

# LITERARY TEXT INTERPRETATION



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|                                                                                   |                                                                                                                               |                                 |
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|                                                                                   | <b>Associate Professor</b><br><b>Sphere of Scientific Interests:</b><br><b>Literary Texts in Linguo-Cognitive Perspective</b> |                                 |

### Course Description

This one-semester elective course is designed to sharpen and enrich your thinking, push back your intellectual horizons and acquire a deeper understanding of the world of fiction in general and of yourself in particular. To interpret a literary text means to become acquainted with the multitudinous and fascinating phenomena of human experience extrapolated through the individualized prism of the fictional world. Such experience will have a discernible effect on your practical ability in critical reading – that is the ability to elicit and decipher a writer’s message. What is more, you will be able to generate your own axiological thought about the fictional world of a story, expressing it in an appropriate metalanguage.

## Course Format:

Lectures: 12 hr, Seminars: 22 hr, Consultation: 2 hr.

## Learning Objectives:

The aims of this course are to enable students to:

- Explain what a work of literature means, and how it means.
- Show how the resources of literature are used to create the meaningfulness of the text.  
lives.

# THE MAJOR QUESTIONS POSED:



What is a text?



A **LITERARY (FICTIONAL, BELLES-LETTRES) TEXT** HAS THE SPECIFIC CODE – LANGUAGE OF FICTION, WHICH IS SECONDARY IN RELATION TO THE NATURAL LANGUAGE (PRIMARY CODE) USED IN TEXTS OF OTHER REGISTERS.



*Tz. Todorov: "...a text is only a picnic where the author brings the words and the readers bring the sense".*



**IS THIS A TEXT?**  
WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

What is a  
**LITERARY**  
text?

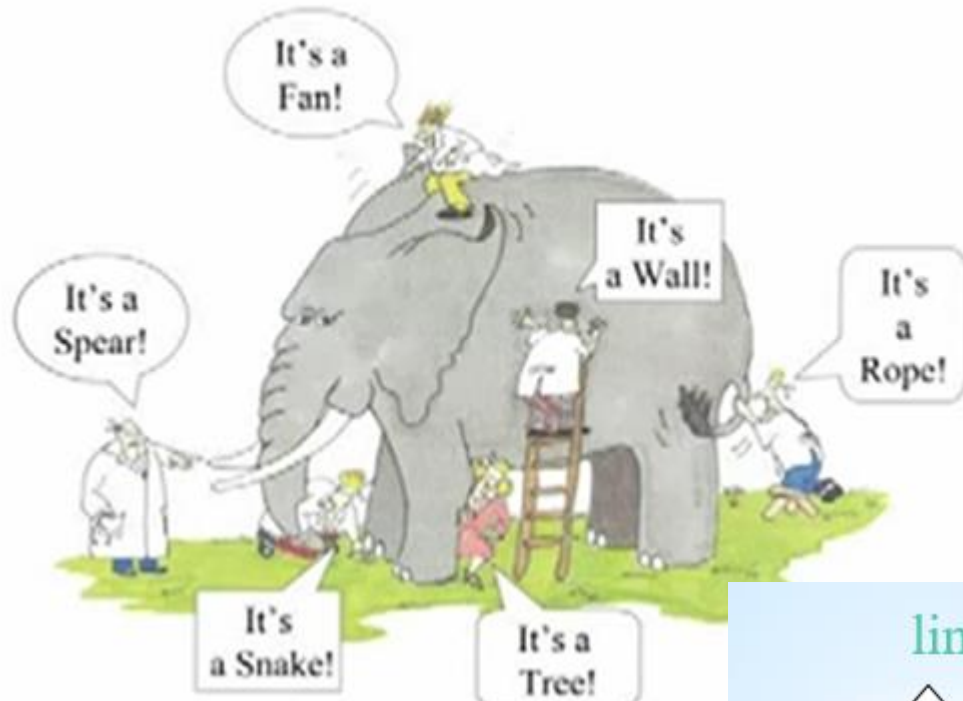


The *"funnel principle"* of interpretation

The outer world enters the funnel through its wider end to be processed and interpreted by the writer.  
A fictional text presents the narrow end of the funnel at which point it is perceived and interpreted by the reader.



