



Name: Aesthetics and Literary Theory II	Requisites: NA
Course Code: SP-0270	Co-requisites: NA
Credits: 3	Type: Plan de Estudios Master's in English Literature
Schedule: 3 hours / week in-class work 6 hours / week out-of-class work	16 weeks
Level: Postgraduate	Cycle: 4 th cycle
Course Delivery Modality:	100% Virtual

I. Course Description

This is a theoretical course that explores the nature and main characteristics of two notions with ample aesthetic and literary traditions--decadence and degeneration--through the reading of theoretical treatises and literary texts. The course begins by analyzing definitions for both of these concepts, based on nineteenth century and contemporary academic sources, as well as with a review of the sociohistorical context in which these concepts acquired tremendous force, the British *fin de siècle*; this context was undoubtedly shaped by French aesthetic and literary influences. These theoretical concepts and history have greatly influenced literature and theory from the 19th-century to contemporary times.

Both decadence and degeneration are discourses that reside and persist in various disciplines ranging from aesthetics (art and literature); medicine and natural sciences (biology); the social sciences (psychology and criminology). Under this premise, the literary texts will serve as illustrations in the course, but in addressing them, theory from various disciplines will be considered in order to formulate a more comprehensive description of these concepts. Moreover, students will be asked to conduct research on the presence of decadence and degeneration in other art forms including painting and film, thus expanding the scope of this discussion.

II. Objectives

A. General Objectives

Through the study and exploration of decadence and degeneration, the students will:

1. Expand their skills in applying literary and aesthetic theory to various types of texts.
2. Develop their ability to think critically and interpret literary texts.
3. Understand the appeal of these notions at the aesthetic and cultural levels in the past, as well as in present times.

B. Specific Objectives

By the end of the course the students will be able to:

1. Define decadence and degeneration mainly as they appear in or relate to literary texts, but always within a broader aesthetic tradition.
2. Understand the socio-historical context in which these concepts blossomed from the 19th century to the present.



3. Recognize the connections between the literary genre and other aesthetic manifestations.
4. Define some of the main characteristics of these concepts, through the reading of novels, short stories and pertinent academic analyses.
5. Address nineteenth-century medical treatises that center on mental and physical degeneration.
6. Acknowledge the legacy of Darwin's ideas about evolution within the discourse on devolution and degeneration.
7. Identify attitudes regarding sexualities and their link with degeneracy in different periods.
8. Recognize the link between gender and decadence.
9. Consider how decadence and degeneration in late-Victorian and contemporary fiction.
10. Analyze how decadence and degeneration appear in other art forms.

III. Contents: Theoretical and Conceptual and Methodology

- A. Defining decadence
- B. Defining degeneration
- C. Medicine and degeneration
- D. Science, nature and degeneration
- E. Race and Social Darwinism
- F. Sexualities and degeneracy
- G. Gender and decadence
- H. Urban degeneration and criminology
- I. Decadence and degeneration in late-Victorian literature
- J. Decadence and degeneration in other art forms
- K. Decadence and degeneration in post-humanism
- L. Decadence and degeneration in contemporary literature

IV. Methodology

The assigned readings for this course will challenge students. Of course, the instructor will lecture and offer guidance during class discussions and presentations; nevertheless, students are expected to lead discussions and bring their own observations, experiences and intellectual concerns with the readings to the class. In class discussions, we will consider the assigned readings in relation to the contemporary and historical intellectual and political movements in which they figure and their meanings for present day society and literature. Class discussions will draw from various academic disciplines including philosophy, political theory, history, cultural studies and literary theory and from a variety of cultural forms including literature, film, television, the visual and plastic arts and music. In addition to class participation, each student will write 2 4-5 page response papers of choice throughout the semester, give one presentation as make a creative blog critically considering the course material. For their final paper, students will select an artistic text of their choice to apply the theories discussed in class and write a 12-15 page formal, academic essay, with a minimum 7 source bibliography.

