Module: Countercultures
Module Code: ENGL717P1

Internal Examiner: Professor Cheryl Stobie
External Examiner: Professor Rosemary Gray
Duration: 3 Hours
Total: 100

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

1. Candidates are requested to write legibly.
2. Answer THREE questions.
3. You may not answer more than one question on a film; however, you may answer three questions on novels.
4. This paper consists of five pages. Please ensure that you have them all.
1. One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest

Review the novel in the light of the following quotation, providing supporting evidence for your argument by referring to specific episodes in the novel.

Kesey’s criticism of a cold-war society that he believed fundamentally emasculated men strikes a chord in contemporary America. Randall P. McMurphy’s brief stint in a mental hospital, where he persuades the submissive male patients to rise up against ruthless, emasculating Nurse Ratched, is a story replete with issues of particular immediacy in contemporary America: heightened surveillance, the corruption of administration, the degradation of the individual, and a fundamental terror of perceived feminization.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest features both a masculine hero who is able to transform his masculine performance in front of different audiences and a male patient (Billy Bibbit) who is encouraged to reassert his masculinity via sexual performance – a performance validated by the witnessing of the other patients, who laugh approvingly as they look on. That both these attempts fail, leading to Billy’s suicide and McMurphy’s lobotomy, confronts readers of Kesey’s novel with a fundamental choice that, for Kesey, reflects the crisis of masculinity in the postwar era: castration or lobotomy. The men who repress their sexuality, and consequently their innate masculinity are psychologically castrated, whereas the rest are sacrificed.

Kesey’s work exhibits a masculinity that can perhaps help us understand the obsession with masculine sexual virility and violence in our own time.

Michael Meloy

2) Sula

The narrative strongly suggests that one cannot belong to the community and preserve the imagination, for the orthodox vocations for women – marriage and motherhood – restrict if not preclude imaginative expression.

Deborah E. McDowell

Using the above quotation as a starting point, discuss the representation of the friendship between Sula and Nel with particular reference to significant episodes. What points is Toni Morrison making with regard to gender, autonomy, relationships, the institution of marriage, ethical behaviour, acceptability in a community, and imaginative expression?
3) *Shallow Grave*

Analyse the representation of masculinity in *Shallow Grave*.

4) *A Private Life*

*A Private Life* details the physical, social, sexual and psychological consequences of women’s absence from the symbolic order except as man’s other. Chen Ran adopts a separatist stance of non-engagement for her protagonist, Ni Niuniu, who also suffers from a lifetime of negative encounters with men. Refusing the male gaze and the paternal order of language, Ni Niuniu, whose name translates as “refusal,” remarks that “A name is nothing more than a name ... a string of sounds.” She withdraws from the substantiality of words. Her identity resists categories and functions. Adopting the name and the metaphysical stance of “Lady Zero,” she refuses identification within the order signification and withdraws both physically and symbolically into “a room of one’s own.” With homage to Virginia Woolf and Luce Irigaray, Chen refashions this room into a borderless space of the bathroom in which mirrors fail to reflect images of unified selfhood. Lady Zero refuses all ideologies, all value systems, all “isms.” She forms a homoerotic bond with her neighbour, the Widow Ho, with whom she merges in a fluid, borderless expanse of intersubjectivity that is physical, sensual, intellectual and spiritual all at once. Hers is a female-centred stance, but one also embedded within a Chinese sense of inheritance. Ni Niuniu raves like a mad person, but her nonsense nevertheless illuminates the truth of women’s lives. Chen Ran has created a special discursive space for the exploration of private lives.

Kay Schaffer and Song Xianlin

Discuss Chen Ran’s experiments with prose forms that aim to produce a female poetic aesthetic of interiority.

5) *Transamerica*

*Transamerica* moves its audience to sympathy while symbolically moving the transgender figure from the total margin of society to the heart of the nation. *Transamerica* proves that films sympathetic to transgender oppression can be profitable, win major industry awards, and reach mainstream audiences. Its optimistic, liberation-themed tone also sets it apart from previously successful transgender-themed films that are either campy or dark. Through its use of genre and its manipulation of dysphoric affects, the film manages to place trans difference squarely within the framework of progressive, multicultural discourses of acceptance and diversity. The emergence of this new narrative aesthetic suggests
that we are currently in the midst of a cultural reframing around the challenge that transgender bodies and politics pose to Western forms of liberal democracy.

Cael M. Keegan

Discuss.

6) Specimen Days

Quoted below are the endings to each of the three sections of Specimen Days, “In the Machine,” “The Children’s Crusade” and “Like Beauty.” Carefully analyse the effects achieved in each of the endings, then offer a conclusion as to what unites the three sections and the overall feeling-tone of the novel.

He saw the woman cross the sky. He saw above her, above the smoke and the sky, a glittering horse made of stars. He saw Catherine’s face, pained and inspired. She spoke his name. He knew that his heart had stopped. He wanted to say, I am large, I contain multitudes. I am in the grass under your feet. He made as if to speak but did not speak. In the sky, the great celestial horse turned its enormous head. An unspeakable beauty announced itself.

He had ended her life and taken her into this new one, this crazy rebirth, hurtling forward on a train into the vast confusion of the world, its simultaneous and never-ending collapse and regeneration, its rock-hard little promises, its owners and workers, its sanctuaries that never endured, that were never meant to endure.

To die is different from what any one supposes, and luckier.
The child kept smiling his murderous smile.
Cat smiled back.

The woman was in the ground. The child was on his way to another world. Simon was on his way someplace, and there might be nothing there. No, there was something everywhere. He was going into his future. There was nothing to do but ride into it.

A pure change happened. He felt it buzzing through his circuits. He had no name for it.

He said aloud, “The earth, that is sufficient, I do not want the constellations any nearer, I know they are very well where they are, I know they suffice for those who belong to them.”

He rode on then, through the long grass toward the mountains.
7) The Lives of Others

Critically analyse the narrative arcs of each of the three main characters in the film (Wiesler, Dreyman and Christa-Maria) in terms of the concept of the countercultural. What is your response to von Donnersmarck’s depiction of the gender dynamics in the film?

8) The Virgin of Flames

Cross-dressing is an ingenious tool as it does not fit categories of sex or gender alone and as such exposes both and so in this way is a form of gender iconography, making visible the spaces of possibility which are closed off by dichotomous conceptualization.

Lisa Isherwood

Evaluate the significance of Chris Abani’s use of cross-dressing within The Virgin of Flames, with some use of close textual analysis to support your points.

9) District 9

The alien reveals human beings to be a single species. If it reveals sexual, racial, and other differences within that species, these are not accidental differences, but constitutive. We are a Species that Is Not One.

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay

Discuss the treatment of aliens within the film.

10) Zoo City

A critical dystopia is a non-existent society described in some detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopian can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia.

Lyman Tower Sargent

Provide a critical analysis of Zoo City, using the framework of the critical dystopian.