# New Perspectives



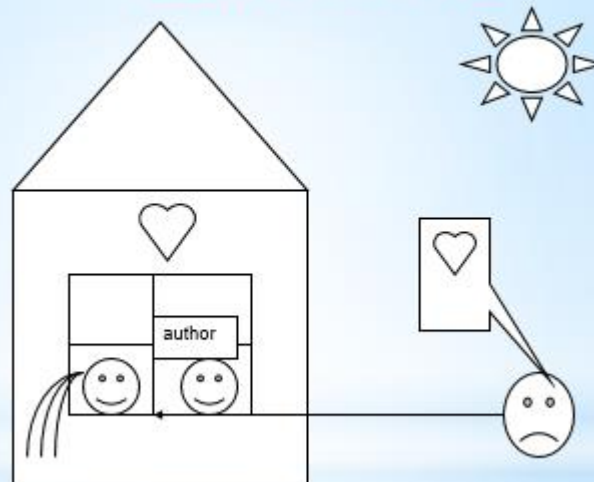
**Jonathan Culler,**  
Professor of English and  
Comparative Literature  
at Cornell University:

**“The notion of  
character, Structuralists  
would say, is a myth”.**



Books are chosen by  
readers  
**or**  
Readers are chosen  
by books

limited observer



“My mind,” he said, “rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world”.

*Arthur Conan Doyle “Sherlock Holmes”*



# THE ASSIGNMENTS OFFERED:

Compare the cultural and historical conditions in which the writers live and work, dominant ideological views and aesthetic standards:

- ❖ *Hurstwood was in his best form, as usual. He hadn't heard that Droet was out of town. He was but slightly affected by the intelligence, and devoted himself to the more general topics which would interest Carrie. It was surprising – the ease with which he conducted a conversation. He was like every man who has had the advantage of practice and knows he has sympathy. He knew that Carrie listened to him pleasurably, and, without the least effort, he fell into a train of observation which absorbed her fancy. He drew up his chair and modulated his voice to such a degree that what he said seemed wholly confidential. He confined himself almost exclusively to his observation of men and pleasures. He had been here and there, he had seen this and that. Somehow he made Carrie wish to see similar things, and all the while kept her aware of himself. She could not shut out the consciousness of his individuality and presence for a moment. He would raise his eyes slowly in smiling emphasis of something, and she was fixed by their magnetism. He would draw out, with the easiest grace, her approval. [...]*

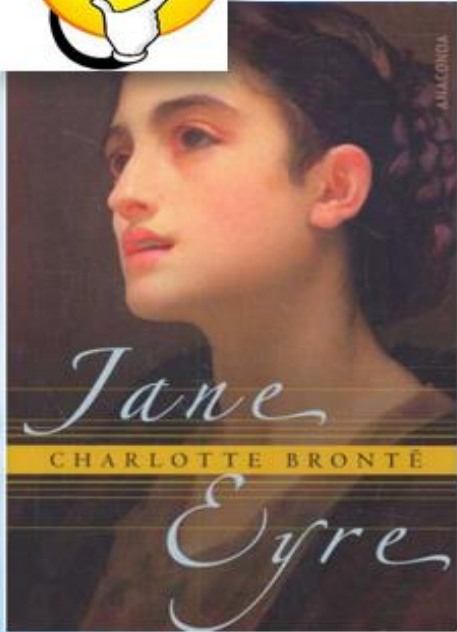
Compare the writers' personal qualities, such as age, gender, psychological features and education:

- *I ate the ham and eggs and drank the beer. The ham and eggs were in a round dish – the ham underneath and the eggs on the top. It was very hot and at the first mouthful I had to take a drink of beer to cool my mouth. I was hungry and I asked the waiter for another order. I drank several glasses of beer. I was not thinking at all but read the paper of the man opposite me. It was about the breakthrough on the British front. When he realized I was reading the back of his paper he folded it over. I thought of asking the waiter for a paper, but I could not concentrate. [...] Suddenly I knew I had to go back. I called the waiter, paid the reckoning, got into my coat, put on my hat and started out the door. I walked through the rain up to the hospital.*





