

Romance Studies

French, Spanish, Italian, Latin American studies

Course: Romance Studies

Group of courses: Humanities

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Course objectives:

The goal is to provide students with the theoretical foundations and the methodology of gender studies within literary criticism, and to give them an idea of the overall importance of gender-related issues in Romance literary studies. The goal is to enable students to understand the importance of the gender category with regard to Romance literary and cultural studies – possibly also in its interactions with other categories such as race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation – and to critically apply this category to literary texts.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Gender approaches in Romance studies explore the ways in which gender relations and the category of gender become manifest at all levels of analysis in Romance literatures and cultures – most importantly in Italian, Francophone, and Hispanic literatures and cultures. Thus the focus is on gender-specific problems of authorship and literary tradition; gender-specific constellations of plot and character in literary texts; gender-specific reading habits and text receptions; approaches to narrative theory that involve considerations of gender; the interdependence between gender and literary canonization, as well as that between genre and gender.

Studies are based on a pluralism of theories and methods whose historical dimension – as a prerequisite for the emergence of gender studies – should also be part of the curriculum.

Historical overview from the emergence of feminist literary theories to the institutionalization of gender studies

A historical overview has to start by tracing the development from Anglo-American feminist critique (images-of-women research) through gynocriticism (E. Showalter) and on to the linguistic turn in poststructuralist feminism (linguistic-performative constitution of identity). The fact that the theory of difference and the *écriture féminine* approach of poststructuralist feminism were developed by French and French Canadian theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Nicole Brossard, and others, makes gender studies an especially relevant concern to Romance studies. Italian feminists, too, contributed to the emergence of a theory of difference during those historic years – through contributions from the *Libreria delle donne* de Milano on the one hand, and through contributions from the two most important Italian representatives of the *pensiero della differenza*, Adriana Cavavero and Luisa Murano (*affidamento*), on the other. Starting in the 1970s, the border region between Mexico and the United States saw the emergence of Chicana feminism, which is based on a model of mixed and blurred cultural boundaries (*mestizijade*), as epitomized by the hybrid figure of the *New Mestiza* (Gloria Anzaldúa).

In addition to covering the postfeminism of the 1980s and 1990s (multiplicity of differences instead of difference), the historical overview will have to address gender studies (J. Butler, sex vs. gender) and deconstructivist feminism (i.e. the analysis of the social construction of gender identities), as well as, finally, men's studies and queer studies. Simone de Beauvoir (*Le deuxième sexe*, 1949), with her distinction between biological sex and cultural gender, needs to be highlighted as a forerunner of gender studies.

Gender-specific problems of authorship and literary tradition

The goal is to make students aware of the relationship between literary authorship and authority, and of the specific strategies of legitimization and self-authorization that female authors in particular often resorted to (e.g. using a pseudonym or publishing anonymously).

By studying examples from the Romance literatures, such as Madame de Lafayette and Madame de Sévigné, students are supposed to learn that whether an author published under a male or female name has been a decisive issue regarding the status of authorship, as well as a guiding factor for the categorization and interpretation of a literary text, and ultimately for its assessment, its ongoing reception, and canonization.

The aim is to help students realize that marginalized women writers who have disappeared from the canon or from literary history can be rediscovered, or 're-read', as part of a (re-)creation of female literary genealogies. The querrelles des femmes tradition – ranging from Christine de Pizan to Marguerite de Navarre, Moderata Fonte, María de Zayas, and at least into the eighteenth century, if not beyond – can hardly be overestimated in its importance for the entire field of Romance studies.

Gender-specific constellations of plot and character

Using examples from the Romance literatures, the aim is to show students that constellations of plot and character in literary texts are structured in gender-specific ways. In this context, female writers often engage in a re-écriture of male-dominated text models by re-writing traditional constellations of plot and character from a female point of view, thereby presenting very different, if not opposite models of gender relationships.

Gender-specific reading habits and text receptions; narrative theory

By exploring theoretical research on the reading process (J. Fetterley) and on feminist narratology (S. Lanser, V. and A. Nünning), and by applying these approaches to examples from the Romance literatures, students are supposed to learn that considering the category of gender is also relevant for studies of the reading process and for the narratological analysis of literary texts.

