Romance Studies

Also relevant for: French Studies, French Romance Studies, Hispanic Studies, Latin American Studies, Lusitanian Studies, Brazilian Studies, Italian Studies and other subjects dealing with Romance literatures and cultures.

Course: Romance Studies
Group of courses: Humanities
Provided by: Prof. Dr. Christian Grünnagel
Last edit: Prof. Dr. Christian Grünnagel , February 2020

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Course objectives:

Students learn about theories and methods of gender studies and learn to apply them to issues in Romance literature and cultural studies in a productive and critical way. In Bachelor's programmes, for example, this is achieved in an introductory module (see below). At Master's level, students should be able to develop their own position on gender issues. Using fundamental methodological approaches to gender studies, Romance literature and cultural studies and taking into account the respective historical and cultural contexts, students will be able to identify gender structures in literary and possibly other cultural Romance artefacts and to critically question and interpret them.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Specialist fields:

In addition to women's and gender studies, which have long been established, subdisciplines of gender studies in Romance studies are still in a process of differentiation. Gay and lesbian studies, masculinity studies and men's studies in particular, as well as queer studies to some extent, should be mentioned here. While masculinity studies are explicitly understood to be part of gender studies, queer studies should not be simply subsumed under gender studies on the basis of their self-understanding, since queer readings are intended to overcome the gender category, which is central to women's and gender studies.

Methodological and theoretical approaches:

Taking the term "gender studies" as a provisional, tentative generic term for the above-mentioned subject areas, it becomes clear that this subject is, in principle, inter- and transdisciplinary. In this sense, strictly speaking, there are no purely Romance theories or methods that characterize the subject of Romance gender studies. Methodological and theoretical approaches are therefore comparable with approaches in other disciplines of the humanities in this database. However, methodological approaches based on theories of poststructuralism continue to be of particular importance in contemporary gender studies. There are also approaches using hermeneutic and – with regard to narrative texts – feminist-narratological concepts. In addition, there is a significant influence of theories of sociological provenance that not only inform traditional women's and gender studies, but also – as for example with the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell in masculinity studies – gradually gain acceptance in Romance studies.

Areas of practice and aspects of professionalism:

In comparison to other (social) sciences with a focus on gender, Romance studies do not refer to the same extent to specific social actions or specific fields of practice. This does not mean that Romance gender studies research does not have relevance for society, politics or practice. However, it should be noted that aspects of a "third mission" within Romance studies seem to be still insufficiently developed.

With regard to Romance studies, it is a desideratum, especially with regard to gender aspects in Romance studies teaching, that occupational fields in which gender knowledge and gender competence are relevant should be made clearer to students. One possible instrument in this context is the integration of internships into the course of study, e.g. on a voluntary basis, but flanked by counselling services offered by the departmental student advisory service. Since in Romance studies, the teacher training courses of the three Romance school languages established in Germany (Spanish,

French, Italian) traditionally dominate, it is important for these courses (e.g. in the Master of Education) not only to point out the practical relevance of gender competence, but also to promote gender competence in concrete terms by offering appropriate courses. In this context, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) has formulated "Guidelines for ensuring equal opportunities through gender-sensitive school education" in 2016, which require teachers to be competent in dealing with pupils in class. This also includes the ability to identify gender aspects in relevant subjects and thus to enable students to deal with gender models themselves and to develop their own sensitivity for gender.

