



British Literature III – Syllabus

Course Description: The novel and the stage flourished to success in Great Britain, Ireland, and Scotland. With literary greats such as Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens, we don't have to look far to find an excellent British story or script. With so many incredible authors to consider, we will delve into several prominent works of British long fiction during this course, exploring novels and stage plays through reading and critical response.

Prerequisite: *Intro to British Literature* or equivalent experience. However, this course may be taken **after** or **before** *British Literature II*.

Course Outline:

Week One: Introduction to the Novel – E.M. Forster, *A Room With A View*

Week Two: Forster, *continued*

Week Three: Introduction to the Stage – Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Week Four: Christopher Marlowe, excerpts from *Doctor Faustus*

Week Five: George Eliot, excerpts from *Middlemarch*

Week Six: George Bernard Shaw, excerpts from *Saint Joan*

Week Seven: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

Week Eight: Tolkien, *continued*

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Advanced Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.

Course Outline & Required Texts:

Please note that, on heavier reading weeks, we will have shorter or lighter written assignments. Our goal is that students are understanding and enjoying the texts!

The student should have access to the following works, via the internet or hard copies either borrowed or purchased. PDF documents are provided with some lessons, as noted below. Selections cover as wide a geographical and cultural background as possible, while still including essential works of the British literary canon.

Note on content: *While we always strive to pick clean and uplifting works, some highly valuable texts result from cultural backgrounds that involve some negative or challenging content. Therefore, we recommend that a parent or trusted adult at least briefly review works and reach out if they would like to substitute a work that matches student and/or family values.*

If you have any trouble finding a particular text, please let us know promptly so that we can help!

Week One & Two: E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*

Value: In *A Room with a View*, Forster creates a vivid character study of turn-of-the-century Great Britain. Throughout this novel, Forster employs a multi-perspective approach, enabling readers to catch a glimpse within and without each unique yet notably imperfect character while simultaneously being witness to relatable societal challenges.

Week Three: Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Value: A satirical drama set in Victorian society, *The Importance of Being Earnest* provides a humorous, if not altogether absurd, look at British social obligations. Witty dialogue and fictitious personae make this play memorable and accessible, even for those new to the stage.

Week Four: Christopher Marlowe, excerpts from *Doctor Faustus* (PDF provided)

Value: Transporting us back in time to 16th Century Great Britain, *Doctor Faustus* gives us a glimpse at the iconic style of Elizabethan plays while presenting a relatable dilemma which makes *Doctor Faustus* as relevant today as it was centuries ago. There is no wonder that this foundational British play has been adapted numerous times since the 1500s!

Week Five: George Eliot, excerpts from *Middlemarch*

Value: A series of interconnected stories composed of thoughtful, honest observations about English society, *Middlemarch* is considered Eliot's crowning achievement and one of the greatest British novels of all time. Whether covering the entire 850+ pages or only portions of this work, readers can appreciate Eliot's use of both realism and humor, in addition to a myriad of literary references demonstrating the time, research, and creative effort applied to this massive and monumental work of British literature.

Week Six: George Bernard Shaw, excerpts from *Saint Joan*

Value: One of Great Britain's most prominent playwrights, George Bernard Shaw is known for his social criticism and wordplay. After a fall from fame during World War I due to his controversial anti-war sentiments, Shaw re-entered the public eye through his play *Saint Joan* which ultimately enabled him to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

Week Seven & Eight: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

Value: A literature class about British novels would be remiss without paying homage to J.R.R. Tolkien, a man who revolutionized the standard of British literature and single-handedly created the genre of fantasy fiction. *The Hobbit*, Tolkien's first published masterpiece, is one of the best-selling books of all time.

All works above, excepting *The Hobbit*, are easily accessible online. However, students are more than welcome to find their own print copies! If purchasing or borrowing hard copies, there is no required edition; the student must simply cite the edition used. Simply, **please make sure that your copy of any given text is not abridged.**

We recommend that students interact with the text (highlighting and marginal notes), but students are *not* required to own copies of the works—texts from the library are perfectly all right! If you would like to own, inexpensive copies can be found online and at used bookstores.

