

**LITERATURA ANGLESA DELS
ORÍGENS AL SEGLE XVIII
*ENGLISH LITERATURE
FROM ITS ORIGINS
TO THE XVIIIth CENTURY***

Gemma López
Ana Moya

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya



UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA



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COURSE PRESENTATION

"Literatura Anglesa dels Orígens fins al S.XVIII" and "Literatura Anglesa del S.XIX fins a L'actualitat" are two of the obligatory first-cycle courses offered by the English Department in the literature area. Together, they aim at providing students with an overview of the development of literature written in English in the British Isles from its origins to the present day. While "Literatura Anglesa dels Orígens fins al S.XVIII" goes from the earliest works to the 18th century, "Literatura Anglesa del S.XIX fins a L'actualitat" covers the 19th and 20th centuries.

At the moment, the English Department offers three optional first-cycle courses: "Història i Cultures de les Illes Britàniques", "Història i Cultures dels EEUU" and "Introducció a la Literatura dels EEUU". In order to complement their historical background, students are *strongly recommended* to take "Història i Cultures de les Illes Britàniques".

In relation to the second-cycle literature courses offered by the English Department, a central aim of "Literatura Anglesa dels Orígens fins al S.XVIII" and "Literatura Anglesa del S.XIX fins a L'actualitat" is to give students a solid grasp of the literature produced in English in the British Isles and of its historical and cultural contexts. It is hoped that this will both prepare them for the second-cycle compulsory literature subjects, and enable them to make a selection of the optional courses that best suits their interests. Students will have noticed that in the second cycle, English literature courses are organized according to the three major genres (prose fiction, drama and poetry), all of which are represented in the first-cycle survey courses.

1. OBJECTIVES

1.1. Aims

"Literatura Anglesa dels Orígens fins al S.XVIII" has the following main aims:

- (a) To familiarize students with i) literature produced in the British Isles from its early origins to the 18th century, and ii) the analysis of specific texts belonging to the three major genres.

(b) We start off from the assumption that

"... there is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as 'obvious'" (Belsey, 1980,4)

Therefore, a major aim of this course is to make students aware of the variety of critical/theoretical approaches to literature that has come to the fore in recent years.

(c) In the light of (b), and with a view to achieving internal coherence, the standpoint for this course will be based on the discussion of "literature *in* its context" (Sinfield 1983, 3), which has been labelled as cultural materialism.

(d) To train students in techniques of essay writing and draw their attention to elementary research procedures, such as finding relevant material in a library, organizing their reading and even working with new research technologies, i.e. Internet.

1.2. Components

1.2.1. Lectures

To achieve the above aims, lectures include the following components, which correspond to objectives (a), (b), and (c):

(a) A series of lectures devoted to i) giving the students brief introductions to the society, economy, politics and literature of the different historical periods from the early beginnings of literature in the British Isles to the 18thc, and ii) presenting a number of specific writers and texts ('focal texts') in greater depth, with an aim of offering a plurality of voices.

(b) An introduction to the concepts of *literature* and *canon* and the controversy which has surrounded them in recent years as they have been questioned from a variety of critical/theoretical positions. This has led, among other things, to the 'unearthing' of texts traditionally considered minor, marginal or non-canonical. Consequently, the selection of 'focal texts' made for "Literatura Anglesa I" includes both canonical texts -which are re-read in the light of recent

critical developments- and works which have never been incorporated into the canon. As Catherine Belsey argues, "...texts are plural, and (...) their meanings are *produced* by bringing to bear on the raw material of the work discourses pertinent to the 20thc" (1980,130).

(c) An introduction to the debate around the concepts of *English literature* and *literature in English*, regarded as cause and consequence of the controversy brought about by recent questionings both of what is understood by literature and the canon.

1.2.2. Practical component

In addition to lectures, the course also includes a practical component, which materializes as a series of worksheets aimed at:

- i) enabling the students to work by themselves on the concepts introduced under components (a), (b) and (c) and thus encouraging their active engagement with the course.
- ii) fulfilling objective (d) above by giving the student the opportunity to practice his/her writing and basic research skills (e.g. use of library facilities and/or new technologies, i.e. Internet).

