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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6EJ305

Literature, Science, and Technology

Module 1: Literature and Scientific Discourse: Enlightenment and Cybernetics • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 1: The Historical Dialogue Between Literature and Science

Literature and science are frequently treated as antagonistic disciplines—the former governing subjective imagination and emotion, the latter objective empirical measurement. In reality, both fields share an intimate historical lineage, each continuously informing, inspiring, and critiquing the other's philosophical claims and cultural metaphors.

1.1 The Enlightenment Ideals: Immanuel Kant's "What is Enlightenment?"

Immanuel Kant's landmark 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" defined Enlightenment as humanity's emergence from its "self-incurred immaturity." Kant articulated the supreme motto of the scientific age: **Sapere Aude!** ("Dare to know!" / "Have courage to use your own understanding!"). Kant championed empirical reason against blind dogma, establishing scientific rationality as the engine of human progress.

1.2 C. P. Snow: The Two Cultures Debate (1959)

In his famous Rede Lecture *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, British novelist and physical chemist C. P. Snow lamented the profound intellectual gulf separating literary intellectuals from natural scientists. Snow argued that the mutual incomprehension and intellectual snobbery between the sciences and humanities severely crippled society's ability to solve global problems (poverty, disease, nuclear catastrophe), calling for urgent interdisciplinary cross-pollination.

1.3 Cosmological Exploration and Faith: Robert Zemeckis's Contact (1997)

Adapted from Carl Sagan's 1985 novel, Robert Zemeckis's film *Contact* (starring Jodie Foster) stages the grand philosophical reconciliation between scientific rigor and spiritual awe. Through Dr. Ellie Arroway's search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI), the narrative explores the mathematical language of the cosmos alongside humanity's yearning for connection.

Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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- **Structuralism and Semiotic Deconstruction:** The organization of signs, tropes, and syntactical structures establishes narrative authority while simultaneously revealing internal fissures. Binary oppositions embedded within the discourse—such as center versus margin, tradition versus modernity, and subjective interiority versus objective reality—are systematically problematized through textual slippages and ambiguous signifiers.
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2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

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3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

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4. Pedagogical Synthesis and Scholarly Praxis

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