Introducció a la literatura anglesa

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Introduction

As general editor, I would like to set out the aims, objectives and content of this course. In preparing Introduction to English Literature the authors faced two major problems: What material should they include? How should it be presented?

This course has been written by four specialists in literature in English who are actively involved in teaching the subject. The difficulties of trying to compress an enormous amount of literature into a meaningful teaching course are compounded by problems of focus: Where should we begin? Where should each module conclude? Which literary genres should it include, or possibly exclude?

The authors decided that this course should provide its readers with an overview of English literature, starting at the Renaissance and concluding in 1990. This might initially seem an impossible task, but we felt that, as most of our prospective students would be taking a general humanities or Catalan Philology degree, to concentrate on just one area might produce a more in-depth knowledge of that particular area, but only at the expense of excluding other, equally important areas, which was something we believed would not be consistent with the aims of a degrees.

In this introductory course, therefore, rather than having to face the dilemma of whether to concentrate solely on the Renaissance or the nineteenth century or contemporary writing, we have included them all. If this leaves some readers dissatisfied, we hope that using the bibliography and other indications we have given, they will be encouraged to continue their study of English literature beyond the narrow limits of this course. This would be a major achievement. At the same time, we believe that the study of literature must engage students in considering the parameters of the society in which we live. Accordingly, we have dedicated three of the five modules to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The course is divided into five modules with the following titles: The Renaissance, The Restoration and the Augustan Era, Romanticism and the Nineteenth Century, Late Nineteenth Century to 1945, and Post-War English Literature 1945-1990.

Each module is divided into several sections, and begins with a brief historical account which will serve to contextualise the literature we shall be discussing. After each section you will find one or two exercises, which you are encouraged to answer. Although these exercises require close and attentive reading, you should try, in formulating your answers, to express
and communicate to the consultor your own thoughts and opinions. It is the combination of attentive reading, coherent reasoning and an exchange of views with the consultor which we believe to be the most solid foundation on which to build up the skills necessary for academic achievement. It is during this process of communication, rather than during an exam, that students should articulate their opinions, doubts and questions.

We have also supplied information on a limited number of books, articles and web-sites which should be consulted. There are so many publications on English literature that what we have provided represents only the tiniest selection. It is highly probable, therefore, that many major books with which you are familiar do not appear here. This should not be seen as a sign of preference on our part, but simply as the inevitable result of having to choose from a thousand titles on one particular subject.

Literary studies has undergone a profound renovation in the last twenty years. It is obvious that the nature of these changes cannot be adequately discussed here, but, realising their importance, we cannot ignore them, nor is it desirable to do so if we believe our task to be a meaningful one, especially as what has been challenged is the very essence of literature and the way it is taught.

When we study a particular literature, we study a selection of texts, which is referred to as the canon. Although the English literary canon has been gradually modified, it has remained fairly stable, consisting mostly of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, the great novelists of the nineteenth century, and modernism. Since a canon is selective, there must clearly be a great deal that is not selected, and is therefore excluded or silenced.

During the past twenty years, the whole question of the canon has been fervently debated and it is now generally accepted that the English literary canon excluded, to varying degrees, women’s literature, many genres, and the literature of other places, in particular the ex-colonies of the British Empire.

The other major revolution in literary studies has been the growing importance of critical theory, which has adapted and adopted a whole host of influences from other disciplines, such as feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and post-Marxism, linguistics, historiography, philosophy, and so on: literature has become a highly eclectic discipline.

As authors, we therefore face a dilemma: given the importance of theory in modern literary studies, we cannot exclude it; given the obvious limitations of space, we cannot include it. Therefore, we have decided to adopt a position which will enable the student to obtain an overall view of English literature but which, at the same time, will hopefully motivate students to go more deeply into the issues that these literary texts have suggested to them.
**Objectives**

In studying this *Introduction to English Literature*, students will:

1. Have a detailed description of all the major genres of English literature from the Renaissance down to 1990.

2. Learn to situate the literary texts analysed in this course in their cultural, social and historical context in order to see how literature interacts with society.

3. Learn to formulate their own opinions in their answers to the exercises in a meaningful way, without feeling obliged to supply the "right" answer.

4. Be encouraged to continue the study of English Literature using the bibliography and other indications given in this course.
Contents

Module 1
**The Renaissance**
Joan Curbet Soler
1. Culture and Poetry in the Elizabethan Court (1579-1603)
2. William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
3. The Metaphysical Poets
4. The Poetry of John Milton (1608-1674)
5. The development of drama, from Shakespeare to the Restoration

Module 2
**The Restoration and the Augustan Era**
Joan Curbet Soler
1. The Augustan Era (1680-1780): cultural context
2. Augustan poetry (1680-1770)
3. Augustan prose (1710-1730): Defoe and Swift
4. The evolution of the novel: Richardson and Fielding
5. Further developments in novel and drama (1750-1780)

Module 3
**Romanticism and the Nineteenth Century**
Andrew Monnickendam
1. Romanticism
2. Romanticism and anti-Romanticism
3. From Romanticism to the Victorian Age
4. The Victorian novel
5. Victorian poetry and essay

Module 4
**Late Nineteenth Century to 1945**
Felicity Hand
1. The Nineties
2. The Revival of the Theatre to 1945
3. The Birth of Modern Poetry
4. The Birth of the Modern Novel
5. Modernism in English Literature

Module 5
**Post-War English Literature 1945-1990**
Sara Martín Alegre
1. Literature 1945-1990: cultural context
2. The English Novel 1945-1990
Bibliography

1) Many of the texts discussed in Introduction to English Literature, especially the novels of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are available in cheap paperback editions. The major publishers are Penguin, Oxford and Wordsworth.

2) There are numerous anthologies of literary texts, such as The Norton Anthology of English Literature: volume 1 covers the period from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, and volume 2 covers the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The publisher Blackwell has produced some more specialised anthologies based on more modern selection criteria, of which six have been published so far.

3) There are many series of literary handbooks. Cambridge University Press has published a series of "Companions", which are particularly good on the area of the Renaissance.

4) A reliable, traditional history of English literature is that published by Penguin books in seven volumes, starting with Chaucer and concluding with the modern age. A more modern alternative is the Routledge The Literary History of England (in four volumes); Routledge also publishes a one-volume A Short History of English Literature by Harry Blamires.

5) Literary studies has developed its own specialised language, which can, at times, confuse readers. To overcome this problem, a useful reference book such as Martin Gray's A Dictionary of Literary Terms is recommended. Routledge publishes a series entitled "The New Critical Idiom", which discusses literary polemics in a concise, straightforward manner. Among the volumes published are Metre, Rhythm and Verse by Philip Hobsbaum and Romanticism by Aidan Day.

6) Internet users are fully aware that the number of sites is increasing rapidly, and that information gathered one day may indicate a source no longer available the next. We would simply advise students to use reliable search tools such as http://www.yahoo.com/Arts/Humanities/Literature, where you can search by theme, or http://www.altavista.com/, where you can track down information by reference to specific names or topics.