

PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED: PAULO FREIRE'S PEDAGOGIC CRITIQUE OF POETRY-1 SYLLABUS AT MATERS LEVEL (ENGLISH) AT UNIVERSITY OF SWABI, PAKISTAN

Sania Gul*

Assistant Professor of English, University of Swabi
sania.shah@uoswabi.edu.pk

Farooq Shah

Lectuer in English Literature, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan
farooq@awkum.ed.pk

Kifayatullah

Assistant Prof & Head, Department of English Language and Literature University of Chitral,
Pakistan
kiffayat@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to evaluate the students' feedback of Poetry course. This course includes a total of thirty-four poems of prominent poets ranging from the 14th century till 18th century. The course contents are annexed as A. This study will evaluate the pedagogical appropriateness of the overall course and with a zero lecture in the course to critically evaluate the pedagogical appropriateness of the following four poems in particular. The study also aims at the evaluation of the course design to see whether management of course curriculum has an impact on the course overall success. The study applied the theory of 'Pedagogic Critique' presented and explicated in the work of Paulo Freire titled as 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Paulo Freire, 2000)'. Freire explains that power dynamics behind everything determines the way how any educational course and setting get underway and proceeded. Books, according to him, are never rated beyond their scope until they are associated with their expected readers and audience (Patton, 2017). The study finds out a mixture of complicated feedback from the students who appeared in their MA English course. The study was devised through a questionnaire indexed at the end of the paper. Their feedback was analysed and the conclusion was made. Most of the students through a resultant questionnaire were unable to reply exactly to the course they read and some of the students could not appropriately connect their initial aptitude to the courses they read and what they had initially anticipated. The study also finds out that some of the students selected their course vaguely without having any firsthand knowledge about they would later on study. Prologue to the Canterbury Tales were considered to be most complicated course since it has a little complicated archaic diction, whereas Spencer's Faerie Queene was considered through a feedback to be outmoted and less universally applied to modern teaching practicum and literary pragmatics. Most pragmatic and creative work that was recommended and liked by both the teachers and studentns was 'Paradise Lost'. The study eventually concludes that the poetry-1 course should stand modied and there is a lot of room for research on this aspect. The course needs an overhauling to better engineer it for the students' comprehension and understability.

Keywords: Pedagogy; poetry; syllabus; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Master in English Literature is one of the most sought after degrees in Pakistan. Students from backgrounds other than literature strive for this degree. Keeping in view the dominance of English languages at the global level, and the fact that English is the official language practised in Pakistan, therefore its importance cannot be overlooked. In addition to this, English language enjoys a complicated relationship with the people of Pakistan; it is deemed as a sign of social status and

* Corresponding Author

associated with the elite class. The masses, on one hand, romanticise the language whereas, on the other hand, it is eyed suspiciously and viewed as a tool to exploit and tamper with their ideology and identity of Pakistan. Despite this ambivalent status of English language, many people want to pursue English Literature for their graduation. Little do they know and realise the subtle difference between English as a language and English as a subject. Majority of the students take admission because they want to learn and master English language; they have the least interest and no aptitude for English Literature. Moreover, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and University of Swabi (later on as AWKUM & UoS in the paper) are the universities still in their embryonic stages; in order to gain recognition and popularity, they offer admission to nearly all who are seeking admission without gauging their aptitude for literature. It is because of this reason that the unprepared students are taken aback when they are put to unforeseen difficult situation while negotiating these advanced English and Literary subjects with minute subtleties.

Teaching Level

This course is taught in the first semester of the Master Program. Students from various backgrounds study this course. Majority of the students who get enrolled for Master in English have little or no understanding of English Literature. As discussed earlier, the admissions in Pakistani varsities are usually not in line with the aptitude of students. Moreover, UoS and AWKUM are relatively new universities and are still in their infancy, due to which they enrol students without an appropriate selection process.

- a. The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer .
 - b. Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser.
 - c. Elizabethan “Sonnets” by William Shakespeare (for the purpose of this study, Elizabethan “Sonnets” will be analysed collectively and not individually)
- d. Paradise Lost by John Milton.

