

Faculty of Economic, Social and Political Sciences



COMU1222 Literature and Society

[30h+10h exercises] 4 credits

Teacher(s): Marc Lits
Language: French
Level: First cycle

Aims

This course aims to raise undergraduate students' awareness of the major issues raised by the role of literature within society. How has literature gradually become an integral part of society, what function does it play, how do writers view themselves and how are they viewed by the public? Attention will also be paid to the place of books vis-à-vis the new media (television, Internet) and socio-economic issues. Consideration will also be given to the act of reading and its contribution to social integration and world knowledge.

Main themes

This course analyses the birth of literature in ancient times, and the development of the concepts of literature and writer in modern times. It adopts a sociological approach to the discussion of the role of literature within social and cultural institutions. Lastly, it analyses the act of reading and the work of the reader, issues related to book publishing and distribution, and the way in which literary texts are having to adapt in the face of competition from new modes of distribution (cinema and multimedia). Rather than adopting a historical overview of literature from past to present, the course attempts to analyse the role it has played within Western culture and society at the different stages of its development. While the course adopts a primarily critical perspective, students will also have the opportunity to discover representative works of literature through reading and analysis of selected extracts.

Content and teaching methods

Course contents:

Chapter 1: Methods (the sociology of literature: from sociocriticism to institutional analysis; the anthropology of cultural practices: "cultural studies"; the history of books and booklore).

Chapter 2: The birth of literature and its social history (the birth of writing and literature in Antiquity; the birth of the writer in the classical period; literature in the XIXth and XXth centuries).

Chapter 3: Literary territory and limits (What is literature?; popular literature and paraliterature; the emergence of Belgian literature).

Chapter 4: Literature as a cultural practice (the book as object; publishing and distribution: book circulation; readers and reading).

Chapter 5: The social development of literature (Literature and adaptation; literature and multimedia).

The lectures are made up of methodical presentations of the subject matter and detailed case studies. There are two objectives: to make students aware of how to read works of literature, but also to teach them to question this practice and to view it in its social context. The 10 hours of supervised discussion involve critical analysis of key texts and surveys of the various links in the distribution chain (publishers, bookshops, public libraries etc

Other information (prerequisite, evaluation (assessment methods), course materials recommended readings, ...)

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on their knowledge of the subject matter of the course and through a piece of personal work each student must complete. The evaluation takes this dimension into account since it involves two different kinds of knowledge and skills: critical analysis of a scientific work devoted to the history, anthropology or sociology of books and reading; comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter.

Course materials: The photocopied course notes distributed to the students constitute only a reminder, designed to help students recall the key aspects of the detailed information given during lectures.

Supervision: The lectures (30hours) are given by a member of the academic staff. Assistants conduct the practical exercise sessions in groups of 25.

Other credits in programs

ARCH13BA	Troisième année de bachelier en sciences de l'ingénieur, orientation ingénieur civil architecte	(4 credits)	
COMU12BA	Deuxième année de bachelier en information et communication	(4 credits)	Mandatory