However, a comprehensive implementation of gender studies in Romance curricula, particularly in teaching, is still pending to a large extent, which means that there is a need for action in this field. Furthermore, the KMK guidelines mentioned above do not provide any information on how the required "gender sensitivity" can be implemented in the classroom. Without appropriate competencies and a sound knowledge of the theories, subjects and methods of gender studies, it will not be an easy task for future teachers of French, Italian and Spanish to teach according to these guidelines.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

So far, approaches to integrate gender studies in the Romance curricula of German-speaking universities do exist, but a specific course of study in the sense of Romance gender studies has not yet been established. Whether such a study programme is necessary remains an open question, considering the generally interdisciplinary nature of gender studies, which is reflected in interdisciplinary Master's programmes, possibly with elements from Romance studies. Irrespective of this, a stronger integration of gender studies content in Romance curricula is not only advisable, but also – as mentioned above – necessary. This can be done both in the form of individual modules and by regularly offering individual courses with a clear gender focus. In principle, it would certainly be preferable from the perspective of gender studies to anchor gender study aspects in the curriculum, especially in the form of an introductory theory module.

However, it must also be taken into account that Romance studies face many challenges and implementation efforts. In the case of teacher training courses, for example, the obligatory use of credit points for courses on inclusion issues in some federal states should be mentioned. It is clear that Romance studies cannot integrate all the subjects that would be principally meaningful into a course of study. At the same time, it should be noted that inter- and transdisciplinarity can only become productive once students are familiar with the basics of a discipline (here: Romance studies). In practice, there will probably not be an elaborate module structure with a clear gender reference in most Romance studies courses, but rather a systematic offering of individual courses (lectures, seminars, exercises) addressing gender studies issues. Even with regard to typical, regularly recurring themes in Romance literature and cultural studies, this is not a great challenge in terms of content since gender is, sometimes implicitly, part of the discussion in practically every cultural artefact of humanity. Is it conceivable, for example, to dedicate a seminar to the Princesse de Clève (Madame de La Fayette) or the Précieuses ridicules (Molière) without the category "femininity" being relevant to the reading? How would one view Molière's Dom Juan or Mozart's or Da Ponte's Don Giovanni without raising the question of what kind of masculinity this modern myth represents? Could the theatre of the Spanish Siglo de Oro be dealt with without raising the question of gender relations in the "drama de honor"? Or could we abstract from gender in Boccaccio's Decamerone or Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron? The same applies to every form of love poetry across all epochs: in each case, also poetic figurations of sexuality are addressed.

This list of individual Romance works is not intended to tempt us to reestablish a canon that has been rightly criticised in many ways, particularly from gender studies. Rather, the relatively arbitrary list is intended to show that we can hardly escape the category “gender” in our teaching. At the same time, this offers a great opportunity for the implementation of gender studies in Romance studies courses, even if a specific module cannot be implemented: Given the sensitivity for and interest in gender issues among many lecturers of Romance studies, the option opens up that through teaching the topics of their subject, the students are simultaneously made familiar with basic questions, theories and methods of gender studies. At many institutes and seminars, this could be promoted at a relatively low threshold by colleagues with a research interest in gender studies networking even more closely – not only at the level of applications for third-party funding, but also in questions of curriculum development.

Assuming that gender was (and is?) a category of formative force for the development of culture(s), there is a vast number of topics that are suitable for introducing basic questions of gender studies and for promoting gender sensitivity as demanded by the KMK, especially among prospective teachers. In addition to the examples mentioned above, in which gender is an explicit element of the literary work in question, gender aspects can also be dealt with in seminars when setting other thematic priorities. A few examples may illustrate this – these in turn are taken from the traditional canon due to their degree of familiarity: Balzac’s novels are treated as examples of the realist era? So why not give a seminar session on the question of fatherhood in Père Goriot? The focus of a session will be on the human image of the French Enlightenment (e.g. as a lecture in cultural studies)? Why not look at the Encyclopédie article “femme” and the figure of Sophie in Rousseau’s Émile and contrast it with Olympe de Gouges Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne? Or shall Baudelaire be investigated as an controversial writer? Perhaps a look at the poetic concept of lesbian love in the Fleurs du Mal would be of interest. (Here it could be discussed whether and to what extent it is a “male fantasy” in Theweleit’s sense and introduced as a theoretical input of the male gaze). This list could easily be extended to Spanish and Italian literature, but for reasons of space this may suffice for a first impression, which made it clear that gender studies in Romance studies will not only be introduced into teaching when we succeed in implementing corresponding modules (which would be the ideal, however), but that university teaching offers manifold and very precise options for strengthening the perspectives of gender studies (and of the subdisciplines mentioned or of related disciplines).