Significance of the Study

The study explores a space between the course aims and its eventual adoptability and achievement. Poetry is the compulsory course in MA English or other literary course designed for an English Literary Degree. As poetry redies students for a literary taste since its archaic/out of the way expression contrary to street or communicative language, it baffles the students at the onset. Therefore, this course evaluation holds importance and instrumental postion. The study will nurture the academic and academic growth of not only the students under question but will help improve the scope and space of the ongoing literary debate on courses in MA English. The study also holds its importance for practical implications of impregnating the aesthetics being presented through literature into interdisciplinary courses held in sociology, anthropology and political sciences. It will facilitate academia from theoretical doings to pragmatic milieu.

Statement of the Research

The research undertakes poetry course to find out what factors are responsible for designing a poetry course at MA Level and how such factors are instrumental to the cause of embarking on a certain academic course. This problem is intervening into ongoing pedagogy at university level and brings out the significant aspects of literary dimensions into teaching corridor. It also redresses the faulty teaching services at MA Level in English Literature.

Research Questions

This paper attempts to find anwer to the following research questions.

1. Do these poems pedagogically seem feasible and appropriate to be taught at Masters level, keeping in view the social and educational background level of MA students?
2. Are components of pedagogic critique taken into consideration while designing this course?
3. Is this course successful in achieving its desired aims and objectives?

Research Objectives

The research objectives of the paper are given below.

- a) To find out the Pedagogic appropriateness of these poems.
- b) To investigate why some poems are more liked by students and some are less liked by students.
- c) To find out sameness or uniformity in the responses of students and teachers to the same texts.
- d) To find out the strengths and limitations of this course.

Delimitation of the Research

During the course of the study, it was strongly felt that the scope of the research is too wide. Pedagogical efficacy of these poems needs to be individually analysed. Since the poems are versatile and dynamic in theme and approach, designing questions with a common denominator that applies to all poem posed difficulty; therefore, the poems have been only broadly analysed.

The survey focused only on the semester system; future researchers may also focus on the same course taught in the annual system in different universities and compare and contrast the feedback obtained from students of semester system and feedback from students of annual system towards the same course. Such a survey might be helpful in highlighting the difference between the annual system and semester system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is quantitative by nature as it involves basically the statistical responses of both the students. The questionnaire has been designed in such a way that all the students have been properly offered time, space, opportunity to register their openness to every logical and personal or emotional responses. The data was carried out and conducted very professionally. The questions were unprejudiced and were based with disinterested fairness. The data and responses collected were made at the end of the course so that the respondents have had the ability to answer comprehensively and with an eclectic/plural approach.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was designed keeping in view the markers of pedagogic critique and objectives of literature; the questionnaire consisted of 15 questions in which 11 were close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. Ten questions had 2 sub-questions. A total of 29 questions were designed for the purpose of this study. (The questionnaire is annexed B)

Sampling

A sample size of 20 students and 10 teachers was randomly selected. 10 students belonged to UoS and the remaining 10 belonged to AWKUM. Whereas, 6 teachers of UoS and 4 teachers of AWKUM were kind enough to be the part of this study

RESULTS

All the students and the teachers expressed that the course is too lengthy to be covered in one semester. 90% of teachers and 100% of students reported that students are not ready for the course of this level in the first semester. 90% of students and 90% of teachers said that teaching/reading the course was an exhausting experience.

In the study, it was found that “Sonnets” are most liked among both teachers and students. All the students and all the teachers were of the opinion that “Sonnets” comparatively pose the least challenge regarding the thematic comprehension of the poems. 75% of students’ view “Sonnets” as most clear, whereas all the teachers were of the opinion that “Sonnets” have the clarity of structure, theme and diction. 75% of teachers and 50% of students view “Sonnets” as reflective of their own emotions and feelings and least reflective of the Elizabethan Age. 60% of students and 100% teachers view “Sonnets” as most aesthetically pleasing. 70 % Students and 40% of teachers were of the view that “Sonnets” have enriched their vocabulary and helped in polishing their language skills.

