

# Tutorials: English language and literature

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ENGLISH IS ONE OF THE LARGEST *and most vibrant faculties at Oxford. Students studying English have the chance to take tutorials in a wide variety of specialist subfields, hear lectures by some of the discipline's foremost scholars, and use excellent library facilities. Students can also become literary tourists, visiting the homes of authors as varied as Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, the Brontë sisters, Robert Burns, and William Wordsworth, and seeing the places which inspired their work.*

The descriptions below are copyright University of Oxford and cover tutorial courses offered by the University to matriculated undergraduates. SSO students follow such courses as closely as is practicable, though there may be scope for minor variation to take into account students' previous experience. Students will not necessarily cover all the material cited in the description (especially when they take the course as a secondary tutorial). All tutorials involve in-depth study: where the title might suggest a survey course, the content of the tutorial will involve focused study on part of the syllabus.

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## Beowulf and its Cultural Background

The focus of your work for this paper will of course be the poem itself, of which you will be expected to make a thorough study. Work set will include writing commentaries on passages taken from the first 498 lines of the poem: you will be asked to comment on aspects of content and style, and you will be expected to show a good understanding of the meaning of the passage. Essay questions will also be set on a very wide range of topics and texts relating to Beowulf. Related texts would include other Old English poems such as Finnsburg, Widsith, and Deor, analogues to the poem in literatures other than Old English and modern translations of the

poem. You might also wish to work on aspects of Anglo-Saxon art and archaeology relating to the poem, for example, the Sutton Hoo ship burial, or on relevant topics in Anglo-Saxon history such as the migration of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain, the transition from pagan to Christian culture, or the Viking invasions.

## Chaucer, Langland, and Gower

Here you can study Langland or Gower or both of them, and you can write on them on their own or in comparison with each other or with Chaucer.

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## Creative Writing (secondary tutorial only)

Students will have the opportunity to study various aspects of how to write creatively and to look at various literary forms and genres, although the emphasis for this course will be on the students' own attempts at writing. Students may choose to focus on writing fiction, poetry, or prose. Students may work on one or several pieces during their time in Oxford and will explore both how to write and how to rework and improve texts.

## CS Lewis in Context

This course involves an in-depth study of the life and major literary works of C. S. Lewis, placed in the context of the authors who influenced him. Throughout the course students will read Lewis's spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* as well as A.N. Wilson's important study, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*. The course begins with a detailed examination of the author whom Lewis described as his literary "master", Victorian fantasy writer George MacDonald. Focusing on MacDonald's influential 'mythopoeic' fantasy novels, *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, we examine the themes and literary techniques used by MacDonald in his Christian mythmaking and discuss how they are repeatedly utilised by Lewis. In addition to MacDonald, we will study authors including G.K. Chesterton (*The Man Who Was Thursday*), J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit* and "On Faerie Stories"), Edmund Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*), John Milton (*Paradise Lost*), William Blake (*Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), and Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*). Contextual authors and texts will be used to shed light on Lewis's literary and apologetic aims as well as specific works by Lewis such as *The Narnia Chronicles*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Space Trilogy*, *The Four Loves*, *The Great Divorce*, *Of Other Worlds*, and *Till We Have Faces*. Students will be introduced to a range of criticism on Lewis — both positive and negative — and topics under consideration will include: Christian notions on the nature of love and dying to the self; allegory versus applicability; travellers' tales; the role of didacticism in children's literature; and Horatian versus Juvenalian satire.

## English Literature, 1100–1509

This course on Middle English literature enables you to study British texts and authors from the early Middle Ages to the early Tudor period. You will study Chaucer and other major fourteenth-century writers such as Langland, the Gawain-poet and Gower, but it is also a good idea to study early texts such as the Owl and the Nightingale or Ancrene Wisse, and late medieval writers such as Malory and the Older Scots poets (e.g. Henryson and Dunbar) in order to gain a deeper sense of the different types of writing produced during changing cultural and historical circumstances. The course also contains a rich range of genres in verse and prose, including the lyric, the ballad, romance, devotional and mystical writing, and drama.

The course also includes commentary work, designed to ensure that your study of Middle English literature is accompanied by a good acquaintance with its language and registers. So alongside tutorial essays, you will write commentaries on passages taken from various set texts: Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (Riverside edition); *Ancrene Wisse* Books 6 and 7 (ed. Shepherd); Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B text, Passus XVI-XX (ed. Schmidt); *Pearl* (ed. Gordon); Malory, *Morte d'Arthur*, Books XVIII-XXI (ed. Vinaver); and Henryson, *Fables* (ed. Fox). Commentaries should be written as consecutive prose (with paragraph divisions, of course), and not as a set of comments in annotated form. You may wish to treat issues of content and style separately or in an integrated discussion, but remember that the style of a passage will often have a significant relation to its subject matter. Bear in mind too that a commentary is not a miniature essay, but a different kind of exercise in which you need to demonstrate both the capacity to see the passage whole and to deal with its detail in a discriminating way. While you will be expected to place the passage in context, you should do this in a focussed manner, not using this as an opportunity to write on matters extraneous to the passage in front of you. Always approach your commentary by asking yourself the best way of organising the discussion of your material, as passages will vary greatly in kind.