2. STRUCTURE AND SCHEDULE

2.1. Structure

"Literatura Anglesa dels Orígens fins al S.XVIII" is structured in five units. In Unit I, which is divided into two modules, students are introduced to the concepts of literature and canon, as well as to the debate around "English literature" vs. "literature in English". Units II to V are organized chronologically. In each of them, there are two introductory modules on the society, economy, politics and literature of the period in question, followed by the presentation of the selected writers and focal texts. Each module includes a bibliographical guide and, except in the case of the introductory modules, a worksheet. The points in each module which are dealt with in the corresponding worksheet are marked with the symbol ✕.

Below is included a course schedule so that students can plan their readings and generally organize their course work.

2.2. Schedule

Week 1: COURSE PRESENTATION

UNIT I: PRELIMINARIES

Week 2: UNIT II: THE BEGINNINGS TO THE 15THC

Society, economy, politics and literature

Society, economy, politics and literature

Week 3: Society, economy, politics and literature

The Second Shepherds' Pageant

Week 4: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Week 5: Geoffrey Chaucer

"The Death of Robin Hood"

Week 6: UNIT III: TUDOR ENGLAND

Society, economy, politics and literature

Society, economy, politics and literature

Week 7: The Sonneters: Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard and Sir Philip Sidney

Thomas More

Week 8: Thomas More

William Shakespeare

Week 9: William Shakespeare

UNIT IV: THE 17THC

Society, economy, politics and literature

Week 10: The Metaphysicals: John Donne and Katherine Philips

Puritan literature: John Milton and John Bunyan

Week 11: Restoration literature: William Congreve

UNIT V: THE 18THC: From the Glorious Revolution (1688) to the French Revolution (1789).

Society, economy, politics and literature

Week 12: Alexander Pope

Eliza Haywood

Week 13: Jonathan Swift

Johnathan Swift

Week 14: R.B. Sheridan

R.B. Sheridan and A.L. Barbauld

3. ASSESSMENT

Bearing in mind the objectives and components described above, by the end of the course students should be able to:

- (a) command a broad historical, cultural and literary chronology of the periods covered;
- (b) analyze specific passages in depth, linking them both to the focal text they have been taken from and to their historical context;
- (c) use appropriate critical terminology such as 'allegory', 'narrator' or 'courtly love';
- (d) engage in critical debate about given topics and texts;
- (e) write clearly-structured essays in which discussion is an essential component.

The students' competence in the above points is assessed on the basis of:

- (a) Worksheets at the end of each unit. Worksheets test the students' familiarity with new concepts and terms, contextual information and analytical and critical skills. In addition, they include a series of suggested essay topics with the aim of i) enabling students to practice their writing skills, and ii) training students with a view to the final exam.
- (b) A final exam that takes place at the end of the course. The *minimal* requirement here is for students to be able to reproduce coherent readings of selected texts which are free from errors of fact and logic and which are expressed in acceptable English. *Ideally*, students should show their full command of the points mentioned above and their capacity to present a soundly-based, clear argument.

GENERAL COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOTE: The bibliographies included in this book aim merely at listing those texts which are easily accessible for the students at the University of Barcelona. Further indications will be given to the students throughout the course.

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UNIT I: PRELIMINARIES

1. WHAT IS LITERATURE?

This module examines the concepts of literature, literary theory and literary criticism with an aim to showing how they are interrelated. A historical approach to the different terms is offered, as well as a general overview of the current critical/theoretical panorama.

