

St Joseph's Catholic
Academy
English Department



A Level English
Literature
Bridging Course

Name:

Congratulations on choosing English Literature as one of your A Level options! You can look forward to a challenging but stimulating course of study, supported by a dedicated and successful department.

The key requirements for this course are a genuine love of reading and a willingness to look beyond the surface level of a text to consider the effects of choices made by the author. To be successful in this subject, you need to stop yourself thinking of plots and characters as real and transfer your attention to the methods of the author and the way/s that reader/s respond to their work, as well as how responses may vary according to context. Please bring this transition work to your first lesson in September. We look forward to meeting you and sharing our passion for English Literature!

Over the summer, you need to purchase the following texts, one of which you will study for Paper 1 *Aspects of Tragedy* and the other for Paper 2 *Elements of Crime Writing*. Both will be needed to complete the tasks in this pack.

Paper 1 *Aspects of Tragedy*

King Lear, William Shakespeare

Available as a free e-book:

<https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/>

Recommended edition to buy:

[Shakespeare: *King Lear* \(Arden edition\)](#)

Paper 2 *Elements of Crime Writing*

Atonement, Ian McEwan

Online e-book:

[Atonement by Ian McEwan](#)

Recommended edition to buy:

[McEwan, I. *Atonement* \(Vintage edition\)](#)

For September you will also need:

- 2 x A4 Lever Arch files
- 2 x packs of A4 lined paper
- 2 x packs of file dividers
- Highlighters / stationery / post-its

Some students find purchasing revision guides for the texts useful, though they are not compulsory. If you do purchase any, York Notes A Level revision guides are best.

There are film versions available to support your studies, but remember that they are adaptations and may differ substantially from the original texts on which you will be examined.

If you have any questions about the course or the activities in this booklet, email:
soconnor@stjosephs.uk.net or
mcewene@stjosephs.uk.net

King Lear by William Shakespeare

Task 1: Context

Access the following websites and use them to write a short biography detailing Shakespeare's life and career:

[The British Library](#)

[Biography Online](#)

[Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#)

Task 2: Summaries and key terms

Read and provide scene summaries in your own words of the first act of the play. Include a list of which characters appear in each scene:

Act 1	
Scene	Summary of events
1	
2	

3	
4	
5	

Define the terms below:

Term	Definition
Tragedy	
Hamartia	
Anagnorisis	
Peripeteia	
Hubris	
Catharsis	
Dramatic irony	
Machiavellian	
Prose	
Verse	
Iambic pentameter	
Antithesis	

Task 3: Characterisation and themes

Based on your reading of the opening of the play make some notes on your impressions of the characters and themes below. You must include at least one quotation per section in support of your ideas.

Characters
Gloucester
Lear
Goneril
Regan
Cordelia
Kent

Edmund

Edgar

Fool

Themes

Fathers and children

Authority and order

Madness and fooling

Atonement by Ian McEwan

Task 1: Context

Access the following websites and use them to write notes on significant aspects of the novel's context or writing process (beware spoilers!):

[Course hero](#)

[English Review](#)

[Penguin Books](#)



Task 2: Summaries and key terms

Read the first FOUR chapters and provide summaries in your own words. Make a note of any significant settings and characters who appear:

Chapter	Plot events, characters, settings
1	
2	

3	
4	

Define the terms below:

Term	Definition'
Metafiction	
Motif	
Symbol	
Proleptic irony	
Analeptic irony	
Unreliable narrator	
Limited third person narrator	
Melodrama	
Postmodernism	
Stream of consciousness	
Tripartite structure	
Epilogue	
Intertextuality	

Task 3: Characterisation and themes

Based on your reading of the opening of the novel make some notes on your impressions of the characters and themes below. You must include at least one quotation per section in support of your ideas.

Characters
Bryony Tallis
Cecelia Tallis
Emily Tallis
Robbie Turner
Lola Quincey
Paul Marshall

Themes
Writing and imagination
Guilt
Coming of age
Social status

Give each paragraph of the article a one-word heading that summarises its focus in this column.

P.D. James: Who killed the golden age of crime?

Remembering the gentlemanly world of Lord Peter Wimsey and Albert Campion

From *The Spectator* magazine issue: 14 December 2013

In 1934, in her preface to an anthology of short detective stories, Dorothy L. Sayers wrote, 'Death in particular seems to provide the minds of the Anglo-Saxon race with a greater fund of innocent amusement than any other single subject.' And, to judge by the worldwide popularity of this essentially innocent genre, it is not only the Anglo-Saxon race who are addicted to murder and mystery.