Degree Stage:

At B.A. level, it seems appropriate to introduce students to the theories and methods of gender studies by way of examples and to apply these to individual, prototypical topics in Romance literature and cultural studies. It should be considered whether certain theory “classics” are recommended here (possibly in excerpts), e.g. Simone de Beauvoir’s groundbreaking and relatively easily accessible work Le Deuxième Sexe (1949). As mentioned above, in (almost) all literary texts the reader is confronted with figures that appear as fictional drafts of femininity, masculinity and (from the 20th century onwards at the latest) also intersexuality. These basic findings can provide a good starting point for sharpening the students’ awareness of the artistic composition of these fictions.

In Masters courses, the achievements of the B.A. programme are to be expanded and deepened. Possible options for further study are:

(1) In-depth studies in the field of theory and methodology, i.e. confrontation with more recent theoretical concepts; a more in-depth study is advisable which, moving away from Eurocentric and US-American concepts, integrates “Southern Theory” (Connell) from Romania Nova (e.g. from the Caribbean, Africa and Latin America);

(2) Diachronic specialisation: While at B.A. level primarily works and artefacts of the (extended) present were at the centre of a confrontation between students and issues of gender studies in a way that was close to their own lives, the Master's programmes also provide a look at historical concepts of gender (19th century and so-called “older literature”: Middle Ages, Early Modern Period). This can be linked to the awareness that it is precisely these past epochs that provide factual evidence for a theoretical-philosophical axiom of gender studies: The fact that gender cannot be derived from biology in a simplistic way becomes apparent when considering (exemplary) fictional gender constructions of the past (e.g. noble lady and regent, bourgeois daughter and upper-class mother, factory worker or knight, cavalier, courtier, bourgeois pater familias, manager, etc.). It should be noted that fictional works do not simply reflect socio-cultural realities; however, they show how femininity and masculinity can be perceived, discussed and, if necessary, criticised.

(3) Intersectional analysis: Gender is not a discrete category in a vacuum, but rather a constant, sometimes conflicting interaction with other socio-cultural categories (including race, class and sexual orientation). It is therefore logical that the Master's programmes should also deepen the subject matter in the sense that, for example, homosexuality is addressed more in depth, postcolonial theory is brought into focus and linked with issues of gender studies. At first glance, this is particularly obvious in the case of topics that originate

from the Romania Nova (e.g. femininity in Maghrebian-French novels, ‘machismo’ in Latin American films, etc.) or refer to a migration context (e.g. femininity/masculinity in the littérature beur in France). However, this must not be understood (and communicated to students) as if gender in intersectional-postcolonial structures is only relevant with regard to the quasi “exotic”. The perspective of Critical Whiteness Studies may be helpful here. Connell has also included intersectional and implicitly postcolonial aspects in his plural model of masculinity(ies): The construction of gender is also influenced by whether we are dealing with a figure from the working class or the upper class, with white or dark skin, etc.