The course will use online sessions to comply with the fully online delivery modality (100% of virtualization, with 60% synchronous and 40% asynchronous sessions) required by University of Costa Rica. This methodology requires students to develop autonomy as learners and writers and to make frequent use of technologies to complete the coursework.



The institutional platform Mediación Virtual will be used as the official platform for online classes. Thus, students are required to possess a UCR account and to participate in all the online activities of the course. A videoconferencing service will be used to establish synchronic communication during class time, and the UCR's institutional email accounts will be the official channel of communication between instructor and students.

V. Grading

10 Blog Entries	20%
2 Response Papers 4-5 pages (Choose 2 of 4 options)	20%
Presentation	15%
Final paper proposal with annotated bibliography	5%
One 12-15 page research paper	35%
Discussion of final work	5%

VI. Course Calendar

Date	Course contents and readings
Week 1	Course Introduction and Library Resources (Synchronous)
Week 2	Readings Due: <i>Decadance</i> , Weir The Picture of Dorian Gray, 5-44 (Asynchronous)
Week 3	Readings Due: <i>Aesthetes and Decadance</i> , Beckson <i>The Literary Mood of Fin de Siecle</i> , Dryden The Picture of Dorian Gray, 44-90 (Synchronous) Presentations
Week 4	Readings Due: Chapter I Degeneration The Picture of Dorian Gray, 91-140 (Asynchronous)
Week 5	Readings Due: Chapter 3 Decadents and Asthetes The Picture of Dorian Gray, 141-190 (Synchronous) Presentations
Week 6	Readings Due: Oscar Wilde, Gothic Ironies and Terrible Dualities The Picture of Dorian Gray, 190-213 (Asynchronous)
Week 7	Readings Due: Scent and Corruption, Bussing Performing Masculinity: Wilde's Art (Synchronous) Guest Lectures Response Paper #1 Due
Week 8	Readings Due: The History of Sexuality, Part I and Part V, Victorian Sexualities (Asynchronous)
Week 9	Readings Due: Co-Construction of Liberal Humanism, Bradley Varieties of Social Darwinism Animal Sociology, Haraway (Synchronous) Presentations
Week 10	Readings Due: Howl, Ginsberg The Wasteland, T.S. Eliot



	(Asynchronous) Final Paper Proposal Due 5%
Week 11	Readings Due: How we Became Post-human, Prologue, Chapter 10-11 (Synchronous) Presentations Response Paper #2 Due
Week 12	Readings Due: Braidotti, <i>Metamorphosis, Becoming Woman, Animal, Insect</i> Watch: The Fly (Asynchronous)
Week 13	Readings Due: <i>Love After the End (9-15)</i> <i>Walking the Clouds (1-10)</i> Writing as a Rupture, Whitehead (Synchronous) Presentations Response Paper #3 Due
Week 14	Readings Due: Whitehead, <i>Full-Metal Indigiqueer</i> (Asynchronous)
Week 15	Response Paper #4 Due (Synchronous)
Week 16	Group discussion and presentations of final work (Synchronous)
	Final Paper Due

Course Bibliography

A. Theory and Treatises :

Adams, James Eli. "Victorian Sexualities." *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, edited by Herbert F. Tucker. Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Bradley, Mónica. "Illustrations and (L) imitations in Western Art and science: A critical biography of intersections in the co-creation of liberal humanism." *Káñina*, vol. 45, no. 2, 23 Aug. 2021, pp. 213–247, <https://doi.org/10.15517/rk.v45i2.48184>.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Polity, 2008.

Brantlinger, Patrick. "Race and the Victorian Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to The Victorian Novel*, edited by Deirdre David. Cambridge UP, 2006.

Dillon, Grace (ed.). *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012.

Dryden, Linda. *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

Eco, Umberto. *History of Beauty*. Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2004.

Foucault, Michel. "We 'Other' Victorians." *Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 292-300.