It was in the so-called Golden Age between the two world wars that the genre flourished so imaginatively and successfully that it seemed that everyone who could put together a coherent narrative was tempted to join this fascinating and lucrative game. The Oxford academics in particular seemed to be writing mainly to amuse themselves and each other. Many distinguished and popular writers whose detective stories have survived had careers in other fields. Nicholas Blake, whose detective is Nigel Strangeways, was the poet Cecil Day-Lewis; Edmund Crispin (Gervase Fen) was the pseudonym of Robert Bruce Montgomery, a musician, composer and critic. Cyril Hare (Francis Pettigrew) was Judge Alfred Alexander Gordon and Michael Innes (John Appleby) was a don and professor of English at the University of Adelaide, while those writing under their own names included Monsignor Ronald Knox, and G.D.H. Cole and his wife, who were both economists. These Oxford writers were working within the accepted structure of a central mysterious crime, invariably murder, a closed circle of suspects, a detective who arrives rather like an avenging deity to solve the crime, and a convincing solution which readers should be able to arrive at themselves by logical deduction from the clues provided cunningly but fairly. But although the form could be considered formulaic, the writing was not. The Golden Age novelists who are still read provide more than an original and exciting plot; distinction in the writing, a vivid sense of place, a memorable and compelling hero and the ability to draw the reader into their comforting and highly individual world.

Almost as if he was afraid the game might get out of hand, Monsignor Ronald Knox, himself an aficionado, set down the rules in his preface to *Best Detective Stories 1928–29*. These included certain imperatives. The criminal must be mentioned early in the narrative but the reader must never be permitted to know his thoughts. All supernatural agencies are inadmissible. There must be no more than one secret room or passage, no undiscovered poisons should be used, and no accident or unaccountable intuition should help the detective. He should not rely on any clues which are withheld from the reader, nor should he commit the crime himself. The Watson should be slightly less intelligent than the average reader and his thoughts on the crime should not be concealed. Finally twins and doubles should not appear without the reader knowing about them, and there must be no Chinamen. This last prohibition is somewhat difficult to understand. Was it that Chinamen, if inclined to murder, were so cunning and ingenious that the amateur detective would have no hope of outwitting them?

The Watson, as used by Arthur Conan Doyle, soon became superfluous. When a writer felt that his character should have someone to whom he could look for practical help and to communicate progress with the less perceptive reader, servants often provided a convenient expedient. Lord Peter Wimsey had Bunter, Albert Campion had his cockney manservant Magersfontein Lugg, while he also fostered a relationship with Inspectors Stanislaus Oates and Charlie Luke. Generally Poirot and Miss Marple worked in isolation, and we can rely on them for the occasional enigmatic remark or comment. These rules would, of course, be fatal to the development of the genre if rigorously kept — and Agatha Christie, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, broke the most important of them and has never been completely forgiven by her readers.

A character in Alan Bennett's play *Forty Years On* describes English literature as 'snobbery with violence', words which are more commonly applied to crime fiction, and to detective stories in particular. Certainly in their unquestioning and usually rural lives characters do in fact seem to know their place and to be happy in it. Readers expected the detective to be a gentleman in all senses of the word. Lord Peter Wimsey is the younger son of a duke, Roderick Alleyn has a mother who is a baronet's widow, a fact that we are not infrequently reminded of when he takes tea or dinner with her, while Albert Campion has a lineage so distinguished that we are not permitted to know who his mother was, although there are hints that royalty is involved. None of the amateur detectives seems short of money and Dorothy L. Sayers admits she much enjoyed providing her hero with all the attributes of nobility and wealth and was confident that this was what her readers expected. 'When I was dissatisfied with my single unfurnished room, I took a luxurious flat for [Lord Peter] in Piccadilly. When my cheap rug got a hole in it, I ordered an Aubusson carpet. When I had no money to pay my bus fare, I presented him with a Daimler double-six, upholstered in a style of sober magnificence, and when I felt dull I let him drive it.'

Readers expected the detective to be a gentleman in all senses of the word

Where modern sensibility detects snobbery, the writer was probably describing a social distinction which was generally accepted and seldom challenged. Even so there is for many of the women writers of the Golden Age a clear division between 'our kind of person' and those who are not. The 'right kind' of people are not necessarily rich or famous, but are invariably educated at the right school and

university, and have the required family background. The views attributed to characters in the books were probably held by the writers. Certainly Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh made it plain as writers where their allegiances lay and Josephine Tey actually has a character referring to a friend's servant as 'your moron', while the division between the right kind of people and the rest is very apparent in what are popularly regarded as her best books, *The Franchise Affair* and *Brat Farrar*.

Dorothy L. Sayers was certainly something of an intellectual snob. In *Murder Must Advertise* Lord Peter takes a job as a fledgling copywriter in order to investigate a mysterious death on the firm's premises and is introduced by Mr Hankin, one of the directors, to his future colleagues: 'I don't think Mr Ingleby was up in your time, Mr Bredon — he was at Trinity. Your Trinity, I mean, not ours.' (Mr Hankin was a Cambridge man.) The only woman copywriter is introduced as 'Miss Meteyard — of Somerville'. No wonder the less privileged members of the staff labour under a strong sense of social and educational deprivation.

