



## **British Literature IV – Syllabus**

**Course Description:** This class conducts a final, broad overview of British literature. The first half of the class touches on poetry, explores notable essays and short stories, and revisits the stage. The second half of the class takes a closer look at variations of the British novel. Each author and text has been chosen for its impact on the literary world and the British experience as a whole.

### **Course Outline:**

**Week One:** Unconventional – British Poetry with Hardy, Hopkins, and Lawrence

**Week Two:** On Essays – Francis Bacon, Thomas Carlyle, and George Orwell

**Week Three:** The Short (and Long) of It – Fiction with Agatha Christie

**Week Four:** The Short (and Long) of It – Fiction with Agatha Christie, *continued*

**Week Five:** The Novel & The Stage – *Oroonoko* with Aphra Behn & Thomas Southerne

**Week Six:** The (Realistic) British Novel – *Barchester Towers* with Anthony Trollope

**Week Seven:** The (Humorous) British Novel – *Three Men in A Boat*

**Week Eight:** The (Humorous) British Novel – *Three Men in a Boat* (continued)

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

## **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 internet links provided in each lesson, attached PDF documents provided with some lessons, or hard copies borrowed or purchased. 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: Unconventional – British Poetry**

**Reading:** Thomas Hardy, a selection of poems (available online)

**Value:** A limited reading of Hardy’s vast collection of 947 poems does not do this author justice. In poetry, Hardy tended to focus on a few themes, the repetition demonstrating his interest in engaging with the same ideas from a multitude of angles. Though consistent, Hardy’s poems are known for their candidness, one reader referring to them like a “pailful of cold water in the face” (8) and many readers can appreciate the honesty with which Hardy explored difficult and sometimes eerie topics.

**Reading:** Gerard Manley Hopkins, a selection of poems (available online)

**Value:** On the other hand, Hopkins’ selection of poetry is limited at best; typical collections contain a mere thirty-seven poems. Despite this, even an inexperienced reader will likely notice the lack of traditional meter. The straightforward but unique way in which Hopkins uses words and the natural, honest rhythm he puts on the page leads us to wonder what type of author he might have become had his poetry been published during his lifetime. A priest by trade, Hopkins writes with religious undertones mixed with an often-relatable sense of doubt, question, and uncertainty.

**Reading:** D.H. Lawrence, a selection of poems (available online)

**Value:** Another prolific author, Lawrence wrote nearly 800 poems during his life in addition to novels, plays, short stories, essays, and travel books. Considered one of the most influential English writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Lawrence too explored different forms of poetical structure, rhyme, and word combinations. Lawrence’s poems, especially his later ones, utilize personal experience to explore everything from relationships to class divisions to social structures.

### **Week Two: On Essays**

**Reading:** Francis Bacon, “Of Studies” (PDF attached)

**Value:** Penned in 1625, this essay highlights, in brief, Bacon’s impact on the literary world. In a concise 500 words, Bacon manages to make a point while conveying his intelligence and mastery of language, his understanding of history and society, his skill in reasoning, his passion for meaningful education, and his penchant toward philosophical discussion.

**Reading:** Thomas Carlyle, “On History” (PDF attached)

**Value:** If Francis Bacon is most remembered for his contribution to the modern scientific method, Thomas Carlyle is most remembered for his passionate exploration of history. “On History” traverses an expansive landscape, covering the nature, methodology, and purpose of studying history. With philosophical depth and impressive use of language, Carlyle critiques the solely analytical approach to history, emphasizing instead the importance of individual humans to shape what is and what is to come.

**Reading:** George Orwell, “Why I Write” (PDF attached)

**Value:** This essay, which might just as easily be titled “On Writing,” begins in a way that feels like a story itself. The narrative style is easy and engaging, seemingly a gentle reflection on Orwell’s journey as a writer; yet as the essay progresses, it overviews the whole of Orwell’s life and career while noting essential components of a writer. “Why I Write” encapsulates what drove Orwell as an author—his passion for political purposes.

