B.A. (Honours) in Contemporary English Studies

Course Title : Contemporary Literature in English I: Prose Fiction
Course Code : ENG3204 / ENG204
Recommended Study Year : 2nd Year for 40year System
                      : 3rd Year for 4-year System
No. of Credits/Term : 3
Mode of Tuition : Lecture/Tutorial/Workshop
Class Contact Hours : 2 hours Lecture/week
                      : 1 hour Tutorial/week
Category in Major Programme : Required Course
Prerequisite(s) : N/A
Co-requisite(s) : N/A
Exclusion(s) : N/A
Exemption Requirement(s) : N/A

Brief Course Description

This course exposes the student to a range of contemporary texts in English, using narratives which will highlight the current importance of English as a world language. It will build on the student's exposure to short fiction provided by Literary Analysis I in the 2nd year of the major programme. The course may also be informed in terms of thematic content by its partner course on contemporary drama and poetry (ENG305). The text selections will vary from year to year but will share some common aspects. They offer a bi-cultural, often multi-ethnic point of view and are written by authors who come from a variety of different national backgrounds. The course exposes students to the phenomenon of world writing in English. Thematic connections, experiential engagement and the ability to make intellectual and intuitive judgments about both text and social contexts are all significant elements of study.

This course builds on the techniques for analysing prose fiction introduced in ENG 2106, Literary Analysis I.

Aims

This course is designed with the purpose of acquainting students with representative contemporary fictions written in English and to consider the nature of fiction as a genre as well as the various thematic, intertextual and socio-political and/or ideological resonances created by the texts studied. In addition to exploring the particular qualities of fiction, the course also aims to develop in students a creative sympathy for literature in English that will enlarge their sensibilities and their ability to perceive connections between fictional texts (as representative of real-life issues and experiences) and the world. Texts will be selected with a particular emphasis on themes, emphases, and approaches that may relate to the Hong Kong student: these may include multiculturalism, colonialism or post-colonialism, gender perspectives, and East-West issues.
Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to elicit from the student an appreciation of multiple perspectives, of seeing from more than one point of view, and of understanding sometimes complex themes and issues dialectically rather than didactically. The ability to suspend simplistic judgments about characters and situations is encouraged, as well as the ability to step into the shoes of at least some of characters in the novels they read. The students are expected to have (1) developed an appreciation of literature as a moral and aesthetic value; (2) enhanced their skills of literary analysis; (3) advanced their ability to write (and speak) coherently in English; (4) enhanced their fluency in extensive reading; and (5) experienced and engaged with contemporary writing in English written from a variety of cultural positions.

Indicative Content

Four medium-length novels or a combination of 5 shorter texts (short novels/novellas) with some medium-length novels; an introduction to the contemporary novel and a short but adequate overview of the theoretical, practical, biographical and social contexts from which the selected novels emerged as meaningful cultural products.

Exemplar Set A
“Post-colonial Literature”, making thematic or even temporal connections between such texts as Beloved (Tony Morrison), The Grass is Singing (Doris Lessing), The English Patient (Michal Ondaatje), Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe), Waiting for the Barbarians (J.M. Coetzee).

Exemplar Set B
“Metafiction: Rewriting fiction” exploring textual inter-relationships between earlier novels such as Robinson Crusoe and Jane Eyre in connection with Foe (J.M. Coetzee) and Wide Sargasso Sea (Jean Rhys); as well as the intertextuality and thematic resonances of Shakespeare’s Othello in Caryl Phillips’ The Nature of Blood.

Exemplar Set C
“Dystopian literature: Reflections on Human Nature and Society”. Never Let Me Go (Kazuo Ishiguro), The Handmaid’s Tale (Margaret Atwood), The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (Muriel Spark) and Lord of the Flies (William Golding)

Exemplar Set D
“Fiction East-West: Eastern and western perspectives on Asian Life and Society” The Quiet American (Graham Greene); An Artist of the Floating World (Kazuo Ishiguro); Fasting Feasting (Anita Desai); The Namesake (Jhumpa Lahiri)
Teaching Method

The course consists partly of lectures by the instructor, in which the modes and techniques of literary analysis are demonstrated. The course also includes workshops and tutorials which enable the student to discuss more informally the issues raised in lectures and relate what they have read to issues at local national and international level. Some free writing in fiction will be encouraged perhaps inspired by the texts studied. At periods when the Department has a Writer-in-Residence this will create synergy with the Department’s creative writing work.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Students’ progress towards the learning outcomes outlined above will be assessed by continuous assessments on the students’ engagement with the lectures, tutorial discussions, readings, presentations, and written assignments. In addition, students’ knowledge will be summatively assessed by a final examination at the end of the term.

Assessment

Continuous Assessment: 60%

- Creative Writing & Critique: 10%
- Term Paper (Draft): 10%
- Term Paper (Final): 20%
- Presentation: 10%
- Participation: 10%

Final Examination: 40%

Required Readings

The texts selected for the class under a particular topic (see above exemplar groupings) will constitute the required readings for the course.

Supplementary Readings

There will be lecture notes for all the texts plus a selection of articles and reviews that are appropriate to the level of the course.