Agatha Christie is never snobbish and we can be certain that any young housemaid being trained by Miss Marple will be kindly treated until she is ready to take a job where, of course, she will be available to scream when the murder is discovered and to proclaim publicly that she has some very important information which it is only right the detective should know. We can then confidently expect that there will be poison in her late-night cocoa or that she will be strangled when venturing outside to bring in the washing. Servants invariably have an important part to play in detective fiction, but not the major part; the butler didn't do it.

The women writers, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh were particularly popular and successful. Any reader of detective fiction anywhere in the world, if asked to name a well-known fictional detective, would name Poirot, Miss Marple, Lord Peter Wimsey or Albert Campion. Agatha Christie has said herself that she makes no claim to be an outstanding literary novelist but she knew precisely the limits of her talent and her style was lively, the dialogue good and the story never falters in the telling. It is easy to criticise her as a writer, but someone who could provide relief, entertainment and excitement to millions of people throughout the world, in peace and war, cannot be dismissed as negligible.

The novels of the Golden Age were particularly strong on plot and puzzle. The nuances of characterisation, setting and any criticism of social and class inequalities were sacrificed to the originality of the plot and the ingenuity of the murderer. Bodies were found in trains and aeroplanes, in church belfries, buried in an already existing grave, and were frequently found in rooms where door and windows were firmly locked. Victims were killed in a number of unique ways including being precipitated down an iron staircase and hit by a stone propelled from a catapult. The world these writers portrayed was one which readers shared and understood, and any sense of the world outside the comfortable confines of conventional English village life was absent.

The detective stories of the interwar years were paradoxical. They might deal with violent death, sometimes in its most horrible manifestation, but essentially they were and remain novels of escape. We feel no real pity for the victim, no empathy for the murderer, no sympathy for the falsely accused, and for whomever the bell tolls, it does not toll for us.

Whatever our secret terrors or the problems of our everyday life, we are not the body on the library floor, and when Poirot, Miss Marple or Lord Peter point an accusing finger, we can return a confident 'not guilty'. Reading these novels today they produce the same comfort as they did when they were written. We enter a world of recognised morality, where evil is sanitised and we can settle down in a familiar English world where all problems will be solved and peace and normality restored in that imaginary postlapsarian Eden.

The best of the Golden Age detective stories have survived and will continue to survive, but they are not being written today. In the 1920s the present system of police forces being served by forensic science laboratories was not yet in place, and fictional autopsies were obviously regarded as somewhat unpleasant procedures and were very rarely mentioned, if indeed they took place. More importantly, the relationship between the police and the communities they serve has become more challenging in today's diverse and multicultural society.

Increasingly, novelists have as heroes professional policemen faced with a challenging and sometimes dangerous job, and with family problems or difficulties with superiors to complicate their lives. Notably successful and popular examples are Colin Dexter's Morse and Lewis, Reginald Hill's Dalziel and Pascoe, Ruth Rendell's Wexford and Burden and Ian Rankin's Rebus and Siobhan Clarke where we have the added example of a woman detective's point of view. No modern writer can devise a story without regard to the scientific and technological developments which have changed the job of a detective, or to the immense social and economic changes which have helped to shape our world.

Even if two wars had not changed the maps of the world, the shadow of that first mushroom cloud will lie forever over the face of our planet. Mankind is adept at creating pleasures and diversions, sometimes dangerous and destructive, which promise at least a temporary relief from the inevitable tensions of contemporary life, and a love of detective fiction is among the less harmful. This continued popularity and worldwide appeal suggests that in our 21st century the detective story, old and new, will continue to provide distraction, entertainment and relief in our increasingly complex and disorderly world.

And now the days have darkened and we are on the cusp of a new year. In imagination we picture the reader of 1934. He has returned, well-fed and cosseted, from participation in the family Christmas and is now glad to be alone. The fire is banked up, the armchair is comfortable, a small table holds a glass and a bottle of his best claret, and he is ready for a mild intellectual challenge, excitement, vicarious horror and the latest exploits of his favourite detective. And from the opening sentence, or some variation of it, we move with him into that murderous but essentially cosy world.

'It was a dark and stormy night...'

©P.D. James 2013, all rights reserved. P.D. James — Baroness James of Holland Park — is the author of 20 novels, many featuring the detective Adam Dalgliesh.



Questions

Now answer the questions that follow with reference to P.D. James' article and your own notes about it.



1) Identify five key ingredients of the Golden Age Detective Novel.

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2) Give one reason why Golden Age Detective Fiction has been accused of snobbery, and of upholding the social hierarchy.

3) P.D. James describes the detective novels as the interwar years as 'paradoxical'. Why? Explain.

4) Why does James suggest that these novels are 'comforting'? Explain.

5) Whilst the police and other official representatives of the justice system may appear incompetent within Golden Age Detective Fiction, they are rarely threatening. James suggests that a faith in the essentially benign (good, kind or harmless) nature of the police may no longer be possible. Why?

6) Can you identify three ways in which James suggest that the detective novel has changed since the heyday of Golden Age Detective Fiction?

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