### **Weeks Three & Four: The Short (and Long) of It—Fiction with Agatha Christie**

**Reading:** Agatha Christie, “The Kidnapped Prime Minister,” “The Adventure of the Cheap Flat,” and “The Chocolate Box” (available online)

**Value:** Nicknamed “The Queen of Crime,” Agatha Christie left an incomparable legacy on detective fiction, penning 66 detective novels, 14 short story collections, and several well-known

stage plays. As the most translated author in the world, Christie has introduced her two most famous detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, to the world! Outsold only by the Bible and William Shakespeare, Agatha Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time. Christie's expansive collection of short stories is an accessible way to discover this woman's incredible literary contribution.

**Reading:** Agatha Christie, *Black Coffee*

**Value:** In addition to numerous novels and short stories, Agatha Christie is known for at least 20 stage plays, including *The Mousetrap*, the world's longest running play. Written in 1930 and her first piece for the stage, *Black Coffee* helped Christie launch a successful second career as a playwright.

### **Week Five: The Novel & The Stage**

**Reading:** Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (PDF attached)

**Value:** Considered the foremother of British female writers by many literary critics, Aphra Behn rose from complete obscurity to become one of the first English women to earn a living through writing. Although Behn began her career as a successful playwright, constructing at least 19 plays during her lifetime, Behn is most well-known for her novella, *Oroonoko*.

**Reading:** Thomas Southerne, *Oroonoko* (PDF attached)

**Value:** Although Southerne is not a well-known British writer, his adaptation of Behn's novella provides an interesting discussion of several topics, including literary license, the impact of genre on the reader's view, how character presentation impacts countless components of story, and how the political climate at the time of writing and/or publication affect the way something is written and read.

### **Week Six: The (Realistic) British Novel**

**Reading:** Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* (We will read Ch. I, Ch. III, Ch. IV, Ch. VI, Ch. IX, Ch. XV, Ch. XX, Ch. XXXVI, Ch. L, Ch. LIII)

**Value:** While Trollope spent much of his life working as a civil servant in Britain's postal system, his fiction offers sharp insight into the everyday workings of institutions, morality, and human ambition. Through humor, psychological depth, and careful social observation, *Barchester Towers* realistically portrays power, hypocrisy, and quiet virtue, transforming ordinary church politics into a profound

study of character and ethical behavior.

### **Weeks Seven & Eight: The (Humorous) British Novel**

**Reading:** Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*

**Value:** Though known for its humor, *Three Men in a Boat* offers more than simple, lighthearted entertainment. Blending travel narrative, social satire, and reflective commentary, Jerome subtly critiques middle-class anxieties, identity, and the romanticization of leisure. Through a tale of misadventures along the River Thames, Jerome transforms ordinary inconveniences into thoughtful observations. Beneath its comedic surface lies a carefully crafted exploration of perspective, demonstrating how humor can illuminate both individual character and broader cultural habits.



## **British Literature IV**

### **Lesson Two: On the Essay**

In 1597, philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon became the first person to publish an essay collection written in English. Considered “the father of the English essay,” Bacon is believed to have written fifty-eight essays between 1597 and 1625. In an era largely marked by drama and poetry, Bacon’s work popularized the idea that diverse topics could be analyzed in a straightforward, concise, non-fiction manner without losing their thoughtfulness or impact. Several hundred years later, George Orwell became another prominent English essay writer, further shaping the genre within the British literary landscape. In between, many other British authors—including Thomas Carlyle, Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot—wrote essays that are still widely studied today. Although the essay has not always been a prominent literary form across centuries, British writers have utilized it to cover everything from politics to philosophy to personal reflections.

As we encourage in our study of essays in *American Literature IV*, take time this week to look at the readings through the lens of relationship; what is the relationship between the writer and the reader, the reader and the text itself? What is the writer able to accomplish within the concise thoughtfulness of an essay that would not have been possible in another literary form (poetry, drama, novel, etc.)? Notice the use of critical analysis, the articulation of complex ideas, and experimentation with style—each one designed to foster intellectual engagement with the reader. Although the essay may not seem equal to fiction or drama or poetry, it carries a weight in the literary world that other forms of expression cannot.

