

Sophister Module Description Template 2024-25

Full Name: Literary Properties

Short Name: Literary Properties

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ECTS Weighting: 5

Semester Taught MT/HT: HT

Year JS/SS: JS

Module Content:

Literary texts have always engaged with questions of possession and ownership on diverse levels. A surprising amount of literary works focuses, for example, on conquests, land claims, rent conflicts and property disputes. And when the dominant ideas about the just distribution of property and housing change in the course of history, novels, dramas and even poems tend to reflect these changes. Some literary works even try to affirm or establish ownership claims, either those of their authors or those of a community to which the authors want to belong. In the case of imperial epics, these claims are the most obvious, but they permeate even love and nature poetry. In the course of British history, reforms and revolutions have often transformed property relations, and these changes always went hand in hand with changes in the poetics and aesthetics of possession. The seminar will investigate this connection between literary texts and questions of property. How can literature legitimate or delegitimize property, from the medieval period to the financialized present? In the course of this investigation, the seminar will occasionally also confront literature's own status as property and the vexed and persistent question underlying copyright disputes: to whom does a literary work really belong?

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn to see literary history and its relation to the history of politics and economics from another angle.
- Read selected literary texts from several epochs (for example, works by Thomas Malory, William Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell, William Wordsworth and Don DeLillo).
- Read influential theoretical texts (Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Raymond Williams, Eva von Redecker and others).

Learning Aims:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the entanglement between the history of ownership and the history of literature.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1
- Name/Type of Component(s): 1 final essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 3000
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List:

- Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*
- William Empson, “Legal Fiction”
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (excerpts)
- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (excerpts)
- John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (excerpts)
- C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (excerpts)
- Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d’Arthur* (excerpts)
- Andrew Marvell, “Upon Appleton House, To My Lord Fairfax”
- Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (excerpts)
- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (excerpts)
- Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital* (excerpts)
- Eva von Redecker, “Ownership’s Shadow: Neoauthoritarianism as Defense of Phantom Possession”
- Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (excerpts)
- William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (excerpts) and other poems

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.**