

EN2K8/EN3K7 The Novel Now: Reading the Novel in the Twenty-First Century

Essay Questions

1. Memory is one of the central themes of the novel in the late twentieth-century and at the beginning of the twenty-first. Choose two novels from the reading list and develop an argument considering in what ways memory (and post-memory) shape the contemporary novel.
2. Violence has always been a key element of most narratives. The contemporary novel is no exception. Choose two novels from the reading list and construct an argument explaining what form violence takes in the contemporary novel.
3. Novels have always focused on personal aspects of life, either in their own right, or in contrast to social questions. Choose two novels from the reading list and explore how the contemporary novel treats the question of the personal self.
4. Although emotions were always important for literary and cultural analysis, more recently specific probing of emotions through Affect Theory have come to the fore. Choose two novels from the reading list and discuss the importance of the emotions in the contemporary novel.
5. What does it mean to be contemporary? What is the significance of the present as a condition for analysing cultural phenomena? Choose two novels from the reading list and sketch an answer to either, or both, these questions.
6. Democracy is in crisis, democracy is threatened, democracy has never been more vital. All three statements can be argued in relation to how the contemporary novel represents and registers societal issues. Choose two novels from the reading list and discuss how questions surrounding democracy can be vital when reading the contemporary novel.
7. Inequality has never been as great as it is now, especially in advanced, rich, societies. Please choose two novels from the reading list and consider the seeming paradox inherent in the rise in inequality and how fiction engages with it.
8. Gender, Class, and Race provide a definite perspective through which we may learn from the past, understand the present, and imagine the future. Choose two novels from the reading list and explore those terms either in relative isolation or in their intersections.
9. To what extent do contemporary novels contribute to an emancipatory consciousness? Choose two novels from the reading list and construct an argument centred on the idea of reading and emancipation.
10. The rate of publication of excellent and important novels in the present, as well as the rate at which the public is reading fiction (and non-fiction) is very high and can even be said to counter more negative expectations resulting from the current crisis. A ten-week module has to be highly selective and will always leave outstanding works out of consideration. Choose one novel from the reading list and one novel of your choice (published on or after 2000) in order to answer any of the preceding questions.
11. Perhaps you are working on a question raised by your reading of contemporary novels that has not been contemplated above. If so, please send me a brief (one paragraph) proposal of what topic you would like to explore. If deemed appropriate, you can then write an essay to answer your own question.