### **FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626) –**

Francis Bacon was born into a prestigious British family. His father served under Queen Elizabeth I, and his mother as a well-educated woman, fluent in Greek, Latin, Italian, and French. His maternal grandfather was both a knight and a tutor to the royal family. Bacon is believed to have been educated at home throughout his childhood because of poor health, yet he began attending Trinity University at the University of Cambridge at the age of twelve and was noted for his maturity and intelligence when he later met the Queen <sup>(1)</sup>. Bacon continued his studies and began traveling abroad, gaining insight in foreign language, political affairs, and civil law. Ultimately laying out for himself three goals—to uncover truth, to serve his country, and to serve God—Bacon became a lawyer, statesman, historian, philosopher, and writer. He is best remembered

for developing the modern scientific method through such works as his *Novum Organum* (1620) which stressed the importance of inductive reasoning. After a fall from political power, Bacon devoted the last five years of his life to writing and producing an impressive array of works which ranged from volumes of history and biography to essays to a science-fiction novel <sup>(2)</sup>.

### **THOMAS CARLYLE (1795-1881) –**

Born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, Carlyle was the eldest of nine children. He was initially educated at home—taught reading by his mother and math by his father—then began attending a secondary school where he studied Greek and learned to read both Latin and French fluently. Not long before his fourteenth birthday, Carlyle walked 100 miles from his home in order to attend The University of Edinburgh <sup>(3)</sup>. There, he excelled in math, even going so far as to invent the Carlyle circle, a demonstration of a simple way to solve quadratic formulas <sup>(4)</sup>. Following his graduation, Carlyle worked as a schoolmaster while preparing to become a minister, but he later quit both of these ventures—as well as several others. Finally, he settled on writing for the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia* and working as a translator. Although Carlyle would attempt a number of other ventures throughout his life, he ultimately became known for his scholarship and writing.

With a novel (*Sartor Resartus*, 1833-1834), numerous essays, and varying lectures under his belt, Carlyle solidified his reputation as a writer through the nonfiction historical work, *The French Revolution*, published in 1837. Interestingly, this work had been contracted to Englishman John Stuart Mill (you may remember him from *British Literature II*), but Mill was ultimately unable to meet the deadlines and asked Carlyle to write the work instead.

Thomas Carlyle's uncommonly long life was not one of overnight success but one of consistent hard work. In addition to his writing, Carlyle founded the London Library, helped to create the National Portrait Galleries in London and in Edinburgh, and served as the Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh. Oddly, despite his fame throughout the Victorian Era, Carlyle fell into obscurity after his death. His highly controversial array of work has since been collected in 30 volumes, and a staggering amount of correspondence with his wife has been published in some 40 volumes <sup>(5)</sup>.

### **GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950) –**

George Orwell (birth name: Eric Arthur Blair) was born in Bengal, India to British colonists. Raised in England by his mother (his father remained in India and was largely absent), Orwell had a difficult childhood. His educational experience was marked by the realization that students were not treated equally, privileges given based on economic status. Orwell eventually became a police officer for the British Empire and began his career in Burma in 1922. Within a number of years, Orwell had gained enough experience to personally

detest political oppression—and he began to put his thoughts on the page. With only a general education, Orwell resigned from his position in 1927, determined to become a writer. For several years, he worked a variety of odd jobs to keep himself afloat while he wrote and wrote and wrote. His first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, was published in 1933, under the pen name George Orwell, inspired by England’s patron saint George and the River Orwell, one of his favorite places to visit <sup>(6)</sup>.

George Orwell is most often remembered for his critiques of both capitalism and communism. His allegorical novella, *Animal Farm*, highlights the results of government oppression, while his dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eight-Four*, centralizes on the consequences of totalitarian political practices. It is this final novel of Orwell’s that brought us the terms “Orwellian,” “Big Brother,” “Thought Crime,” “Thought Police,” and “Doublethink” <sup>(7)</sup>. Name by *The Times* as the second greatest British writer since 1945 <sup>(8)</sup>, George Orwell penned six novels, three non-fiction works, and hundreds of essays—the latter being our focus for this week’s lesson.

