

Modern French Thinkers: Study Groups

Research individually on the topics shown in preparation for presenting and leading class discussion in groups as shown below. Note that the questions shown below are *suggested starting points*. Exploring these should lead to more questions and more answers... Study of the primary texts should be supported by some secondary reading.

Week 2, Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Part 1: 'Destin'

SdB divides the main discussion of volume 1 of *LDS* into three distinct areas. It may be helpful to consider from the outset why she chooses to do this, and why she selects these divisions in particular, and what expectations each topic heading might raise in the contemporary reader. Useful starting questions for this week might be:

- ▶ Why 'Destin'? What is the relation between destiny and biology?
- ▶ What is the relation between human and animal?
- ▶ What is the role of psychoanalysis? Of historical materialism?
- ▶ How does SdB state her case in this section?
- ▶ How easy is the material to understand?
- ▶ What conclusions are drawn here? Are they tenable?

Group 1: destiny, biology and women as *le deuxième sexe*: Mason, Barritt, Rogowska, Sullivan, Pires da Silva

Group 2: psychoanalysis, historical materialism, women as *le deuxième sexe*: Atkinson, Vane, Thompson, Cooper, Rees, Levett

Group 3: form and content (tone, writing style, register, structure, logic): Barnard, Tabio, Sriganthan, Malti, Foster, Capeci

Week 3, Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Part 2: 'Histoire'

SdB states her intention to present the historical and ethnographical evidence 'à la lumière de la philosophie existentielle' (p. 109). Examine her presentation of the evidence, supporting this as necessary with further research (critical, historical, anthropological &c). Useful starting questions might be:

- ▶ What focus does SdB bring to each section? How does this focus fit with the argument presented in 'Destin'?
- ▶ In what ways does she shine the lamp of existential philosophy?
- ▶ How does she use the 'analysis and appeal' format of presentation?
- ▶ How does she connect the material here with her initial arguments in Part 1?
- ▶ Is the argument convincing? What conclusions does she draw? Are the argument and conclusions watertight?

Group 1: Prehistory (Nomads & Agricultural Communities): Atkinson, Barnard, Mason, Capeci, Banaria

Group 2: Early Patriarchal Societies: Vane, Tabio, Foster, Pires da Silva

Group 3: Late Roman Empire to Sixteenth Century: Barritt, Thompson, Sriganthan, Rees, Millen

Group 4: The *Révolution* to the Industrial Revolution: Cooper, Malti, Sullivan, Rogowska, Levett

Week 4, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Part 3: 'Mythes', plus Conclusion

Here, SdB focusses on the work of five authors to support her comments about the myth of Woman. Examine her presentation of the evidence, using secondary material (both critical reading and research into the biographies and works of her selected authors) where appropriate. Starting points might be:

- ▶ How, if at all, does Beauvoir justify the use of literary works in a philosophical argument?
- ▶ How, if at all, does Beauvoir justify using the works as evidence of the author's own beliefs?
- ▶ In what ways does she use a psychoanalytical approach in her arguments? Is this approach problematic in relation to her earlier comments on psychoanalysis?
- ▶ How does she connect the argument here with the discussions in Parts 1 and 2?
- ▶ What role has existentialist philosophy here?
- ▶ How does she draw *LDS*, volume 1, to a close?

Group 1: Montherlant: Cooper, Rogowska, Capeci

Group 2: Lawrence: Atkinson, Sullivan, Thompson, Levett

Group 3: Claudel: Mason, Sriganthan, Tabio, Banaria

Group 4: Breton: Malti, Rees, Barnard, Pires da Silva

Group 5: Stendhal: Barritt, Vane, Foster, Millen

Weeks 5 & 7: Luce Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous* (Lecture in Week 5; only Workshop in Week 7)

For week 5, read from 'Petite annonce' to "“Le side ne passera pas par moi”"; for week 7, read to the end of the text.

