare lived and wrote in this period, and his writing may come in as we study Elizabethan and Jacobean drama: revenge tragedy and domestic tragedy. The ‘Metaphysical’ poets John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, and Andrew Marvell produced some of the most exquisite spiritual and erotic poetry in the language. We can also study John Milton and his *Paradise Lost* or the poems and meditations of the Anglican mystic Thomas Traherne. Finally, the libertine atmosphere of Restoration drama in the late seventeenth century embraces Aphra Behn, the first woman to make a living from writing.

## Literature in English, 1760–1830

This period is one of the richest and most exciting in all of English literature. Among the central attractions in this period we have the great Romantic poets: William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Burns, John Clare, John Keats, George Byron, and William Blake. It is also the period of Jane Austen, one of the best-loved (and most film-adapted) English novelists, and of Gothic literature, including Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe, William Beckford, Matthew Lewis, and others. In this tutorial we can also read the novels of Walter Scott or go further back to some of the writings of Samuel Johnson (who created the first English dictionary) and his friend and biographer James Boswell. It’s a fascinating period of revolution, new ideas, and new ways of writing and a very rewarding one to study.

## Literature and Music

In this tutorial, students will have the chance to explore various aspects of the close relationship between literature and music throughout the ages. Topics studied may range from the origins, development, and techniques of lyric poetry, through the songs of Shakespeare, the significance of music in nineteenth-century aestheticism, and portrayals of music in literature, to the consideration of contemporary song lyrics by writers such as Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan. Students may also have the opportunity to consider the relationship between music and dramatic texts through the incidental music of composers such as Mendelssohn or Grieg, the nature of programmatic music, and the intricacies of word-setting by such composers as Benjamin Britten.



## Modern Literature in English (1910 to the Present Day)

This tutorial allows huge scope for study of a wide range of authors from Britain and other areas of the English-speaking world. The tutorial will start by exploring the early twentieth-century phenomenon of Modernism, a cultural revolution which transformed literature. This early part of the period contains the great Modernists James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, W.B. Yeats, and Katherine Mansfield. The (mostly non-Modernist) writers of the First World War, including combatants such as Wilfred Owen and nurses such as Vera Brittain, offer some of the most powerful and poignant poems of the century. During the period between the two cataclysmic wars, we may choose to study for instance the novelists Evelyn Waugh, F. Scott Fitzgerald, George Orwell, or D.H. Lawrence, or the poet W.H. Auden. Major modern poets working in recent times include Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, Sylvia Plath, and Alice Oswald. The 'Theatre of the Absurd' in the work of Harold Pinter or Samuel Beckett is another important area of study. As we come closer to the present day the possibilities are myriad and may include postcolonial writers such as Chinua Achebe or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

## Postcolonial Literature

This tutorial offers wide flexibility to study the literature written in English from the Global South, or from writers drawing on a heritage from the Global South, protesting and exploring imperialism and its legacy — especially the legacy of the British Empire. The tutorial can especially cover writing that speaks from three large regions of the world, and students may range over all three or choose to specialize: Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean. Literature from Africa includes work by different generations of Nigerian novelists (including Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie), or the novels of the self-examining South African writer J.M. Coetzee, or the poetry of the exiled Malawian poet Jack Mapanje. Literature from South Asia can include work from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, and covers the panoramic novels of Salman Rushdie and Michael Ondaatje, and the acute and precise writing of Arundhati Roy. Writing from the Caribbean includes the epic and lyric poetry of Derek Walcott, and the novels of Andrea Levy and Jean Rhys. This tutorial can also cover writing which addresses the experience within Britain of immigrant communities from those same parts of the world, such as the novels of Monica Ali or Zadie Smith. Postcolonial literature offers doorways to a wide world of human experience, and also to sides of British history which are hidden or have been concealed.

## Psychological Approaches to Literature

Since the dawn of modern psychology with the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts, psychology and psychiatry have been used as lenses through which to view literary texts and their authors. This tutorial will combine work on psychoanalytic and other psychological literary theory with specific psycho-biographical studies of individual authors. In particular, we will consider the medieval mystic Margery Kempe and her accounts of complex inner experiences in her fifteenth-century *Book*, the theological and psychological contexts for John Bunyan's

1666 *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and the complex ways in which psychological disorder is present in the novels of Virginia Woolf and in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and her poetry. Some of the sessions will allow work on psycho-literary theory, by Freud, Jung, Lacan, Kristeva, Adam Phillips, Norman Holland, and others. There will be opportunities for close reading and exploring specific genres, for instance the Gothic, in the light of psychoanalysis. We will also consider the ways in which more modern psychological theories are now being used in the study of literature.

## Writing and Feminism

This tutorial explores literature which explicitly takes a feminist stance, exploring and questioning the position of women in the world, and studies the literary approaches and techniques with which various authors have chosen to write their feminism. It ranges widely across genres from political tracts to short stories, from works of theory to novels and from essay collections to poetry collections, as well as across different eras and continents: students will have the chance to read the seminal work of Wollstonecraft, the experimental work of the New Women, Woolf's famous extended essay *A Room of One's Own*, the work of French theorists, the efflorescence of 1970s feminism, and Black feminism and its relation to Womanism through the works of writers such as Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, and to set all this alongside contemporary work by writers such as Bernardine Evaristo, Amia Srinivasan, and Roxanne Gay, illustrating both the vital expansion beyond the bounds of White feminism and the continued importance and relevance of such literature in today's increasingly fraught debates on the nature of gender and sexuality.