### **THINGS TO CONSIDER –**

- **NON-ACADEMIC STRUCTURE:** If the majority of your essay-writing experience is academic, you will quickly note that none of the essays covered in this lesson follow the structures with which you are familiar. There are no clear introductions or properly placed thesis statements; paragraphs are loosely defined; and use of citations is non-existent. The literary essay often varies greatly from its academic counterpart. If you are one for methods, such divergence from structure might frustrate you, but we hope you will enjoy the loose, yet still cohesive, nature of these essays—and find freedom to write such essays of your own.
- **DIFFERENCES IN LENGTH:** Again, when it comes to literary essays, length is discretionary. In this week’s assignment, you will experience a wide array of length—Bacon’s essay is 500 words; Carlyle’s 4,300; and Orwell’s 2,700. Consider your response to these differences. Do you prefer one over the other? Perhaps the shorter essay is more digestible but lacking in development of ideas; perhaps the longer essay considers the subject at length but might benefit from more specific structure. Etc.
- **STYLISTIC CHOICES:** As you read, note the different rhetorical and literary devices used by each author. Each of the three writers demonstrates mastery of language and profound critical thinking skills, yet none uses the same method or style as another. Literary essays offer a sense of freedom in structure, length, and style—a place where an author can truly develop his/her own craft—proving that the essay is, in fact, a piece of literary art.

## Assignment 2A: Read the following essays.

**Reading:** Francis Bacon, “Of Studies” (PDF attached)

**Value:** Penned in 1625, this essay highlights, in brief, Bacon’s impact on the literary world. In a concise 500 words, Bacon manages to make a point while conveying his intelligence and mastery of language, his understanding of history and society, his skill in reasoning, his passion for meaningful education, and his penchant toward philosophical discussion.

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**Value:** This essay, which might just as easily be titled “On Writing,” begins in a way that feels like a story itself. The narrative style is easy and engaging, seemingly a gentle reflection on Orwell’s journey as a writer; yet as the essay progresses, it overviews the whole of Orwell’s life and career while noting essential components of a writer. “Why I Write” encapsulates what drove Orwell as an author—his passion for political purpose.

**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.

- Although we cannot look to a single sentence at the end of an introduction to determine this, what is the thesis—main idea—of this essay? What is the author most specifically trying to convey?
- How would you describe this author’s style?
- What rhetorical and/or literary devices do you notice throughout the text?
- How would you describe the relationship between the author and his subject?
- How would you describe the relationship between the author and the reader?

**Assignment 2B:** Each of the three essays covered in this week’s lesson highlight the author’s passion, revealed through varying stylistic choices. Francis Bacon was driven by his passion for science; Thomas Carlyle by his passion for history; George Orwell by his passion for politics.

**This week, write your own essay about a passion that pushes you forward in your life.**

Your essay may range from 700-1200 words (we want to push you but also don’t want you to write an entire research paper!). It should be entitled “On...” OR “Why I...”. Structural and stylistic choices are discretionary. Use of specific examples and/or citations are permitted but not required.

#### Sources –

1. Klein, Jürgen. “Francis Bacon.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 29 Dec. 2003, revised 7 Dec. 2012, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/francis-bacon/#Bio>.
2. Simpson, David. “Francis Bacon (1561-1626).” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://iep.utm.edu/francis-bacon/>.
3. “Thomas Carlyle: A Brief Biography.” *Victorian Web*, <https://victorianweb.org/authors/carlyle/carlyle4.html>.
4. Weisstein, Eric W. “Carlyle Circle.” *Wolfram MathWorld*, <https://mathworld.wolfram.com/CarlyleCircle.html>.
5. “Thomas Carlyle.” *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-carlyle>.
6. Soniak, Matt. “How 8 famous writers chose their pen names.” *The Week*, 8 Jan. 2015, <https://theweek.com/articles/463100/how-8-famous-writers-chose-pen-names>.
7. Vishal, Rohit. “Neologism by George Orwell.” *Medium*, 29 Sept. 2017, <https://medium.com/@rohitvishal7/neologism-by-george-orwell-e8e129a72d22>.
8. “The 50 greatest British writers since 1945.” *The Times*, 5 Jan. 2008, <https://www.thetimes.com/article/the-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945-ws3g69xf90>.