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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

First Semester Examination  
Academic Session 2007/2008

October/November 2007

**HXE 211 – LITERARY CRITICISM**

Duration: 3 hours

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Please check that this examination paper consists of FIVE pages of printed material before you begin the examination.

Answer FOUR questions. Choose any TWO questions from Section A and TWO from Section B.

Section A

1. What are some of the central issues and concerns of postcolonial theory and literature? Illustrate your discussion with specific examples drawn from the texts that have been analysed in class.  
[100 marks]
2. To what extent do you agree that Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" is an appeal in favour of imperialism and militarism?  
[100 marks]
3. "Colonialist literature was informed by theories concerning the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire. Its distinctive stereotyped language was geared to mediating the white man's relationship with colonised peoples" (Boehmer 1995). How far is this true in your reading of Conrad's *Almayer's Folly*?  
[100 marks]
4. How and why does Rhys attempt to re-invent an identity for Rochester's mad wife, Bertha Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea*?  
[100 marks]

Section B

5. The following passage was written by a well-known writer in 1788. Read the extract carefully and discuss the author's view of marriage?

Early marriages are, in my opinion, a stop to improvement. If we were born only 'to draw nutrition, propagate and rot', the sooner the end of creation was answered, the better. . .

. . . In a comfortable situation, a cultivated mind is necessary to render a woman contented; and in a miserable one, it is her only consolation. A sensible, delicate woman, who by some strange accident, or mistake, is joined to a fool or a brute, must be wretched beyond all names of wretchedness, if her views are confined to the present scene. Of what importance then, is intellectual improvement, when our comfort here, and our happiness hereafter, depends on it.

[100 marks]

6. Analyse the extract about female language and gender and determine how female silence is represented metaphorically.

When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent. A dumbness - a shame - still cracks my voice in two, even when I want to say 'hello' casually or ask an easy question in front of the checkout counter, or ask directions of a bus driver. I stand frozen, or I hold up the line with the complete, grammatical sentence that comes squeaking out at impossible length. 'What did you say?' says the cab driver, or, 'Speak up,' so I have to perform again, only weaker the second time. A telephone call makes my throat bleed and takes up that day's courage. It spoils my day with self-disgust when I hear my broken voice come skittering out into the open. It makes people wince to hear it. I'm getting better, though. Recently I asked the postman for special-issue stamps; I've waited since childhood for postmen to give me some of their own accord. I am making progress, a little every day.

My silence was thickets - total - during the three years I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top. I was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose. The teachers called my parents to school, and -I saw they had been saving my pictures, curling and cracking, all alike and black. The teachers pointed to the pictures and looked serious, talked seriously too, but my parents did not understand English. ('The parents and teachers of criminals were executed,' said my father.) My parents took the pictures home. I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas.

During the first silent year I spoke to no one at school, did not ask before going to the lavatory, and flunked kindergarten. My sister also said nothing for three years, silent in the playground and silent at lunch. There were other quiet Chinese girls not of our family, but most of them got over it sooner than we did. I enjoyed the silence. At first it did not occur to me I was supposed to talk or to pass kindergarten. I talked at home and to one or two of the Chinese kids in class. I made motions and even made some jokes. I drank out of a toy saucer when the water spilled out of the cup, and everybody laughed, pointing at me, so I did it some more. I didn't know that Americans don't drink out of saucers.

I liked the Negro students (Black ghosts) best because they laughed the loudest and talked to me as if I was a daring talker too. One of the Negro girls had her mother coil braids, over her ears Shanghai-style like mine; we were Shanghai twins except she was covered with black like my paintings. Two Negro kids enrolled in Chinese school, and the teachers gave them Chinese names. Some Negro kids walked me to school and home, protecting me from the Japanese kids, who hit me and chased me and stuck gum in my ears. The Japanese kids were noisy and tough. They appeared one day in kindergarten, released from concentration camp, which was a tic-tac-toe mark, like barbed wire, on the map.

It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery. I did not speak and felt bad each time I did not speak. I read aloud in first grade, though, and heard the barest whisper with little squeaks come out of my throat. 'Louder,' said the teacher, who scared the voice away again. The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl.

Maxine Hong Kingston, The Women Warrior: Memoir of A Girlhood Among Ghosts (1981) pp. 148-50.

[100 marks]

7. To what extent does the following poem reinforce or challenge a stereotypical conceptualization of gender.

Ain't I a Woman?

That man over there says  
a woman needs to be helped into carriage  
and lifted over ditches  
and to have the best place everywhere.  
Nobody ever helped me into carriages  
or over mud puddles  
or gives me a best place ...  
And ain't I a woman?  
Look at me  
Look at my arm!  
I have plowed and planted  
and gathered into barns  
and no man could head me ...  
And ain't I a woman?  
I could work as much  
and eat as much as a man  
when I could get to it  
and bear the lash as well  
and ain't I a woman?  
I have born 13 children  
and seen most all sold into slavery  
and when I cried out a mother's grief  
none but Jesus heard me ...  
and ain't I a woman?  
that little man in black there say  
a woman can't have as much right as a man  
cause Christ wasn't a woman  
Where did your Christ come from?

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From God and a woman!  
Man had nothing to do with him!  
If the first woman God ever made  
was strong enough to turn the world  
upside down, all alone.

From: Linthwaite, 1. (ed.) Ain t 1 a Woman: A Book of Women's Poetry from Around the World.)

[100 marks]

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