DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

This course offers an introduction to Literary Criticism and Theory, giving you the opportunity to explore some of the concerns and debates that have remained central from Aristotle to the present. The main questions around which the course is structured are the following:

- What is the politics of English as a cultural institution and a discipline?
- What are the function and role of the Humanities today?
- What is the distinctiveness of "Literature" as an aesthetic category?
- Is “theory” parasitic over literature? How is the relation between the two to be re-imagined?
- How is literary value to be determined? How has the literary canon been formed?
- What is the relation between a literary work and the historical/institutional frame that encloses/defines it as such?
- If a literary text can always travel beyond the distinct local, historical borders that have shaped it, how can we conceptualize its worldliness?
- Is the relation between a literary work and its creator one of filiation?
- Does the author have authority over the text(s) s/he produces?
- In what ways is the concept of the "author" the product of particular historical coordinates?
- Are texts gendered? Are they racialized?
- Is meaning the destiny/destination of a text? If so, do texts always arrive at their destination?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding (Theory Component)
- Develop a historically-informed understanding of the key developments in the wider field of contemporary literary theory and criticism;
- Appreciate the institutional politics of English as a discipline;
- Reflect critically on one’s own experience of reading and discussing literary texts;
- Investigate the connections between aesthetic form, literary value, the socio-political functions of ideology and cultural power;
- Examine the central concerns and debates in post-1960s literary theory; develop the ability to comparatively discuss and evaluate different positions in these debates.

Key Skills (Practical Component)
- Apply the critical and analytical skills required in scholarly research to reflect on and evaluate the bibliography studied;
- Acquire the ability to put forward a theoretically-informed argument in a well-written academic essay;
- Debate the validity of different arguments and compose informed responses to the competing theoretical perspectives examined in the course;
- Develop effective presentation and argumentation skills.
GRADING
The final grade for this course will be based on:
a) the completion of assigned reading before each meeting;
b) regular attendance and active participation in class-discussions;
c) a presentation on one of the theoretical texts studied in the context of the course and a position paper on this text (to be submitted two weeks after the presentation; 1500 words);
d) an extended essay focusing on one or more of the key concerns/questions/debates discussed in class; the essay needs to draw on the theoretical material examined in the context of the course and to put forward a clear, coherent argument (up to 3000 words).

Please note that academic honesty is absolutely required: plagiarism is unacceptable in any form and will automatically lead to your failure in the course.

REQUIRED TEXTS
All primary texts are included in your course-packet.

USEFUL SECONDARY MATERIAL
Stathis Gourgouris, Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory for an Antimythical Age (Stanford University Press, 2003).
David Richter, Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000).
Ronald Schleifer & Robert Con Davis, Criticism and Culture: The Role of Critique in Modern Literary Theory (Longman, 1992).
Bennett, Andrew and Nicholas Royle, An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory, 2nd edition (Prentice Hall, 1999).
OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

WEEK 1:  Introduction to the course


The Last Romantics, Part II https://vimeo.com/22791604

WEEK 2:  What Is Literature?


WEEK 3:  P. B. Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry” (cont.)


WEEK 5:  The Subject of (in) Literature


WEEK 7: Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” (cont.)


WEEK 9: *Literature and Value*


*Literature and the World*


WEEK 12: Edward W. Said (cont.)


*Debate Session*