“Prologue to Canterbury Tales” had a mixed response from both students and teachers. 75% of students’ view “Prologue to Canterbury Tales” as the most difficult poem to comprehend, whereas teachers encounter no difficulty in comprehending the poem. The poem lacks clarity as per feedback of 30% students. All the teachers and students liked prologue to Canterbury Tales for its realistic and detailed depiction of its respective age. Only 25% of students think the poem is relevant to the modern age. All the teachers and students unanimously favoured the poem to be least helpful in improving English language.

“Paradise Lost” elicited a favourable response from students. 75% of students and 10% of teachers said: ‘Paradise Lost’ is difficult to comprehend. 25% of students think “Paradise Lost” lacks clarity. 50 % of the students and 100% of the teachers view the poem as the least reflective of its age while 20% of teachers think that they can relate to the poem and deem it relevant to Modern Age. On one hand, 20% of students and 40% of teachers find the epic as most aesthetically satisfying, while on the other hand, 40 % of students think the poem is offensive to their sensibilities. According to 40% of

students and 100% teachers “Paradise Lost” has enriched their vocabulary and hence has played an instrumental part in polishing of the English language.

As a result of this study, it was found out that “Faerie Queene” is least popular among students and teachers and it evoked a least favourable response from them. 75 % of students and 100% teachers said: “Faerie Queene” poses the greatest difficulty in comprehension. 80% students and 100 % teachers think “Faerie Queene “ is the vaguest poem that lacks clarity; 90% students and 100% teachers said that the poem is by no means relatable to them and is least relevant to their contemporary space and time. According to 90% students and 80% of teachers, the poem offers little or no aesthetic satisfaction. All the students and teachers are convinced that the poem fails to achieve its avowed purpose, and unsurprisingly 90% both students and teachers think the poem should be scraped from the course and some other poem should be introduced instead

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS & ANALYSIS

The study very aptly revealed that this course is unrealistic and too lengthy; it cannot be covered fully in 16 weeks. This course was originally designed by the University of Peshawar for the annual MA English later on by AWKUM and UoS have adopted this course for semester system without tailoring it to the needs and demands of the semester system.

From the above survey, it can be easily deduced that “Sonnets” are most liked by students and teachers alike. The course is taught chronologically in classrooms starting from Chaucer and ending with Pope; after reading Chaucer’s “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales” and Spencer’s “Faerie Queene”, “Sonnets” prove to be a breath of fresh air. They are short and concise and hence easy to teach and comprehend. Their themes are simple and the emotional quotient of sonnets successfully stirs emotional chords of youth and hence they emote from students, not an emotional connection but also a favourable response. The simple diction of “Sonnets” makes them even more enticing. However, all the “Elizabethan Sonnets” have a similar theme of celebrating the beauty of beloved or venting out the pangs of unrequited love. The theme common to all the Elizabethan makes them a bit too simplistic for the master’s level students.

“The Prologue to Canterbury Tales” got a mixed response from students and teachers. It is liked by a high percent students as it is the most reflective poem of its age; the text provides historical discovery and emotional engagement at the same time. It is a social, historical, and cultural document as well as a story. To read the ‘General Prologue’ of the Canterbury Tales is to gaze directly at the late Middle Ages; the relevancy of the Chaucer’s characters to modern times is amusing. The characters are medieval in appearance but modern in outlook. Chaucer presents well to students using modern theoretical approaches; on gender, class, xenophobia, etc. they gain insights into the origins of many modern problems in a study of medieval culture. The alterity is attractive, especially when such variety can be experienced relatively quickly in the ‘Canterbury Tales’. I think the relative shortness and the variety of the ‘Canterbury Tales make it possible for students to experience a lot of variety, in the genre, and the characters.

