

Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies

EN 201 *The European Novel* Assessed Essay 2016-17

The essay counts for 50% of the final mark. All essays must be submitted electronically via Tabula not later than 12 pm on Week 10 of Term 2.

The following topics are suggestions. You may modify them, or devise one of your own, but should do so only in consultation with your seminar tutor.

While you may range as widely as you like in European prose fiction, not necessarily confining yourself to books studied on the module, you should make detailed reference to AT LEAST TWO of the set texts unless the question states otherwise. Material used in the essay must not be substantially repeated in the examination.

Word Length: **5000** (students on exchange in Term 2: **3000**).

1. “The stupidity of people comes from having an answer for everything. The wisdom of the novel comes from having a question for everything . . . The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question.” Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Assess the validity of Kundera’s statement, with detailed reference to at least two novels you have studied on the module.
2. “The” “European” Novel”. Using at least *one* of these categories as your baseline, write an essay on your understanding of how we can (or perhaps cannot) situate and identify a (or, if you like, “The”) European Novel. Refer to at least two novels studied on the module in your answer.
3. It has often been remarked that of all literary genres the novel is the most egalitarian and democratic, representing an array of characters and experience from across the social spectrum. In your reading of the European novel, is this statement legitimate? Do novels portray a diversity of social experience, or are they in actual fact shot through with dominant class interests, visible and invisible social hierarchies and antagonisms? Discuss with reference to at least two European Novels.
4. Is it fair to say that most enthusiastic characters in the post-romantic European novel are defeated or disillusioned in the end? Provide reasons for this eventuality, referring to at least two novels in your answer.
5. Can we see madness (or delusion) as a *positive* feature in European Novels?
6. What is the significance of marital union in the European novel? Discuss, with reference to at least two novels studied.
7. Analyse the narrative technique in at least two European novels and demonstrate why it is a central feature in comprehending the predominant themes of each text.
8. Make a case for Empire and/or modernity as a crucial context in European novels.
9. The module has covered fiction spanning three centuries and ten countries. Make a case for

the inclusion of a novel *not* on the syllabus. Your novel must be “European” and from the period 1650-2015. You must critically compare it with at least *one* text we have studied on the module.

10. Discuss the role of **either** sex **or** violence **or** fashion **or** death **or** war **or** migration (or combinations of these) in at least two European novels.

11. Without Romanticism, the realist novel could not exist in the manner it does. Do you agree? Answer with detailed reference to at least two novels we have read.

12. Make a case for the notion that European novels register extra-European affairs **or** globalization as much, if not more than they are concerned with national or local contexts.

13. European novels are more (or as much) concerned about themselves as work of art as they are about “external” material themes or historical events, etc. Do you agree?

14. Lobo Antunes’s novel “The End of the World” represents the end of an era, that of European imperial domination of the world as well as it ushers in postcolonial and postimperial reflection – that critiques “European” myths of grandeur, modernity and civilisation from the margins of Europe. Analyse at least two novels we read in this light.

15. In what ways can the novels we have covered be seen as testing laboratories for **either** gender politics **or** women’s rights?

16. ‘The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art.’ (Friedrich Engels, letter to Margaret Harkness, April 1888.)

Examine such a view in relation to the handling of the relation between realism and its relationship to the construction of “reality” in two or more of the novels studied in this module.

17. Discuss the representation of either “extremity” or “banality” or “mediocrity” (or combinations of the two) in any two novels you have read on the module.

18. Do you agree with the assertion that *what* happens in the European novel depends on *where* it happens?

19. At the root of most novels is class-consciousness. Do you agree? Answer with detailed reference to at least two novels we have studied.

20. Can one speak of an “idea” of Europe conveyed through European novels? If so, what form or forms does it take? Or is such a concept of Europe necessarily always a refractory and illusive wish? Please consider at least two of the novels read.