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### English Literature, 1509–1642

This course spans the period from the accession of Henry VIII to the start of the Civil War: it includes Skelton at the beginning and Milton's 1645 poems (but not his prose) at the end. This period is rich in many famous authors: poets include Spenser, Sidney and Donne, dramatists such as Marlowe, Webster and Jonson are popular, and prose writers include Nashe, More and Bacon. Students also have the opportunity to study less well-known authors: a wealth of early seventeenth-century poets (including Herbert, Crashaw, Herrick and Lovelace) can be studied on this paper and in recent years women's writing has commanded increasing critical attention. You may not write essays exclusively or primarily on Shakespeare in this course. Essays may focus on specific authors, or on more general themes. The latter allow students to write on more than one author and to address issues of broad literary interest in the period. Students have ample opportunity to relate their study of literature to its historical and cultural context, and to pay attention to matters of form and genre.

### English Literature, 1642–1740

This course encourages you to consider writings from 1642 to 1740 in terms of author, genre, and subject, and to range across the whole span of the period. Teaching aims to provide a sense of the major forms and styles which flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as direct you towards less well-known materials. The course encompasses Milton's prose and later poems (including *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*), the works of Aphra Behn, Sir Thomas Browne, John Bunyan, Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughan, Daniel Defoe, John Dryden, Andrew Marvell, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, drama of the Restoration, and of the period after the revolution of 1688–9. The boundaries include Sir William Davenant, Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Waller at the beginning and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and James Thomson at the end. Eliza Haywood may be studied in this course or in English Literature from 1740 to 1832, depending on which of her works receive the bulk of your attention.

### English Literature, 1740–1832

In this course you may study texts from the period 1740 to 1832 by author, theme, genre, or historical context. Teaching is designed to give you a sense of the major literary and cultural developments, as well as an opportunity to explore both well-known and less well-known materials in a very diverse period. In terms of the better-known figures the period covers novelists such as Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, Burney, Austen, Edgeworth, and Mary Shelley; poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Percy Shelley, Keats; and non-fiction prose writers such as Hazlitt and De Quincey. Mid-century writers such as Samuel Johnson and the poets Gray, Goldsmith, and Smart are also represented, and work on other writers of the period is very much encouraged. Genres such as the Gothic novel or the fiction of sensibility are other popular subjects. Themes such as 'the sublime', ideas of national identity, and the sense of the past, or historical issues such as the literary response to the French Revolution, and the exchanges between political writers such as Burke and Paine, are also taught for this course. The chronological boundaries are loosely set at Fielding at the beginning and Clare at the end.

### Linguistic Theory

This course is intended to provide students with a general knowledge of theoretical linguistics, with special reference to phonology, phonetics, grammar, lexis, semantics, and discourse structure and pragmatics. Students will be given the opportunity to explore major developments in linguistic theory since 1800.

### Literature in English, 600–1100

This course covers a wide range of Old English literature in prose and verse, and to locate it within its historical and cultural contexts.

### Literature in English, 1100–1530

This course covers a wide range of literature, from early Middle English to the early Tudor period, and to locate it within its historical and cultural contexts. Early Tudor authors on whom you may write include Skelton, Hawes, Barclay, Colet, Berners, More, Tyndale, and Fisher.

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### Modern Literature (1900 to the present day)

This course gives you the opportunity to write across a range of authors, focusing on some of the major thematic and stylistic preoccupations of the period. Alternatively, you may choose to focus more closely on a smaller number of authors.

Issues that you might choose to cover could include (for example) ideas of literary language, post-colonialism, literary experimentalism, primitivism, national (and other) identities, popular culture, concepts of literary value, journalism, gender and writing, intertextuality, literature and other art forms, technology, modernism, post-modernism, innovations in modern theatre, and ideas of the self.

Among the authors you might consider studying are Achebe, Amis (father and son), Atwood, Auden, Beckett, Bowen, Carter, Coetzee, Conrad, T.S. Eliot, Forster, Friel, Golding, Greene, Hardy (the poems), Heaney, Hill, Hughes, Joyce, Kipling, Larkin, Lawrence, Lessing, Mamet, Toni Morrison, Naipaul, Ondaatje, Orwell, Osborne, Pinter, Plath, the poets of the two World Wars, Pound, Rushdie, Shaw, Stoppard, Dylan Thomas, Walcott, Waugh, Woolf, and Yeats.

### Old English Literature

For this course you will read a range of Old English texts – both poetry and prose – in their original language (you are not expected to have any previous knowledge of Old English). The following texts are especially recommended for study: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Wanderer*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Aelfric's Life of St Edmund*, Bede's account of the poet *Cædmon* and an extract from *Beowulf* ('Beowulf's fight with Grendel' [lines 702-897]). All these texts are in Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 7th edition.



