

LT111 INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE: ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

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1. The content of the module

The **Introduction to Literature** module is designed as a foundation for the rest of your degree in the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies at Essex: it will introduce you to themes and texts to which you will constantly return during your time here. It is also intended to stand alone as coherent course of study with many of its own unique and vital qualities.

The module consists of six units, each based on a common genre or theme: **Epic; Metamorphosis; the Underworld; Tragedy; Comedy; the Other**. An understanding of these key genres and themes will provide you with sound foundations upon which you can build throughout your degree. The module honours the comparative emphasis that defines our Department, and the Faculty of Humanities and Comparative Study generally, by drawing links between texts from different centuries, cultures and continents. Notably, the module examines the ways that key literary texts, like Homer's *Odyssey* or Dante's *Inferno*, and key literary genres, like tragedy or comedy, are borrowed from, rewritten, retranslated or reworked by successive generations of writers, up to the present day. In this way, the module seeks to understand long cultural traditions. Lectures and seminars will assist you in tracing a text's literary origins, and the ways in which it develops, whether through continuity, or else via transformation, transition or rupture. Therefore, links will frequently be made between the different texts and units on the module. The constant shifting forward from a classical text to a modern example, and then back to another classical text in another unit, will draw your attention to the complex links and fissures across our cultural traditions.

2. The structure of the module

This module consists of a series of weekly lectures, attended by the whole year group, and weekly seminars, held in smaller seminar rooms on the campus, which you will attend in your seminar group. (If you don't already know it, you will find details of your seminar group on the departmental notice-board outside the General Office.)

If you look at the **LECTURE LIST** (details below) you will see that it is arranged thematically. When studying Comedy, for instance, you will hear lectures on texts from three different periods in history, so that you can compare the development of the genre across time. Typically, a thematic group will contain

three lectures: however, to encourage you to make connections *between* the themes as well as *within* them, sometimes the third lecture will be a bridging session, which will look at how a particular issue—say, gender—is treated across the module more generally. There will also be some revision lectures before the exam, and a lecture on research methods, from our Subject Librarian Emma Wisher.

As noted below, you will find **LECTURE HANDOUTS** on Moodle and on CMR, which will be posted a few days before the lecture takes place. It is important to understand the function of these handouts. Firstly, they are published in advance for environmental reasons. It used to be the case that lecturers would bring a large pile of handouts and distribute them at the lecture; however, because of the difficulty of predicting how many students would be present on any one day, this led to considerable quantities of paper being discarded, unused. To avoid this waste, please bring along your own copy to the lecture, either on paper or on your laptop. The second advantage to advance publication is that it allows you to prepare in a more focused way for the lecture itself. A lecture is much easier to absorb if the material isn't entirely new, and you might also be helped to have unfamiliar names or words (remember, there will be considerable discussion of foreign-language texts) written down for you in advance. A typical handout—say, for a lecture on Dante's *Inferno*, would lay out the following information: the full title of the *Inferno* and its date of publication; the details of Dante's life; his other works; any works, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, which influenced Dante; and any technical terms which would be likely to come up in your reading about the work (e.g. *contrapasso*). There might also be a few different extracts from Dante's poem. You might ask why, armed with this information, you need to turn up for the lecture. The answer is that the handout is only a sketch-map. It provides the basic framework of facts, and in that sense, it is very useful. However, with perhaps some time-consuming research, you could have found out a lot of the same information for yourself. The lecture is there to interpret the facts for you, to fill in the gaps in the sketch and help you to understand how to use the facts in your reading of the text. For instance, the handout might give you a few lines of the poem; the lecture will show you why those lines are difficult to interpret, will tell you what different critics have suggested as a solution to the problems they present, and will offer you the lecturer's own interpretation. This sort of expert discussion and debate is the reason to come to lectures.

SEMINARS work a little differently. They afford you the opportunity to discuss for yourself the material covered in the lecture. For the main part, tutors of seminar groups will follow the texts on the lecture programme. They might, in addition, introduce other relevant texts that serve to broaden your understanding of the particular genre or theme being studied. It is not to be expected that you will have a seminar which covers in detail every text on which you have heard a lecture, so do not be anxious if your group doesn't deal with all of them. LT111 covers such a large range of rich texts that, often, a seminar tutor may wish to spend a few weeks focusing in depth on a particular text, particularly if he or she has special expertise in the area.

The module will emphasise both close reading of literary texts and discussion of broader literary issues. Many of the texts considered—all of the ancient ones and some of the modern ones—are studied in

translation, so questions should be raised as to how literary or cultural values are retained, or else transformed, in the process of translation.

3. Resources for LT111: where to find what you need

Your texts are your most important resource on this course of study, followed by your lecturers and your seminar tutors. Members of the Department will be very happy to answer your questions in their office hours or via email: however, do attempt to be reasonable in your expectations about response times for any emails you might send. An email sent over the weekend might not be received until Monday morning, for instance, so try to make your enquiries in good time. Before you get in touch, you might check to see that your question hasn't been anticipated by looking at the web resources on **MOODLE** and the **COURSE MATERIAL REPOSITORY (CMR)**.

On the LT111 **Moodle** site, you will find the following:

- The lecture list
- The reading list (primary and secondary readings)
- The handout for the weekly lectures
- A notice-board where you can find news relevant to LT111: new library books, podcasts, etc.
- A calendar with deadlines marked

The **CMR** is a less interactive site: it stores documents, and contains copies of lists and handouts also available on Moodle.

The other modules you are studying are also a resource. Many of you will be taking the Writing Skills and Close Reading modules. These classes will enable you to develop skills such as responding directly to essay questions, constructing an argument, structuring an essay and conducting a close commentary of a passage of literary text. Please use these skills you acquire in order to enhance the quality of your work on the LT111 module.

The Department website is another repository of valuable information: you will find there a copy of the First Year handbook, which contains, among other things, the Departmental Style Sheet, which gives details on how to format your written work:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/resources/departmentalStyleSheet.pdf>.

4. Evaluation

ESSAYS:

Written assignments take the form of two essays, each between 2,500 and 3,000 words. Failure to submit an essay by the prescribed deadline will result in the student receiving 0%. Please take note of the essay

deadlines, and leave yourself plenty of time for conducting research, planning your essay, drafting it, redrafting it, and proof-reading your copy for errors. You might be surprised how long it takes, early in your academic career, to format footnotes and bibliography in accordance with the Department style-sheet. This will become second nature to you shortly, but in the first year, give yourself extra time for formatting: you will be penalised if your work is not presented in accordance with academic standards.

Essay questions and deadlines will be posted on Moodle.

EXAMINATION

The examination at the end of the year comprises a first part where students must provide a close reading of a short passage of text. These texts will be chosen from the works discussed in the final few lectures of the spring term, which fall after the final essay deadline. There is then a choice of around ten essay questions, from which students must choose two. Copies of past examination papers are available via the Department website, and there will be two revision lectures in the summer term to help you with your exam preparations.

ORAL GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Oral group presentations are like essays, except that you will work with a team, and you will deliver the results of your research orally rather than in written form. In your first term, you will be divided into groups, and you will be issued with a series of questions, like essay questions. The group will choose a question, and will work to research it; but you should also give thought to how you will present your findings. You will give a twenty-minute presentation in May, and it can take any form you like, as long as everyone is seen to take part. You could decide to support your presentation with images, or other relevant texts. However, although we strongly encourage a creative approach to the presentation, it is important that your work observes academic standards: you will be marked on the depth and integrity of your research as well as your flair for presentation. Your tutors will be available to advise you throughout the year on how you might interpret these regulations.