THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS

Lecturer: Dr Ian Sansom
Semester: Hilary Term
ECTS: 10

SUMMARY

The module is intended as an introduction to the history, theory and practice of narrative, storytelling and plots.

We will be examining plots, plotting, patterns and shapes in fiction, non-fiction, video, art, graphic narratives and digital/online media.

This is a hybrid critical/creative module intended for students who wish to experiment with their critical and creative writing. The module will be exploratory and practical, using structured exercises, published texts, handouts, class discussion and homework to stimulate the production of new work. Each week students will study one text in particular in relation to an aspect of plot. All students are expected to produce work for discussion every week.

Primary Reading:

Each week, one book will be studied in detail. A course handbook will be provided at the beginning of the module which will contain extracts of further reading.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module a student should be able to:
1. Identify and show a critical understanding of some of the key terms for interpreting and discussing narrative and plots.

2. Show an understanding of the history and recent developments in the theory and practice of plotting and narrative.

3. Demonstrate an awareness of some of the key debates about the nature of narrative, storytelling and plotting.

4. Employ a range of high-level writing skills in producing a range of texts.

**Assessment:**

This module will be assessed by the submission of 1 piece of work at the end of term - EITHER an essay OR a creative project which explores some aspect of plotting or narrative theory.

**Schedule:**

**Week 1:** Introduction
*The Seven Basic Plots*, Christopher Booker
(Poetics, fairy tales, Joseph Campbell, patterns in nature and art)

**Week 2:** Heroes/Heroines: Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
(Don Quixote, *The Bourne Identity*]

**Week 3** Monsters/Others: Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley*
(The Bible, *Frankenstein*, Stephen King, Homer)

**Week 4** Tragedy: *Oedipus Rex*
(Oedipus Rex, Ibsen, Chekhov, revenge)
Week 5 Comedy: Jane Austen, *Emma*  
(Chaplin, Keaton, Harold Lloyd, P.G.Wodehouse, slapstick, stand-up)

Week 6: The Quest: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*  
(Dan Brown, Super Mario, gaming)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Voyage and Return: Homer, *The Odyssey*  
(Islands, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Beach*)

Week 9: Transformation: Dickens, *Great Expectations*  
(Dostoevsky, *A Star Is Born*, the Bildungsroman)

Week 10: Anti-Plots: Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*  
(Clarice Lispector, Christine Brooke-Rose, *Adaptation*)

Week 11: Plots and Reality: Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*

Week 12: Summary and Review