However, the poem earned negative response as well, which can be attributed to its obsolete and difficult language. The poem is not in any possible way helpful in polishing the language; in fact, the language is rather time consuming and baffling. In Pakistan the classrooms have ESL setting; the students experience great difficulty in mastering the syntax of the language that they have been exposed to for more than ten years, and hence, may not be considered the competent users of the language. In such a situation, the language of “The Prologue to Canterbury Tales” proves to be further challenging. The challenging and unfamiliar dialect of the poem intimidates both teachers and students. The poem is, therefore, not instantly appealing due to its difficult and archaic language. There is apparently an issue with semester system with regard to the time available to familiarize students with Chaucer’s language. The absence of authentic prosody of the Prologue makes it further taxing, and even if there is any, then the question arises how we know this is the most credible rendering of sounds. In this regard, Robinson suggests that we listen to ‘the gramophone records’ made by Professor H. C. Wyld which are ‘indispensable for those who wish to know how Chaucer’s English sounded to those who heard the poet read it’. Most of the energy of students is invested in mastering the language instead of appreciating it. Accents, pronunciations and the final e sounds put students off. Moreover, Historical gulf is too wide (the students naturally tend to ask why reading a language that is obsolete?). Chaucer and the modern reader may think alike, but 700 years of language evolution and a trans-Atlantic divide

have made the differences more immediately recognizable than the similarities. The experience of studying the *Canterbury Tales* involves historical discovery, philosophical seriousness, emotional engagement, and, often, spontaneous laughter. A good deal of historical groundwork is necessary to prevent this many-faceted text from being a mere relic from the past, charming perhaps, but quaint.

Since the poem is in an alien language, there is an abundance of study guides in the market that renders the poem with translations and modern versions of the language. This kills the charm and romance of the poem. An important task for the teachers is to avoid the early resort to translations, especially the modern versions in some of the study guides by the students. "Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*" is a teacher-centered text; Chaucer may rely upon teachers to cultivate the Chaucerian sensibilities that connect him to the modern age. Unfortunately, Chaucer is not being taught in a way which brings out fully Chaucerian sensibilities, a study of previous papers revealed that questions were nearly always formulated with 'discuss', 'comment', 'consider', 'how', 'what', 'show', that ask students to establish Chaucer as being the most authentic representative of Medieval Age. There is hardly any question that asks to explore Chaucer. Even if there is any question that requires exploring, exploring means not much to explore. The survey of questions indicated we are not exploring and re-exploring Chaucer; also he is modern but we are pushing him to be medieval. His appeal is in a kind of universality, the medieval immediacy and the modern resonances of characters and stories. A deeper study of the characters in the poem will make the poem more interesting sailing e.g. the Wife of Bath, despite living in the Middle Ages which were supposedly oppressive, is travelling free & has her own way. Why is the fact important that she is a weaver? Questions about her style and dress can also give an insight into the personality of the character. In a time when the 'how-to-pass-examinations' industry thrives, perhaps to the exclusion of more academic and intellectual pursuits, an uphill task for the teachers will be to engage young and lively minds on how 'modern' Chaucer is (perhaps how 'medieval' are we) when immediate goals are more important.

"*Faerie Queene*" came out to be the least popular among students and teachers. Reading and teaching the poem is a daunting task. It is both complex and complicated. The archaic language, formal structure, an abundance of historical references and allusions, plenty of literary and mythological allusions, interlaced plot lines, too many characters, overloaded symbolism are some of the reasons that instead of inspiring and impressing students, it earns from the students a negative response. Reading and comprehending the poem is a long struggle and most of the students end up being exhausted.

This artistic creation is viewed as a source of instruction via amusement as Spenser professes in a letter to Raleigh that he is writing this poem "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline"(06). The question then arises whether the text has achieved its purpose. And all the students in the questionnaire recorded their response that it did not achieve it; hardly the students came out as gentlemen and hence, the poem failed in achieving its desired objective. The poem also challenges the readers through the narrative to become actively engaged in the evaluation of characters' words and gestures and of the appearances of settings and objects. The text constitutes an increasingly demanding course of study that requires as its basic lesson that readers respond effectively and intuitively to the poem's diction which are not just simple signs but potentially contradictory and mixed literal, symbolic, and allegorical significations describing complexly ordered actions, ideas, and feelings. Spenser is master of obscuring the plot, and hence its lines remain obscured.

David Lee Miller says rightly "*Faerie Queene*" is more often admired than read and more often read than understood"(34). What makes this text more difficult is that its allegorical method is rooted in the dense matrix of linguistic invention and deformation, neologism, archaism, punning, and typographical play.