(4) In-depth study beyond the traditional canon: Currently, a rather undogmatic approach to canonical as well as non-canonical or not-yet-canonical Romance works is likely to prevail at German-speaking universities. It would be problematic, however, if the traditional canon alone were to dominate the teaching of Romance studies in the B.A. and M.A. programmes. Students must understand (by way of example) how this canon was established by exclusionary principles that focused on the gender of authors, i.e. excluded women from access to this canon until well into the 19th century, and in some cases even into the 20th century. Mutatis mutandis, this also applies to authors from a colonial as well as postcolonial context (and is possibly aggravated for authors from the Romania Nova). The traditional canon should therefore be abandoned at Master’s level at the latest. This can be done by the inclusion of female authors in the course catalogue or by contrasting (male-dominated canon vs. female writings). An example may illustrate this (and especially diachronic exclusion principles of canon formation): If it is desired to offer a seminar on novellistics in Spanish baroque literature, Cervantes may be compared with María de Zayas, for example: This female author was famous in her time (17th century), but fell into oblivion at the latest in the middle-class 19th century, so she did not become part of the middle-class literary canon. A stubborn adherence to the traditional canon must therefore be overcome – at the same time, however, it does not seem productive to radically renounce the treatment of the assumed upscale literature because it must be considered that figures of these canonical works had a formative power in the respective culture, that was conveyed in schools, universities and other educational institutions. The Princesse de Clève, Madame Bovary, Don Juan, Don Quixote, Sancho Panza and Dulcinea, or even Petrarchas Laura are possible examples. It will therefore be a matter of appropriately weighting canon, canon criticism and counter-canons during the course of study from a consistent gender perspective or, ideally, of establishing a critical dialogue between these works.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

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

Dijk, Suzan van/Steinbrügge, Lieselotte (Eds.) (2010): Théorisation des genres narratifs et Études de genre. Theorizing Narrative Gender and Genre. Louvain: Peeters.

Elm, Susanna/Vinken, Barbara (Eds.) (2016): Braut Christi. Familienformen in Europa. Paderborn: Fink 2016.

Grünnagel, Christian (2018): Von Kastraten, Hermaphroditen und anderen Grenzgängern lateinamerikanischer Männlichkeit in Literatur und Film (1967-2007). Ein Blick der ‚Peripherie' auf Sex und Gender. Berlin: edition tranvía.

Hassauer, Friedericke (Ed.) (2008): Heißer Streit und kalte Ordnung. Epochen der Querelle des femmes zwischen Mittelalter und Gegenwart. Göttingen: Wallstein.

Ingenschay, Dieter (Ed.) (2006): Desde aceras opuestas. Literatura/cultura gay y lesbiana en Latinoamérica. Madrid: Iberoamericana.

Jung, Ursula (2010): Autorinnen des spanischen Barock. Weibliche Autorschaft in weltlichen und religiösen Kontexten. Heidelberg: Winter.

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

Kroll, Renate (Ed.) (2002): Metzler Lexikon Gender Studies/Geschlechterforschung. Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler.

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

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

Schuhen, Gregor (2018): Vir inversus. Männlichkeiten im spanischen Schelmenroman. Bielefeld: transcript.

Steinbrügge, Lieselotte (1992): Das moralische Geschlecht. Theorien und literarische Entwürfe über die Natur der Frau in der französischen Aufklärung. Stuttgart: Metzler.

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

Volmer, Annett (2008): Die Ergreifung des Wortes. Autorschaft und Gattungsbewusstsein italienischer Autorinnen im 16. Jahrhundert. Heidelberg: Winter.

Zimmermann, Margarete (2005): Salon der Autorinnen. Französische ‚dames de lettres' vom Mittelalter bis zum 17. Jahrhundert. Berlin: Schmidt.

Journals:

De genere. Rivista di studi letterari, postcoloniali e di genere.

Genre & Histoire - the emphasis is on historic analysis, but lierary articles are published as well.

Genre en séries: cinéma, télévision, médias.

Glad! Revue sur le langage, le genre, la sexualité - collects linguistic as well as literary and cultural studies.

Nouvelles Questions Féministes - interdisciplinary extension of the Journal Question Féministes.

RAUDEM. Revista de Estudios de las Mujeres - include literary and cultural analysis.

Recherches féministes - offers also materials for teaching in schools and universities with a gender emphasis.

REGS. Revista de Estudios de Género y Sexualidades - emphasis on literary and cultural studies.

Revista Interdisciplinaria de Estudios de Género de El Colegio de México - has an sociological emphasis but includes literary and cultural studies from time to time.