

Fundamentals of Literary Theory

Duration: MT

Taught by: lecture and tutorial

Weighting: 5 ECTS

Theories of literature deal with basic issues involving the study of narratives, poems and plays. They try to answer questions such as: what is literature? What are people doing when they write or read literary texts? Is there a social function of literature? And what is the task of a literary scholar? These questions are complex and they are connected with even more fundamental questions, such as: what is language and what is its place in society and in the individual? For this reason, literary theory has become an large, intricate terrain that beginners often find difficult to navigate. This module aims to provide the students with the basic conceptual tools that will enable them to engage with theoretical texts.

On successful completion of this course students will:

- Be familiar with some of the dominant schools of literary theory, from the late 19th century to today.
- Be able to consider and apply different theoretical approaches when analyzing literary works.
- Be familiar with the different debates regarding the role and value of literature in broader cultural contexts.
- Be prepared to engage in the practice of interpreting texts and contexts at an advanced level.

Course Outline with Readings

Week 1 (BQ/SS)

Introduction (The pre-20th-century history of literary criticism: Aristotle; rhetoric, poetics, exegesis/hermeneutics, liberal tradition)

Week 2 (SS)

New Criticism; Russian Formalism, Roman Jakobson

Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique”; Roman Jakobson, “What is Poetry?” (excerpts);

“Linguistics and Poetics” (excerpts).

Week 3 (SS)

Saussure and his disciples (Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Genette)

Ferdinand de Saussure, Excerpts from the *Course in General Linguistics*, part 1 and 2.

Week 4 (BQ)

Speech act theory (Austin), media theory (McLuhan, Kittler)

John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, chapter 1; Friedrich Kittler,

“Gramophone, Film, Typewriter”.

Week 5 (BQ)

Freud and his disciples (Lacan)

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, chapter 5 and 6 (excerpts); Jacques Lacan,

“The Instance of the Letter” (excerpts).

Week 6 (BQ)

Marx and the consequences (Lukács, Gramsci, Voloshinov, Jameson)

Karl Marx, *Capital* (excerpts); Valentin Voloshinov/Mikhail Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, chapter 1.

Week 7

Reading Week

Week 8 (SS)

Nietzsche and the consequences (Foucault, New Historicism)

Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense”; Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”.

Week 9 (SS)

Deconstruction (Derrida, de Man)

Jacques Derrida, “This Dangerous Supplement” (chapter 2.2 of *Grammatology*).

Week 10 (BQ)

Frankfurt School (Benjamin, Adorno) and School of Konstanz (Jauß, Iser)

Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” (excerpts) and “The Storyteller” (excerpts),

Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process”.

Week 11 (SS)

Gender Theory (Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva, Butler)

Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* (excerpts); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, chapter 1.

Week 12 (BQ)

Geophilosophy/Ecocriticism/current trends (Deleuze/Guattari, Whitehead et al.)

Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, “The Geology of Morals” (chapter 3 of *A Thousand Plateaus*; excerpts); “Postulates of Linguistics” (chapter 4 of *A Thousand Plateaus*; excerpts).