1.1. The need to define literature ✕

- F.R. Leavis, in *The Great Tradition*, defined the great British novelists of all times as being "distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity" (1986, 18).
- David Lodge, in *The Modes of Modern Writing*, argues that: "We all 'know' what literature is, but is remarkably difficult to define (...). It is obviously true that *literature* is a flexible category in that the sum of works included in it will vary from age to age and from person to person. But it is flexible only at its circumference. There are a great many texts which are and always have been literary because there is nothing else for them to be, that is, no other recognised category of discourse of which they could be instances. We may call them *axiomatically literary*" (1977, 1-9).
- Raymond Williams, in *Marxism and Literature*, states that "it is relatively difficult to see 'literature' as a concept (...) Whatever else 'it' may be, literature is the process and the result of formal composition within the social and formal properties of a language" (1967, 45-46).
- Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory. An Introduction*, points out that "If there is such a thing as literary theory, then it would seem obvious that there is something called literature which it is the theory of. We can begin, then, by raising the question: what is literature?" (1983, 1).
- A historical approach to the concept of literature. The construction of the canon.
- Latin 'littera' > 'litterature' (literacy).

- Literary (reading ability). 'Litterature' as a specialization to reading. Category of use rather than production. 'Literature' as 'printed books'. Shift to literature as an 'objective' category of printed works.

1.2. Literary theory and criticism ✂

- 'Language' vs. 'discourse'.
- Catherine Belsey's definition of discourse: "A discourse is a domain of language use, a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking). A discourse involves certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterize it" (1980, 5).
- Literary theory vs. literary criticism: "Works of literature have their meaning, and their very existence, in a continuous stream of human conversation *about* them, which at its most formalized and articulate we call literary criticism" (David Lodge, 1972, xvii).
- The need to incorporate literary theory: "... no critical approach, no interpretation, no way of reading a text can avoid implicit theory" (Raman Selden, 1988, 3).
- A historical approach to the concept of criticism.
- Literary criticism/theory nowadays.

1.3. Different conceptions of literature for different critical/theoretical approaches ✂

- Traditional definitions of literature: i) imitation; ii) aesthetic pleasure.
- Different approaches to the concept of literature have produced different critical/theoretical perspectives.
- Literature as a representation of life? Literature as *truth*? Literature as a form of moral experience?
- The literary text as a *subjective* entity?
- Literature as an autonomous reality?
- Literature as part of history? Is literature determined by its context?

1.4. Key concepts and terms

autonomous
aesthetics

canon
discourse
literary criticism
literary theory
literature
subjective

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UNIT I: PRELIMINARIES

2. ENGLISH LITERATURE VS. LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

This module traces the shift from a conception of literature in *nationalistic* terms, to one which seeks to represent a plurality of voices.

2.1. English literature ✕

- The United Kingdom as a political and ideological construction.
- The concept of a *national literature*: white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, male. Literature as tradition. The canon.
- The institutionalization of English literature.

2.2. From English literature to literatures in English ✕

- The disintegration of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
- The end of the imperial era. The post-colonial age. The Commonwealth of Nations.
- Immigration to the British Isles: the rise of multiracial societies.
- The rise of the woman worker.
- The disruption of the concept of *national literature*: post-colonialism; women; the ex-centrics.
- The new English writer: the Booker Prize.

2.3. Key concepts and terms

Commonwealth
construction

ex-centric
multiracial
national literature
post-colonial

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WORKSHEET 1

Questions

The following worksheet covers the material introduced in Unit I. The questions aim at helping students to check their grasp of the basic concepts and terms explained in the two lessons in Unit I. These questions should thus be understood as a personal study aid.

1. Why has there been such a debate across history about the concept of literature? Is there *one definition* of literature?
2. What is discourse? In what way/s, if at all, is it different from language?
3. Explain the difference/s between literary theory and literary criticism. What relationship/s is/are there between the rise of theory in the second half of the 20thc and the approaches to the concept of literature?
4. Why is it important to read literature in its context?
5. Is literature a representation of true life? Does it need to have a moral stand? Support your answer with the names of the different critical/theoretical schools.
6. Define the traditional conception of *national literature*. Why is it no longer useful? Answer in historical/cultural terms.
7. Try your skills at research. Find the list of books (and their writers) which have won the Booker Prize ever since its establishment in 1969. In what way/s does this list illustrate the recent shift from English literature to literature in English?