Gender and literary canonization

Students should be made aware of the fact that re-reading canonical texts from a gender perspective is a primary objective (e.g. Shoshana Felmann's re-reading of Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or*). Beyond that, the goal is to re-read female and male authors previously ignored by a patriarchal type of literary historiography that presumed a heterosexual matrix, and to place these authors in the literary tradition. What students are expected to learn this way is that literary canonization is always based on certain criteria for exclusion – criteria that have to be critically re-examined. Re-evaluating and revising the traditional canon thus becomes an important issue for students to consider.

Genre and gender

Students should be made aware of the fact that, in certain periods of literary history, female or male authorship was restricted to specific genres. The goal is to illustrate that there were precise ideas about the genres that were considered appropriate for a female writer or a male writer and that could be reconciled with their respective gender. Students are supposed to learn that literary genres that were considered 'female' and often catered to a female readership were devalued and excluded from traditional literary historiography as 'irrelevant' genres, or at least were not appraised appropriately. Good examples of this include the French female novelists of the *siècle classique* or the 'female'

genre of the nineteenth-century novela domestica, which was ignored in traditional accounts of the history of the Spanish novel.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

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Degree Stage:

At the B.A. level, students should begin to engage with gender issues starting approximately in the third

semester. It seems reasonable to begin with a historical overview covering the emergence of feminist literary theories all the way to the institutionalization of gender studies as an academic discipline. In subsequent semesters (i.e. in the final semesters of B.A.-level study and during M.A. and M.Ed.-level study), the more specific gender issues in Romance studies could be addressed in depth.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

Aichinger, Wolfram u. a. (Hg.). 2003. *The Querelle des Femmes in the Romania. Studies in Honour of Friederike Hassauer.* Wien: Turia + Kant

Bergmann, Emilie L./Smith, Paul Julian (Hg.). 1995. *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings.* Durham /London: Duke University Press

Chávez-Silverman, Susana/Hernández, Librada (Hg.). 2000. *Reading and Writing the Ambiente: Queer Sexualities in Latino, Latin American, and Spanish Culture.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press

Frackowiak, Ute (Hg.). 1998. *Ein Raum zum Schreiben. Schreibende Frauen in Spanien vom 16. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert.* Berlin: tranvía

Kroll, Renate/Zimmermann, Margarete (Hg.). 1995. *Feministische Literaturwissenschaft in der Romanistik. Theoretische Grundlagen - Forschungsstand - Neuinterpretationen.* Stuttgart: Metzler

Kroll, Renate/Zimmermann, Margarete (Hg.). 1999. *Gender Studies in den romanischen Literaturen. Revisionen, Subversionen.* 2 Bde. Frankfurt/M.: dipa

Kroll, Renate (Hg.). 2002. *Metzler Lexikon Gender Studies/Geschlechterforschung. Ansätze - Personen - Grundbegriffe.* Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler

Makward, Christiane P./Cottenet-Hage, Madeleine. 1996. *Dictionnaire des femmes de langue française de Marie de France à Marie NDiaye.* Paris: Karthala

Panizza, Letizia/Wood, Sharon (Hg.). 2001. *A History of Women's Writing in Italy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Rieger, Angelica/Tonard, Jean-François (Hg.). 1999. *La lecture au féminin/Lesende Frauen. La lectrice dans la littérature française du Moyen Age au XXe siècle. Zur Kulturgeschichte der lesenden Frau in der französischen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum 20. Jahrhundert.* Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft

Steinbrügge, Lieselotte. (21992). *Das moralische Geschlecht. Theorien und literarische Entwürfe über die Natur der Frau in der Französischen Aufklärung.* Stuttgart: Metzler. (11987)

Vollendorf, Lisa (Hg.). 2001. *Recovering Spain's Feminist Tradition.* New York: The Modern Language Association of America

Journals:

Feministische Studien. Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag.

Figurationen. Gender, Literatur, Kultur. Köln: Böhlau.

Querelles. Jahrbuch für Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Göttingen: Wallstein.