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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6EJ307

Reading World Classics

Module 4: Classical Prose and World Epics: Cervantes and Dostoevsky • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 4: The Novelistic Renaissance and Philosophical Realism

The birth of the modern novel revolutionized world literature by exploring psychological interiority, existential doubt, and socio-economic realism.

4.1 Miguel de Cervantes: Don Quixote (1605/1615)

Widely regarded as the first modern European novel, *Don Quixote* parodies chivalric romances through the misadventures of the aging gentleman Alonso Quijano, who imagines himself a noble knight-errant battling windmills alongside his pragmatic squire Sancho Panza. Cervantes explores the profound tension between subjective idealism and harsh objective reality.

4.2 Fyodor Dostoevsky: Crime and Punishment (1866)

Dostoevsky's psychological masterpiece follows impoverished former student Rodion Raskolnikov in St. Petersburg, who murders an elderly pawnbroker to prove his "extraordinary man" theory (anticipating Nietzsche's Ubermensch). Besieged by crushing guilt, psychological breakdown, and spiritual torment, Raskolnikov finds redemption through the self-sacrificing love of Sonia Marmeladov and Christian resurrection, establishing modern existential psychological fiction.

Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

Critical inquiry into Module 4: Classical Prose and World Epics: Cervantes and Dostoevsky reveals how textual forms construct meaning through complex aesthetic strategies and structural choices:

- **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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- **Feminist, Queer, and Intersectional Critique:** Analyzing the construction of gender roles, patriarchal surveillance, and non-normative subjectivities provides crucial insights into how bodily experience, domesticity, and public agency are mediated across divergent historical moments and cultural landscapes.
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2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

Every literary text and cultural artifact is firmly situated within specific historical material conditions. Understanding Module 4: Classical Prose and World Epics: Cervantes and Dostoevsky requires examining how contemporaneous social movements, intellectual revolutions, and material shifts in print and digital publishing influenced textual production. Furthermore, Hans-Robert Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectations" demonstrates that textual reception is never static; each successive generation of readers reinterprets these works through evolving ethical, philosophical, and cultural frameworks.

3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

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