

Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

Full Name: Literature of Critique, Critique of Literature: The Uses of Satire

Short Name: Literature of Critique

Lecturer Name(s) and Email Address(es): Björn Quiring, quiringb@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: HT

Year JF/SF/JS/SS: JS

Module Content:

The question how literature impacts on society is a complicated one. But usually, two pathways are designated: on the one hand, literature is supposed to provide orientation by representing how things should be, formulating ideals. On the other hand, literature is seen as an instrument of critique, representing and thereby attacking diverse shortcomings of society, and creating an aesthetics of ugliness in the process. The most prominent literary form of critique is satire (along with comedy, parody and others).

In order to perpetuate itself, satire always had to engage with discourses of non-literary critique which also claim to know what is wrong in society and needs to change – discourses that emerge from the field of professional politics, from philosophy, from the sciences etc. To some degree, even literary criticism forms a part of these discourses, when it condemns novels, poems and plays it considers worthless or pernicious. The seminar will delineate the structure and follow the historical development of this tangled debate across genre boundaries and through literary history. Besides satires, from Donne and Swift to William Gaddis, we will also look at theoretical texts on the uses of critique and satire.

Learning Outcomes:

- Read selected literary texts from several literary epochs (John Donne, Jonathan Swift, Ambrose Bierce and others).
- Think about the position of satire in literature and society.
- Read selected theoretical texts on the aesthetic and political aspects of satire.

Learning Aims:

- To gain a better understanding of the political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of critique in general and of satire in particular.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1
- Name/Type of Component(s): 1 final essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 5000
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List:

- Roy Ben-Shai, *Critique of Critique* (excerpts)
- Walter Benjamin, “Karl Kraus”, “The Destructive Character”
- Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (excerpt)
- Ambrose Bierce, “The Passing of Satire”, “The American Sycophant” and other texts
- Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (excerpts)
- Lord Byron, “The Curse of Minerva”
- Jonathan Coe, “Sinking Giggling into the Sea”
- John Donne, “Satire III”
- William Gaddis, *American Gothic*
- Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk* (excerpts)
- Juvenal, “Fourth Satire”
- Karl Kraus, *The Last Days of Mankind* (excerpts) and other texts
- Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (excerpts)
- Flann O’Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (excerpts)
- Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* (excerpts)
- Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (excerpt)
- Seneca, “Apocolocyntosis”
- Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*
- Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness”
- Massih Zekavat, *Satire, Humor and the Construction of Identities* (excerpt)

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.