As students tend to experience stronger reading comprehension when not reading on a screen, we would highly recommend that students have access to a hard copy of the works (a printed out PDF works well, too!).

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Advanced Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



British Literature III

Lesson One: Introduction to the Novel

SAMPLE LESSON

Once upon a time . . . someone wrote a really long story . . . and the form of the novel came into existence. (Many scholars suggest that the world's first novel is *The Tale of Genji*, written by a Japanese woman some 1,000 years ago [1].) In reality, the novel itself has been around for longer than anyone really knows.

When we look more closely at the circle of British literature, a non-ending debate ensues. What was the first English novel? Was it Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, published in 1485? Was it John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1678? Or was it Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or *Moll Flanders* (1722)? (2)

Regardless of which novel is the *first*, British society gave rise to the novel in a way that no other society had accomplished before, thus cementing the novel's critical place in the literary world. In this class, we will discuss the significance of the British novel as well as the British stage play, two literary forms which were indelibly shaped by the society that popularized them.

COURSE STRUCTURE –

If you are joining us after taking *Intro to British Literature* and *British Literature II*, you will notice a few differences in this class.

- **One author per lesson or lesson pair:** As we will only tackle longer works, we will have one author per lesson (for plays and excerpts) or lesson pair (for full novels).
- **Shorter lessons:** Since our readings are more intensive, we will shorten these lessons by providing brief contextual information and important topical insights, either about our texts as literary works or about relevant skills for literary study.
- **Multiple options for some assignments:** In several assignments, you will have the opportunity to choose a creative or scholarly response to our reading. Since we have longer readings, we want

you to have the chance to pick whatever assignment would be most enjoyable and beneficial—and least stressful—for you.

- When we believe a style of response is particularly important for your growth as a reader, writer, and critical thinker, there will only be one assignment option.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH NOVEL –

Although many people had written long works in centuries gone past, the British novel truly began to take shape in the 1700 and 1800s. Prior to this, most novels told fairy tales or stories of grand adventures about noble characters (consider *Pilgrim's Progress* or even the Spanish epic novel, *Don Quixote* [1605]). Other novels focused on the idea of turning fiction into fact. Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* essentially anthologized legendary tales of King Arthur. Even Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is written in a journalistic way so as to seem like a realistic history.

In the mid to late 1700s, writers began to break from “tradition,” constructing novels about ordinary people and the rhythms of daily life. Often, these novels began to take shape as reactions to the changes and developments of surrounding society. Henry Fielding (1707-1754) was the first English author to write novels that focused on ordinary English citizens and everyday life. His novel *Amelia* (1751) was the first novel of social reform, a style of writing upon which many famous English authors such as Charles Dickens would later build.

1800s England gave rise to the middle class, citizens who defined themselves by their occupation more so than their money. While there had long been citizens who did not fit squarely in with the poor population nor with the upper aristocracy, “the phenomenal rise in the number of middle-class households . . . as well as the influence they exerted, is undoubtedly a characteristic of Victorian England.” (3) The middle class began to find its place and define itself, and authors answered this call. Suddenly, there were novels written for the middle class, about the middle class—stories with which the everyday person with a normal job and a normal family and a little bit of normal leisure time could relate.

In addition to this, societal changes of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries gave way to a rise in literacy rates, more widespread education, a standardization of the English language, improvements in printing and distribution, and the development of circulating libraries. Thus, by the 1800s, it became possible for writers to make a living from their work, further bolstering the success of the Victorian novel and all English novels to follow.