The poem fails to engage students emotionally and students in Pakistan do not find any element that binds or connects them to the poem. Most references and allusions are about Elizabethan times as it was written to promote national agenda to glorify Queen Elizabeth and demean Mary Queen of Scots. It also portrays the religious struggle of the age. A little too much is happening here and all of this is layered. While Chaucer records and showcases his times, Spenser only alludes; this makes it less appealing to our students.

Despite the fact that it indirectly touches all the issues of its time, students and teachers in their response recorded that it is least reflective of its age. The reason might be that Shakespeare has dwarfed Spenser in representing the true spirit of the Renaissance. The name Renaissance and Shakespeare have almost come to be synonymous in recent times. Shakespeare escapes political or ideological

classification more easily and allows for more interpretative freedom on the recipient's part. Especially Shakespeare's plays appear as more modern and appealing than Spenser's epic poem. This is due to various factors: the different generic conventions, structures and systems of communication inherent in drama and poetry, and the qualities of universality or historicity in the construction of the works' meanings. Last but not least Shakespeare's representations seem to be more universal and timeless, whereas Spenser's appear as more time culture bound, more strictly historical.

Spencer, as is known as the poet's poet, has been loved and admired by the masters of the trade, but unfortunately, students in Pakistan do not seem to appreciate Spenser's genius. His poetic genius has mixed response from other writers as well. On one hand, he is praised by classics like John Milton' "our sage and serious Poet Spenser [...] a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas", (50) while on the other hand has received harsh criticism from philosophers like Karl Marx's "Elizabeth's arse-kissing poet"^[1] (3). Given the implicit tension between these approaches, it is not surprising that book 1 often leaves novice readers reeling with blurred vision.

The aesthetic appeal of the poem is lost in grasping the theme and references. The poem has a fixed background, so every episode or encounter is seen in a given light of history. An attempt of different interpretations of the poem might make it more interesting flight. The survey of old questions also shows that is only one interpretation of the poem has been in vogue. The wooden surface of allegories needs to be forsaken in favour of some newer interpretations. Some shreds of modern relevancy must be made otherwise, not only the language but the genre too is obsolete. For example, the poem can be studied in a way where the knight's foes can be interpreted as largely projections of his own spiritual and psychological conditions.

The problem with "Faerie Queene" is that it is too complicated. Spenser's poem pushes at the limits of its own faerie world even as that world develops further complexities and depth. The students are convinced that they must retreat to some higher authority- notes or teachers in order to decode the layered symbolism of the poem. "The retreat to authority" inevitably kills any interest they have developed in the poem, for if it is no more than a puzzle to be solved by someone above and outside themselves, then they cannot partake of its interpretive pleasures. When we read The Faerie Queene we need a long memory and a distanced, somewhat relaxed view of its entanglements even more than we need the capacity for paying minute attention. Matters are complicated and deepened in Spenser's verse by continually widening contexts.

"Paradise Lost" is more liked by teachers as compared to students' likeness and response. Despite having a grand style and abundance of biblical and mythological allusions, teachers and students find it aesthetically pleasing. It is a poem that undoubtedly uplifts the soul in unfelt ways. The conflict is universal in nature and common to man's interests and engages students. Some of the students find it irritable but many find it as a most honest piece of literature that broadens the vision of life and opens up new vistas of thinking and understanding. Despite the difficult language and classical approach of Milton, the poem helps in polishing the language. The character of Satan leaves indelible imprints on the minds of readers and stays with readers long after the poem is finished. The speeches of Satan alone initiate students to the subtleties of literature and play an important part in giving them the true flavour of literature. Texts like "Paradise Lost" are more important in countries like Pakistan in which societies are plagued by extremism, as the poem encourages critical thinking and debates in classrooms. Hence, the poem can play an important role in diluting the religious extremism by engaging students in critical debates. With this backdrop, Paradise Lost becomes most important poem as it provides both amusement and instruction and successfully achieves the goals of literature by polishing their language and broadening their vision of life.