Groups prepare (using primary and secondary material) to present on sections shown below. Some research should be done to contextualise the text historically, for example a view of the formal and radical feminism of the period. Research on the reception of the text both in France and in the UK and US may be useful. Focus should be primarily on Irigaray, but comparison/contrast with Beauvoir may be made as the context suggests.

For reasons which should quickly become apparent, the same topic headings will be kept for both weeks.

Group 1: 'égales ou différentes?' The case for (and against, in the reception of Irigaray's work) and the purpose of viewing women as *différentes*:

Week 5: Atkinson, Barnard, Barritt, Millen

Week 7: Vane, Cooper, Rees, Sriganthan, Pires da Silva

Group 2: mothers and daughters. The role of mothers in changing socio-cultural attitudes:

Week 5: Cooper, Malti, Mason, Foster, Pires da Silva

Week 7: Tabio, Rogowska, Levett, Banaria, Wilde

Group 3: patriarchy and phallogentrism. Irigaray's view of the appropriation of culture by men:

Week 5: Rees, Rogowska, Sriganthan, Sullivan, Capeci

Week 7: Barnard, Thompson, Malti, Foster, Millen

Group 4: linguistic concerns. Irigaray's focus on gendered language as a means of change:

Week 5: Tabio, Thompson, Vane, Levett, Banaria

Week 7: Atkinson, Barritt, Mason, Sullivan, Capeci

Week 8: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Spectacle and Identity (short lecture; workshop)

Essays for focussed discussion: Everyone should read *all* essays, not just the ones allocated for focused preparation: the topics will have some overlap across the essays, and group presentations will lead into open discussion. Research (primary and secondary material) and present on sections as shown below. Some research should be done to contextualise the text historically, for example a view of French foreign policy and colonial France would be helpful.

Group 1: 'Le Monde où l'on catche', 'Les Romains au cinéma', 'Continent perdu', 'Au Music-hall': Malti, Cooper, Sriganthan, Tabio, Millen

Group 2: 'La Croisière du *Batory*', 'La Croisière du Sang bleu', 'Conjugales', 'Paris n'a pas été inondé': Thompson, Vane, Atkinson, Foster, Banaria

Group 3: 'Bichon chez les Nègres', 'Le Vin et le Lait', 'Le Bifteck et les Frites', 'Le *Guide bleu*': Rees, Barnard, Rogowska, Sullivan, Capeci

Group 4: 'Puissance et désinvolture', 'Photos-chocs', 'Strip-tease', 'La grande Famille des hommes': Barritt, Mason, Levett, Wilde, Pires da Silva

Week 9: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Media (short lecture; workshop)

Essays for focussed discussion: Again, everyone should read *all* list essays. Some research should be done to contextualise the essays historically: for example, read up on the Dominici trial, Henry Grouès (l'abbé Pierre), and France and the colonies.

Group 1: 'Saponides et détergents', 'Publicité de la profondeur', 'L'Opération Astra', 'La nouvelle Citroën': Malti, Atkinson, Sullivan, Foster, Wilde

Group 2: 'Dominici ou le triomphe de la Littérature' [background reading on the topic will be required!]: Cooper, Capeci, Mason, Pires da Silva, Levett

Group 3: 'Romans et Enfants', 'Jouets', 'La Plastique': Rogowska, Barritt, Sriganthan, Vane, Banaria,

Group 4: 'Iconographie de l'abbé Pierre', 'Celle qui voit clair', 'Astrologie', 'Cuisine ornementale': Millen, Rees, Tabio, Thompson, Barnard

Week 10: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Semiotics (lecture and workshop)

Essays for open discussion: Everyone should read *all* listed essays, and make some attempt to relate them, in the context of semiotics, to the essays examined in the previous two weeks. Discussion on semiotics will be followed by some examination considering ways to compare this term's authors.

'Le Mythe aujourd'hui', 'L'Art vocal bourgeois', 'Photogénie électorale', 'L'Usager de la grève', 'Grammaire africaine'