When we study British novels, we see several defining elements:

- **Focus on class and social status:** Because class and social status have long been a major marker of British society, most classic English novels touch on these subjects in some way or another.
- **Focus on courtship, marriage, and love:** Other significant ideals of British society had long been courtship, marriage, and love. Before the 1800s, women rarely had the opportunity to make their own way in the world. They might need to marry for money rather than love, though marrying into a new social class might be frowned upon, etc. Marriage became much more complex in a society built upon the fabric of class and social standing.
- **Realistic characters across different social classes:** Beginning in the 1700s, British novels began to focus on real people, characters with whom the readers could really relate. Although fantastical novels with knights (literally in shining armor) or larger-than-life heroes may have been entertaining, working-class readers simply could not connect with these tales. Stories about realistic characters facing the social ladder became a defining feature of the English novel.
- **Real-life settings:** Again, with the 1700s came novels that focused on real-life settings—readers could see their way into Charles Dickens' London, with crowded streets and obvious division between the poor and wealthy. Readers could imagine their way into Jane Austen's Pemberley, envisioning the rolling hills and not-uncommon massive estate in the English countryside. Authors penned settings in Italy or India, England or Ireland; regardless, the surroundings were real, not in the least bit fantastical.
- **Preference for satire and/or comedic endings:** The English novel had little difficulty poking fun at its own society. Rather, British authors used their novels to comment on, critique, and satirize the fabric and ills of the society in which they lived. The English novel is rarely known for a happily-ever-after ending, which may leave some readers dissatisfied. However, since realistic connection with middle-class readers has been a hallmark of the English novel for several centuries now, we can expect endings that leave us without perfect closure.
- **Individualism:** British novelists regularly pushed literary boundaries, seeking to express a sense of individualism in a world of fairy tales and grandiose romances. Even as early as the 1700s, the idea of individualism became a major defining feature of the English novel. As the 1800s wore on, British authors explored individualism in direct contrast to the long-held class system and societal ideals.

E.M. FORSTER –

E.M. Forster was born in London, England on January 1, 1879. His architect father passed away before Forster turned two, leaving the little boy—an only child—and his mother alone but with enough money to live comfortably. Forster's paternal aunts assisted in raising the boy, providing him with a first glimpse at “domestic tension” – Forster's mother was free-minded, almost irresponsible; while his aunts—and the rest of his paternal family, were devoted Evangelicals with high moral standards.

As a boy, Forster attended Tonbridge School, Kent. Although Forster was unhappy at this school and later used this experience to criticize the English public school system, the school's theater has since been named in his honor. From 1897-1901, Forster attended King's College, Cambridge, where he gained a sense of individualism and skepticism, in addition to a better appreciation of cultural differences and how northern European cultures could benefit from many ideas from Mediterranean culture. From King's College, Forster graduated with two bachelors' degrees, one in the classics and one in history.

From his paternal great-aunt, Forster received a healthy inheritance, enabling him to pursue his desire to become a full-time writer after completing college. Forster is best known for his novels: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howard's End* (1910), and *A Passage to India* (1924). He also wrote another novel, *Maurice*, between 1913-1914, but this was not published until 1971, a year after Forster's death. Beside novels, Forster also wrote dozens of short stories, essays, critiques, letters, travel diaries, screen plays, film scripts, and even an opera. Forster's works explore many common themes of British literature while employing an ordinary, easy-going style. Forster is known for astute observations of human nature, middle-class life, and the differences between Mediterranean and northern European culture. (4)

THEMES AND TOPICS TO CONSIDER –

- **CHARACTERIZATION.** A hallmark of the English novel, none of Forster's characters are definitively the “hero.” Rather, this novel highlights, in many ways, the reality of humanity—the fact that we all have positive and negative traits, and that we all harbor a sense of selfishness and a drive to protect ourselves.
- **A ROOM WITH A VIEW.** When this novel opens, the narrative informs us that Lucy, a young Englishwoman, and her chaperone Charlotte had expected a room with a view during their stay in Italy. Despite what might seem like a simplistic title, the phrase “a room with a view” ultimately takes on numerous meanings throughout the rest of the novel.
- **SOCIOECONOMICS.** *A Room with a View* was published in 1908, a time when many societal ideals were changing in Great Britain. Think about how social class, economics, education, and

occupations play into Forster's novel while also noting the contrast between ideals of different locations and eras.

