

Theory and Methodology

Required MA Course (2019–2020) / Dr. Jonathan Stavsky

The past few decades have seen the rise of radically new approaches to the study of literature: from textual materialism to digital humanities, from cognitive poetics to transnationalism. At the same time, established theoretical fields such as narratology have evolved in response to challenges brought on by the shifts that have been taking place in society, technology, and global politics. Others long considered out of date, for example formalism, are making a comeback. What possibilities of reading have these methodologies opened up? How are they redefining the object of our study? What are their limitations?

This course aims to expose beginning MA students to some recent developments in literary theory while training you in conducting graduate-level research. You will learn how to uncover hidden assumptions, blind spots, and ideological blinkers in other people's work; how to stake out an informed theoretical position; and how to bring theory and criticism into mutual dialogue with literary texts. As your final project, you will practice conceptualizing, planning, and executing a research paper that employs the advanced skills you have acquired.

Note that, as an integral part of this course, you must attend the departmental events that will take place on Thursday afternoons.

Prerequisites

This course is open to students who have been officially admitted into the MA program. If you are still taking supplementary courses (*hashlamot*), you must wait until you have completed them successfully before signing up.

If your previous studies did not include an introduction to literary theory and an advanced BA-level workshop on academic writing (such as our Proseminar), please consult the lecturer and the MA advisor in advance of the academic year.

Reading Material

Short theoretical, critical, and literary texts will be made available on the course website.

Evaluation

- Regular attendance during the entire course in ordinary and make-up classes as well as the departmental events that occasionally replace them (10%);
- Seven out of nine short assignments on the reading material (35%), each of which must be submitted via the course Moodle by 16:00 of the due date there specified;

- One short assignment that relates to a departmental event (5%), to be submitted via the course Moodle by 16:00 of the following Thursday;
- A research proposal for an MA seminar paper or your MA thesis, to be submitted via the course Moodle by the last class of the semester (5%);
- A draft chapter of an MA seminar paper or your MA thesis, to be submitted via the course Moodle by the deadline there specified (45%).

To pass this course, you must (1) attend the required number of classes, (2) receive an average grade of at least 60 for the short assignments, submit (3) the research proposal and (4) draft chapter on time via the course Moodle, and (5) receive a passing grade for each.

NOTE: You cannot get partial credit for this year-long course or split it between two years.

Basic Course Rules

Full attendance in all classes for the entire duration of the lesson is necessary in order for you to achieve the goals of this course. No less important is your commitment to preparing the required texts before they are taught, following the discussion attentively, and doing your best to participate. Should you fall behind on your studies even for a week or two, you will find it very difficult to catch up later.

Please show consideration to other students as well as the lecturer by refraining from side conversations, using electronic devices for non-course-related purposes, wandering in and out of the classroom, bringing in visitors, consuming strong-smelling, crispy, or crunchy food or carbonated drinks, and other distractions. Disrespectful or confrontational behavior will not be tolerated.

Attendance Policy

- Attendance in all classes from the first day of the semester is obligatory. There will be a penalty of two points for every unexcused absence. Students who accrue six or more absences in total for whatever reason will not be allowed to pass the course.
- All absences must be coordinated with the lecturer in advance of the affected class or, in case of an emergency, as soon as possible thereafter. Those due to late registration, documented illness, childbirth, veteran service, and certain religious holidays (listed at www.tau.ac.il/calendar) will not incur a two-point penalty but will still be counted.
- If you signed up for this course during the change period, please ask the Department Office to send the lecturer an email confirming the date and hour of your enrollment. You will only be excused from the classes you missed before joining the course.
- An official doctor's note is needed to justify absences on account of ill health. Such notes must be issued no later than 72 hours following the first day of your absence.

- If you encounter another problem that you believe may call for special consideration, contact the lecturer the moment it arises and be prepared to follow his instructions. Such cases will not be negotiated at a later date.
- Students who repeatedly come in late or leave early will be marked as absent when such behavior occurs. If you have a particular reason for doing so on a one-time basis, please notify the lecturer before the beginning of class.
- Students who for any reason have failed to sign the attendance sheet will also be counted as absent. Please wait patiently until it reaches you or add your name at the end of the lesson.

Policy on Assignments

- Instructions for writing your papers will be posted on the course website. Study them carefully to make sure you know what is expected of you and how to meet these expectations with the best results.
- In some cases, papers that do not follow the lecturer's instructions will receive an automatic failing grade. These include failure to address the assigned or approved topic, use the required sources, observe the rules of documentation and citation, and rely solely on peer-reviewed scholarship.
- No extensions will be given to any deadline except in extraordinary circumstances (such as childbirth, prolonged hospitalization, or veteran service).
- You are permitted to miss two short assignments on the reading material. Each additional short assignment that you fail to submit on time will receive a zero grade, as will the assignment on the departmental event if you do not complete it on time. Research proposals and draft chapters handed in late without prior permission will not be graded.