Foucault, Michel and Robert Hurley. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.



Hayles, Nancy Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010.

Lombroso, Cesare. *Criminal Man*, translated by Gibson, Mary and Nicole Hahn Rafter. Duke UP, 2006.

Marshall, Gail, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to The Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge UP, 2007.

Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*, compiled by Rosemary O'Day and David Englander. Wordsworth Classics, 2008.

Michie, Helena. "Under Victorian Skins: The Bodies Beneath." *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, edited by Herbert F. Tucker. Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. The Project Gutenberg Ebook, 2016.

Rodensky, Lisa, editor. *Decadent Poetry from Wilde to Naidu*. Penguin Books: 2006.

Smith, Andrew. *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle*. Manchester U P, 2004.

Von Krafft-Ebing, Richard. *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*. G.P. Putnam's, 1965.

Weir, David. *Decadence, A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2018.

Whitehead, Joshua. *Making love with the land*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022.

B. Literary Texts:

Howl and The wasteland, Full Metal Indigiqueer

Beckson, Karl. *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose*. Academy Chicago Publishers, 2004.

Conan Doyle, Arthur. "The Terror of Blue John Gap." *Tales of Terror and Mystery*. *The Project Gutenberg E-Text*. www.gutenberg.org.

Hodgson, William Hope. *The House on the Borderland*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1990.

Lee, Vernon. *Hauntings*. *The Project Gutenberg E-Text*. www.gutenberg.org.

Lovecraft, H.P. "Rats in the Walls." *Tales of Terror and the Supernatural*. Bracken Books, 1994.

Machen, Arthur. *The Great God Pan. Classic Tales of the Supernatural*. Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2000.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Penguin Books, 2009.



Whitehead, Joshua. *Full-metal Indigiqueer: Poems*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2017.

*References for the articles and other theory-related texts are indicated on the copies.

ASSIGNMENTS

Blog

For this assignment, you will create a blog where you will create 10 entries related to the material covered in the course, your opinions and associations as well as their connections to the world around us. These are meant to be creative expressions of the material discussed with a critical and analytical focus but also a place for exploration and risk-taking.

Literary Response Papers

For your literary response papers, you will choose 2 of 3 of the options and apply the theory studied in class to the literary text(s). It should mention at least 2 theoretical texts from the course in addition to literary text(s) you will analyze in a 4- 5 page response paper. Your paper must have quotes from the texts to support your analysis and opinion and be well-organized with a clear thesis statement. You will use theory to discuss how the texts relate to the concepts of decadence and degeneration as well as your substantiated response/opinion to the texts.

Student presentation:

During these presentations, you will be the “experts” on the theoretical works at hand and will share your expertise with the class, leading the class in motivating and provocative discussions and applying critical analysis to the texts. The presentation may have but is not limited to providing a brief summary with the main points, explaining difficult parts in the text, discussing previous texts that the text is in conversation with, contextualizing the text, offering critical reviews and criticism as well as your own opinions on the authors’ ideas and applying the text to contemporary or historical society and other artistic representations. The presentation should be organized, have clear objectives, have strong analysis and be well-researched.

The presentation should:

- Be between 1 hour and 1 hour and 15 minutes (Including all activities, discussion, videos, etc...)
- Have a “pop-time” activity where you relate the text(s) to a specific cultural representation either historical or contemporary.
- Include at least three interesting discussion questions for the class (You should plan for at least 20 minutes of class discussion)

Research paper

For your final paper, you will choose an artistic text (literature, film/series, painting, photography, etc...) and write a 12-15 page essay. You should think of the essay as the



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draft of a publishable article, a conference presentation and/or a starting point for your thesis. You will need to research your text extensively, contextualize it historically, and apply the theories discussed in class to the analysis of your text to explore degeneration or decadence within the work. You must use at least 2 theoretical works from the class in addition to other academic texts from your own research. You will be required to turn in a project proposal as well as have a discussion/brief presentation of your final work as well.