Work set during the course may include essays, translation of pieces of Old English prose, and writing commentaries on passages of verse from the texts listed above. For commentaries, you will be asked to comment on aspects of content and style, and to show that you have a good understanding of Old English as a literary language by discussing such poetic devices as occur in the passage (for example, kennings, or variation). Essay topics will include the specified texts, but you will also be given the opportunity to write on a wider range of Old English literature, and on aspects of Old English history, culture and language, if you wish.

### Old Norse

This course will involve translation and comment work on passages from the set texts, plus essay writing. Set texts are *Íslendingabók*; *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*; *Skírnismál*; *Hamðismál*; *Snorri's Edda* (ed. Faulkes, Oxford, 1982); *Gylfaginning*, ch. 43 to end.

### Shakespeare

The Shakespeare course provides a wonderful opportunity to get to grips with an entire canon and its contexts. Although you can study Shakespeare chronologically or generically (tracing his development from the early plays and poems or through a genre), the tutorial course provides opportunities to mix and match. Thinking thematically you can place early comedies with later histories (identity in *Comedy of Errors* and *Henry 5* for example); thinking generically you can consider sonnets and poems alongside poetry within the plays for instance. This is also a course in which you can make full use of your wider reading (knowledge of the Victorians or the twentieth century, for example) – Shakespeare and performance, political receptions, cultural uses, editorial history, new schools of criticism. You are expected to cover a representative range of the canon, but also to gain an in-depth knowledge of a number of plays. There is opportunity to write on genres and on periods ('early Shakespeare', 'mature comedies') as well as

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to pursue a topic-based approach.

## Special Authors

The Special Authors course gives students the opportunity, in conjunction with their tutor, to study either one or more author in great depth, or literature in a given genre or from a particular geographical area. At the time of application students should state which special author(s) or genre or geographical area they wish to specialise in. If they choose postcolonial literature they should specify which geographical area(s) they wish to specialise in. It is possible to specialise on a major author (Dickens, Eliot, etc) for eight tutorials, but if students wish to study minor authors, they should plan to study the wider genre or geographical area to ensure that the tutorial study is of comparable challenge and importance. Particular focuses of interest are:

- American Literature
- English Drama
- English Fiction
- English Poetry
- Medieval and Renaissance Romance
- Named major author(s) of student's choice
- Post-Colonial Literature
- Women's Writing

## Textual Criticism

The texts for this course are two Old English and two Middle English texts: Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*; Exodus line 1-298; *Ancrene Wisse*, Part 7; *Sir Orfeo*. These texts present a variety of manuscript situations: Exodus is a single manuscript; *Ancrene Wisse* has a multiple and complex manuscript tradition; *Sermo Lupi* has five manuscripts with some difference of material between the versions; *Sir Orfeo* is in three manuscripts with significant variation between the copies. You will use these texts to study the practices and methodologies of editing both Old and Middle English texts, covering many aspects of manuscript culture, looking at such issues as: the context of texts in miscellanies; the dissemination of texts, the critical appraisal of editorial decisions (e.g. agendas for editions as a whole, provision of glossary and its adequacy, adjudication of textual emendation). You can also examine the implications for date, context and authorship of editorial decisions, and investigate the

boundaries between editing and critical interpretation. You will need to be able to work with the texts in their original language in order to address these questions.

## The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England

Topics for study include the archaeology of kingship; Celtic influence on Anglo-Saxon material culture; rural settlement and landscape; the archaeology of the Conversion; the emergence of towns; and the 'Golden Age' of Northumbria. Attention will also be paid to the identification, description and discussion of artefacts.

## The History, Use, and Theory of the English Language

This course covers the development of the written language from the earliest records to c.1750, with particular attention to the emergence of a standard form.

## Victorian Literature (1832–1900)

This course gives you the opportunity to write across a range of authors, focusing on some of the major preoccupations, both thematic and stylistic, of the period. Alternatively, you may choose to focus more closely on a smaller number of authors.

Issues that you might choose to cover could include (for example) the development of realism, responses to industrialism, women's writing, concepts of identity and selfhood, guilt and transgression, memory, and uses of the past, verbal and metrical experimentation, attitudes towards race and Empire, class, domesticity, writing for children and the treatment of childhood, romance, popular fiction, and the relationship between literature and art.

Among the authors you might consider studying are Dickens, the Brontës, George Eliot, Hardy (the novels), Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Arnold, Emerson, Christina Rossetti, Swinburne, Collins, Thackeray, Clough, Carroll, Patmore, Carlyle, Ruskin, Pater, Gaskell, Gissing, Braddon, Shaw, Meredith, Oscar Wilde, Hopkins, Henry James, R. L. Stevenson, and Walt Whitman.