Assignment 1A: Begin reading E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*. We would recommend reading 2/3rds of the text this week if possible, as next week's assignment will include a research component.

Value: In *A Room with a View*, Forster creates a vivid character study of turn-of-the-century Great Britain. Throughout this novel, Forster employs a multi-perspective approach, enabling readers to catch a glimpse within and without each unique yet notably imperfect character while simultaneously being witness to relatable societal challenges.

Optional reading questions: You will not need to answer these questions for the assignment, but they will help you engage more deeply with the literature.

- What is your opinion of Forster's multi-perspective approach?
- Do you like or dislike these characters? Why? Do you think that Forster attempts to steer you one way or the other?
- What does the lack of clear “hero” reveal about human nature? What is your opinion of a story in which everyone seems rather two-sided and flawed?
- What does the story reveal about class and turn-of-the-century British society? Do you think that Forster had a positive or negative view of that society?
- Despite this novel being written in early twentieth century England, does the story have the ability to relate in any way with us now?

Assignment 1B: For this assignment, we will practice skills that make material stick in our memory, develop strong arguments and opinions, and foster critical thinking. Follow the steps below to engage with the text, using the assignment sheet (attached to the email) as your guide.

Don't be intimidated! This assignment only looks long because we walk through the steps below. If you complete this process while reading, it will barely add to your reading time, but will increase your comprehension of the text.

Step One: Actively engage with the text as you read.

- ***If you are using a book in which you can write:***
 - Underline, highlight, circle! This way, important elements will jump out at you when you review for future paper-writing.

- Make marginal notes—questions, comments, thoughts, clarifications.
- Doodle if you'd like!
- ***If you are using a borrowed book, an ebook, or a book in which you'd rather not write:***
 - Take good notes on a separate piece of paper or a digital document, using proper in-text citations (Lastname Pagenumber), *e.g.* (Forster 12).
 - Copy quotes that stand out to you (with proper citations).
 - Note your questions, comments, thoughts, and clarifications—remember to note page numbers so you can return later!

You will not receive more points for more pages, but will be graded on your detail, thoughtfulness, and accuracy. We expect that students will take good notes on the whole book, although some pages will naturally be more marked up than others.

Step Two: Note key themes.

- When you see a theme emerge in the text (childhood/faith/individualism, etc), write that word on the top of the page.
- If you aren't writing in your book, you can place themes in your notes with page numbers and, if required, an explanation.

Step Three: Keep a simple character chart.

- This can be a family tree, a bulleted list, whatever works best for you!
- Note the character's name and anything you will want to remember—how they relate to other characters, what they look like, your opinion on them, etc.

Step Four: Write a *brief* summary of each chapter after you finish reading it.

Please fill out and submit the assignment sheet, which will include the following elements:

- A list of at least five questions, comments, thoughts, or clarifications which you have noted in your reading
- At least two themes you have noticed in your readings thus far
- Your character chart
- Your brief summaries

Sources –

1. “The Tale of Genji.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 7 February 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Tale-of-Genji>.
2. Mambrol, Nasrullah. “A Brief History of English Novels.” *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 2 July 2020, <https://literariness.org/2020/07/02/a-brief-history-of-english-novels/>.
3. McBeath, VL. “Rise of the Middle Classes.” *VL McBeath – Historical Sagas and Mysteries*, <https://www.valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-england-1837-1901/the-rise-of-the-middle-classes/#:~:text=The%20phenomenal%20rise%20in%20the,wealthy%2C%20educated%20and%20important%20men.>
4. Beer, John Bernard. “E.M. Forster.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 June 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/E-M-Forster>.