Fictions of History

Module Code: 155901013
Credits: 30
Year of study: Year 2 or Year 3
Taught in: Full Year

Student Profile

SOAS is a place you come to grow: as a person, writer and thinker. The Fictions of History class was a particularly transformative experience for me. As a bilingual, bicultural and interdisciplinary student it allowed me to explore not only the world but also myself. Hank van Woerden, Caryl Phillips, Alexandra Fuller... these are all authors I have come to love and would not have discovered without SOAS. And the best bit? I have not stopped exploring since.

Kalle Oskari Mattila, BSc International Management (China), Class of 2013
Graduate destinations:
Community Manager, Penguin Books UK
Nonfiction Creative Writing MFA, Columbia University in the City of New York

Prerequisites
None

Objectives and learning outcomes of the module

At the end of the module, a student should be able to:

- show an advanced level of understanding of literary and critical representations of history in Africa and the diaspora
- undertake independent research and complete it successfully
- show advanced level of expression of his/her views both orally and in written form

Workload

Total of 22 weeks teaching with 2 hours classroom contact per week.

Scope and syllabus

This module looks at representations of history in fiction and auto/biography. Focussing on texts in English geographically ranging from England to the Caribbean, North America to Africa and Australia, and temporally from the eighteenth century to the present day, throughout the module we are examining the intersections of history and literature to discuss the ways in which they work as genres and as disciplines. What are the implications of reading a novel for its historical content or accuracy? How does the memoir negotiate intergenerational histories and ideas of veracity? How do different writers reflect on questions of authorship and audience? Looking at questions of orality and transcription, prequels and sequels, intertextuality and canonicity in a selection of colonial and postcolonial works, including film adaptations, the module is excellent preparation for third-year BA English modules such as Southern Spaces and Empire and the Postcolonial.

Method of assessment
A final written examination in May/June (50%); one essay of 1,500 words to be submitted on the last day of term 1 (10%); one essay of 4,000 words to be submitted on the last day of term 2 (30%); presentations (full details to be given by the module convenor) (10%).

Suggested reading

- Valerie MARTIN, Property (Abacus, New ed, 2003)
- Harper LEE, Go Set a Watchman (Heinemann, 2015; available on Kindle)
- Jean RHYS, Wide Sargasso Sea (Penguin, 1997)
- J. M. COETZEE, Foe (Penguin, New ed, 2001)
- Sally MORGAN, My Place (1987; Kindle edition available*)
- Henk VAN WOERDEN, A Mouthful of Glass (Granta, New ed, 2001)
- Alexandra FULLER, Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness (Simon & Schuster, 2012; Kindle edition available*)
- Louise ERDRICH, The Plague of Doves (Harper Perennial, 2008; Kindle edition available*)

Films:

- Mansfield Park
- To Kill a Mockingbird
- Wide Sargasso Sea
- Skin
- The Furies
- The English Patient
- A United Kingdom

Disclaimer

Important notice regarding changes to programmes and modules

Convenors

- Kai Easton

Degree offered on

- BA African Language and Culture
- BA African Studies (3 Year)
- BA African Studies and ... (3 Year)
- BA English
- BA English and ...
- BA Swahili and...

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The Fictions of History class was a particularly transformative experience for me. As a bilingual, bicultural and interdisciplinary student it allowed me to explore not only the world but also myself. Hank van Woerden, Caryl Phillips, Alexandra Fuller these are all authors I have come to love and would not have discovered without SOAS. How does the memoir negotiate intergenerational histories and ideas of veracity? How do different writers reflect on questions of authorship and audience? HISTORY History is systematically collected information about the past. History studies the past in human terms. When used as the name of a field of study, history refers to the study and interpretation of the record of humans, families, and societies. Historical fiction works by presenting something familiar but simultaneously distant from our lives. Its world must have importance and authenticity – it must feel right – but at the same time, the novel is a representation.