# Define the type of the narrator



*There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.*

*I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons*

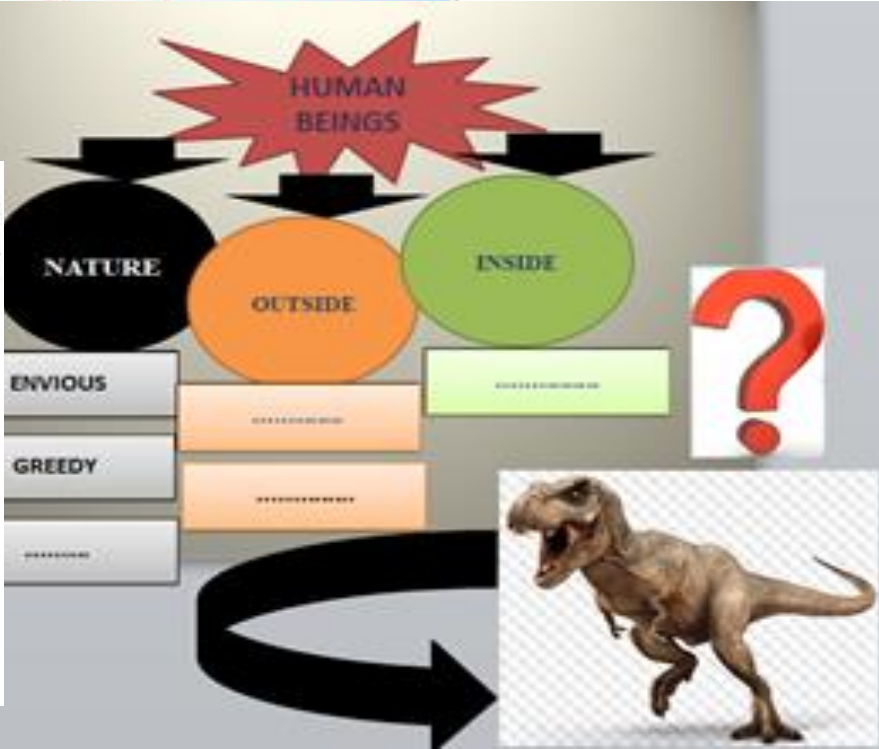


| Literary communication dimensions | Addressees                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Real (empirical)                  | real (empirical) readers                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                            |
| Hypothetical (virtual)            | <b>hypothetical reading audience</b> that generalizes some relevant features of the empirical reading audience and gives rise to the <i>idealized reader</i> , designed for each concrete literary discourse |                                                                                            |
| Textual                           | <b>textual readers</b>                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                            |
|                                   | <b>IDEAL READER</b> , or the implied, model reader, as a counterpart of the implied author                                                                                                                   | <b>MOCK READER</b> , or a fictitious reader, a narratee, as a counterpart of the narrator, |

Where did the feeling of insecurity first begin to take hold of her?  
What occurred during their visit to Long Island that increased Margaret's panic?  
Why did Margaret phone Brad to come and get her in the drugstore?



Pinpoint all the emotions you've identified on the diagram.



# Define the type of the conflict



*The next shark that came was a single shovelnose. He came like a pig to the trough if a pig had a mouth so wide that you could put your head in it. The old man let him hit the fish and then drove the knife on the oar don into his brain. But the shark jerked backwards as he rolled and the knife blade snapped.*

“The Old Man and the Sea” Ernest Hemingway

**Person VS environment**

# THE MAJOR CLASS ACTIVITIES:

- DISCUSSION FORUMS
- SMALL GROUP CASE STUDY
- PROJECT WORK
- INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS



## Learning Outcomes:

Successful students will be able to:

- Deeper understand and fuller appreciate the literature – you learn to see more, to uncover or create richer, denser, more interesting meanings.
- Be aware of the cultural delineations of a work, its ideological aspects. As art is not eternal and timeless but is situated historically, socially, intellectually, written and read at particular times, with particular intents, under particular historical conditions, with particular cultural, personal, gender, racial, class and other perspectives, we can see ideology in operation through it. This can be of particular use in understanding our own culture and time, but has historical applications as well.
- Understand the way ideas and feelings are talked about in our culture or in other times and cultures – have a sense both of communities of meaning, and of the different kinds of understanding there can be about matters of importance to human life. Art can give us access to the symbolic worlds of communities: not only to the kinds of ideas they have about life, but also to the way they feel about them, to the ways they imagine them, to the ways they relate them to other aspects of their lives.