CONCLUSION

In the poetry course, the beginners are immediately served with the archaic language of complex and complicated poems which becomes unpalatable and difficult to interpret and appreciate. The problems are multifaceted and call for several changes and modifications. There is a dire need of changing and modifying the course according to the needs and demands of the semester system. Also, the universities must design a filtration process for the students who aspire to get admission in English literature; only those students should be given admission who have an aptitude for literature. More creative pieces like Paradise Lost should be added in the course to bring out the practical efficacy of literature in combating problems like fanaticism and extremism. Modern approaches must be applied to texts like "Faerie

Queene” that have no relevance to contemporary time and space, in order to rekindle the dying interest in them.

The majority answers/feedback were regarding the removal of the poem Spencer’s Faerie Queene because of its irrelevance and too outdated implication to the contemporary poetics and modern literary genres. The other was relative to Chaucer’s poem ‘Prologue to the Canterbury Tales’ which received a mixed feedback and the overwhelming one was its importance in the relevant world for its creative impulse and universality. However, it was also slightly disfavoured for its tough phraseology and lexical outmodedness and threadbare fashion.

Recommendation and Further Studies/Research

A zero semester should be introduced in these universities for students who have not read English Literature in previous grades to acquaint them with the basics of Literature. As this research evaluated the contents and its main focus was on the content and overall thematic inclusion in these researches, a further investigation in line with the current research can/should be made in regards to its moral and ethical level. The ethical and religious considerations should be properly taken into mind while designing the questionnaire. Furthermore, the prose syllabus can also be researched in this way to find out what course and when to teach and to which classes/levels such teachings be conducted.

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ANNEXURE A

Marvell (1621-1678):

- “To his Coy Mistress”,
- “The Definition of Love”

4. Restoration & 18th Century Poetry (1660-1789)

a) John Dryden (1631-1700):

- Alexander’s Feast;
- Absalom and Achitophel

b) Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

- The Rape of the Lock, Essay on Man (Epistle 2, ll. 1-30)
- Essay on Criticism (ll. 68-91; 215-252; 357-383)

Annexure b

Pedagogical critique of Poetry I, with a focus on

- i) Prologue to Canterbury tales ii) Faerie Queene
iii) Sonnets iv) Paradise Lost**

Questionnaire

- Q1.** Can the whole course of Poetry I be covered in one semester?
Yes No to some extent Don't Know
- Q2.** Are the students ready for the course of this level in the first semester?
Yes No to some extent Don't Know
- Q3:** Are the poems challenging?
Yes no to some extent Don't Know.
Most difficult (to teach/read) among the aforementioned poems:
Most easy (to teach/read) among the aforementioned poems:
- Q4:** Do the poems have clarity?
Yes No to some extent Don't Know
Most Clear poem:
Most Vague poem:
- Q5:** Do the poems reflect their Ages?
Yes No to some extent Don't know
Most Reflective poem:
Least Reflective poem:
- Q6:** Are the poems in any way relevant/ relatable?
Yes No to some extent Don't know.
Most Relevant poem:
Least Relevant poem:
- Q7:** Do the poems touch emotional chords?
Yes No to some extent Don't Know.
Most emotionally charged poem:
Least emotionally charged poem:
- Q8:** Are the poems aesthetically satisfying?
Yes no to some extent don't know
Most aesthetically satisfying poem:
Least aesthetically satisfying poem:
- Q9:** Are the poems in any way offensive to your own sensibilities?
Yes no to some extent. don't know.
Most offensive poem:
Least offensive poem:
- Q10:** Are the poems helpful in polishing of language?
Yes no to some extent. don't know.
Most helpful poem:
Least helpful poem:
- Q11:** do the poems broaden your vision of life?
Yes no to some extent. don't know.
- Q12:** Is Faerie Queene successful in fashioning a gentleman?
Yes no to some extent. don't know..
- 13)** Do you want any poem to be removed from course?
Yes no to some extent. don't know.
- 14)** was studying/teaching the course exhausting or exhilarating experience?
Exhausting Exhilarating Both don't know.
- 15)** Any comments/feedback other than above questions on the course or on the questionnaire?