WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 WELCOME TO THE COURSE

Professor Susan Fitzmaurice: Welcome to The Literature of the Country House. On this course, we'll be exploring the role of the English country house in literature to understand its literary history and its enduring appeal. Each week, we'll be thinking about different ways to interpret this literature.

Dr Adam Smith: There are three major strands running through this course, Close Reading, Material Conditions, and Research Approaches. To begin, we'll learn how to conduct a Close Reading, which will form the basis for your own literary interpretation.

Susan: From then on, you'll need to close read all of the texts that we encounter. So remember that you'll be able to return to this week's introduction to Close Reading at any time.

Adam: But you also need to put your close reading into context. So each week, we'll be examining material from The Special Collections archive at The University of Sheffield. We'll look at the different contexts in which this literature was produced, and we'll examine materials such as handwritten 17th-century manuscripts, and 18th-century newspapers. You'll be able to think about and discuss the wide variety of ways country house literature has been composed, consumed, and received over the centuries.

Susan: Finally, in the research approaches steps, we'll be joined by experts from The School of English at The University of Sheffield, who will share with us the approaches that they take in their own research.

We've gathered here in The Bath Hotel to introduce ourselves, and tell you a little bit about what we'll each be covering.

Professor Cathy Shrank: Hello, my name's Cathy Shrank. And in Week One, I'll be talking about Thomas More's 'Utopia' and literary history.

Dr Tom Rutter: Hello, I'm Tom Rutter. And in Week Two, I'm going to be talking about 'Hamlet' and travelling players. I'm also going to be talking about what goes into the making of a modern edition of Shakespeare.
Dr Jim Fitzmaurice: I'm Jim Fitzmaurice, and I'm mostly going to be in Week Two, and I'll be talking a lot about manuscripts, and a bit more about letters, and with special reference to Margaret Cavendish.

Susan: As you know, I'm Susan Fitzmaurice, and I'll be one of the lead educators on this course. You'll join me in Week Three, when I'll discuss print culture, coffee houses, politeness, and sociability in the 18th century.

Dr Joe Bray: Hello, I'm Joe Bray. You'll be seeing me in Week Four, when we'll be considering the representation of the country house in Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice'.

Dr Amber Regis: Hi, I'm Amber Regis, and in Week Five, I'll be discussing 'Great Expectations' by Charles Dickens. And it's my fault that we're in the pub here this evening, because I'll also be talking about country house brewing.

Professor Angela Wright: Hi, I'm Angela Wright, and in Week Five, I'm going to be discussing the Gothic author Ann Radcliffe's amazing novel, 'The Mysteries of Udolpho', from 1794, and Jane Austen's subsequent fascination with the fiction of Ann Radcliffe.

Dr Andrew Smith: My name's Andy Smith, and I will be teaching you in Week Six, when we'll been looking at Oscar Wilde and his contribution to the English country house tradition.

Adam: And I'm Adam Smith. I'm one of the lead educators, and you'll be seeing me throughout the course, where I'll be interviewing everyone to find out more about their individual Research Approaches.

This week, Professor Cathy Shrank will be discussing how historical context can be used to enhance a Close Reading, and she'll be showing us a version of Thomas More's 'Utopia' from 1551.

Susan: This first week is all about setting up some key questions to frame our study of country house literature for the course. So we'll ask:

1. How is the country house depicted in literature?

2. What is the role of the country house in literature?

3. And what is the literary appeal of the English country house?

It's now time for us to embark on our journey through The Literature of the English Country House, so let's get started.