PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

HOURS: Monday, Wednesday 3:15-5:05

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COURSE OUTLINE

Why would a writer whose aims are philosophical produce anything other than a treatise? Why would a writer whose aims are literary make use of philosophical ideas, motifs, and vocabulary? What, in general, can literary forms achieve that non-literary forms cannot?

In this course, we will discuss whether it is more appropriate to think of imaginative literature as conveying truths, as transmitting idiosyncratic visions, as inventing glorious lies, as setting up useful make-believe scenarios, or as providing formal models for the well-lived life. We will also ask whether literature can improve its readers morally -- or whether, on the contrary, its core function may depend on a steady refusal to offer clear positions and to adopt definitive stances.

We will explore three general kinds of connection between philosophy and literature:
(1) philosophy on literature: philosophical approaches to the understanding of literary texts (issues of truth, authorship, selfhood);
(2) philosophy in literature: literary texts that explicitly invoke philosophical problems or approaches (particularly those belonging to the ethical domain);
(3) philosophy as literature: problems raised by certain philosophical texts whose proper use requires careful attention to their form.

TEXTS
Sophocles, *Oedipus The King*  Hackett  0872204928
Plato, *Gorgias*  Hackett  0872200167
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*  Harvest  0156628708
Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*  Harper  0060002107

Additional readings may be found online, via coursework.stanford.edu.

NB: it is your responsibility to bring copies of required reading to class.

ELIGIBILITY
This is an undergraduate class—preference will be given to sophomores and juniors—designed in part as a gateway course for the new set of major tracks in literature and philosophy. Affiliation with these tracks is, however, not a requirement.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADING
Take-home exercise (2-4 pages): 10%
First paper (c. 1800 words): 30%
Second paper (c. 2500 words): 40%
Intellectual engagement (including regular attendance at lecture and section): 20%
Late papers will be penalized by one third of a letter grade.
Monday January 5: INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS LITERATURE FOR?

Wednesday January 7: LITERATURE AS TRUTH, LITERATURE AS LIES
LITERATURE: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*; Lydia Davis, “New Year’s Resolution”
PHILOSOPHY: Plato, *Republic X*, 595a-608b
Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* vol. I, section 51; two-page introduction
(Suggested: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* vol. I, sec. 34; vol. II, sec. 37, pp. 433-4)

Monday January 12: LITERATURE AS GOOD LIES
PHILOSOPHY: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* §7, §8, §24; *The Will to Power* §853; *Beyond Good and Evil* §24; *The Gay Science* §54, §78, §107, §290, §299, §344. (Suggested: *Beyond Good and Evil* §4; *The Genealogy of Morals* III:25.)
LITERATURE: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

Wednesday January 14: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION (METAPHOR)
LITERATURE: Marcel Proust, The Steeples at Martinville [excerpt from *Swann’s Way*]; Charles Baudelaire, “The Swan”
THEORY: Marcel Proust, The Septet of Vinteuil [excerpt from *The Captive*]
William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, paragraphs 5-8, 15, 26
T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet”
(Suggested: Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, pp. 8-26, 326-33; Danto, “Metaphor, Expression, and Style.”, pp. 204-8.)

Monday January 19: NO CLASS (MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY)

Wednesday January 21: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION: METAPHOR CONTINUED
THEORY: Max Black, “Metaphor”
Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” [difficult]
(Suggested: David Hills, “Aptness and Truth in Verbal Metaphor” or “Metaphor,” sec. 1, 3, 4, 5.3*)


Monday January 26: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION: AN OBJECTION [“DEATH OF THE AUTHOR”]
THEORY: Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” [read for the general idea]
Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” [read for amusement]
Alexander Nehamas, “The Postulated Author” [read carefully]
Virginia Woolf, Incandescence [excerpt from *A Room of One’s Own*]
LITERATURE/FILM: Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”; Charlie Kaufman, “Adaptation”

Tuesday, January 27, 5 p.m.: TAKE-HOME EXERCISE. Please upload to Dropbox on the Coursework site.

Wednesday January 28: LITERATURE AS MAKE-BELIEVE
PHILOSOPHY: Kendall Walton, “Fearing Fictions”
(Suggested: Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Ch. 1, esp. pp. 11-16, 21-43, 51-54)

Monday February 2: LITERATURE AS MAKE-BELIEVE / SIMULATION
(Suggested: Lisa Zunshine, “Why We Read Fiction,” 6-10, 47-54, 60-65)

Wednesday February 4: LITERATURE AS IMAGINATION
LITERATURE: Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (finish the novel)
PHILOSOPHY: Richard Moran, “The Expression of Feeling in Imagination” (focus on sections 1 & 3; skim section 4)

Monday February 9: LITERATURE AS EDIFICATION
PHILOSOPHY: Martha Nussbaum, “Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination”
(Suggested: Tamar Gendler, “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance”*)
LITERATURE/FILM: Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway; McQuarrie / Singer, “The Usual Suspects”

Wednesday February 11: LITERATURE AS CLARIFICATION
LITERATURE: Geoffrey Chaucer: “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (incl. prologue & epilogue), “Valediction” (aka “Retraction”);
Lydia Davis, “The Old Dictionary”;
McQuarrie / Singer, “The Usual Suspects”
THEORY: Joshua Landy, Chaucer: Ambiguity and Ethics
(Suggested: Richard Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism”)

Friday February 13, 5 p.m.: FIRST PAPER DUE. Please upload to Dropbox on the Coursework site.

Monday February 16: NO CLASS (PRESIDENTS’ DAY)

Wednesday February 25: LITERATURE AS WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A (TALL) STORY
PHILOSOPHY: R. Lanier Anderson, Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption,” esp. 185-7, 196-212
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science §34, §54, §78, §110, §290, §307, §335, §341, §354; Ecce Homo frontispiece
LITERATURE: Samuel Beckett, Krapp’s Last Tape

Monday March 2: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS
PHILOSOPHY/LITERATURE: Plato, Gorgias

Wednesday March 4: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS (II)
LITERATURE/ PHILOSOPHY: Plato, Gorgias

Monday March 9: LITERARY PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE (I)
LITERARY PHILOSOPHY: Michel de Montaigne, “Of Repentance”; “To Flee from Sensual Pleasures at the Price of Life”
PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE: Milan Kundera, Ignorance

Wednesday March 11: LITERARY PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE (II)
LITERARY PHILOSOPHY: Michel de Montaigne, “Of Repentance”; “To Flee from Sensual Pleasures at the Price of Life”
PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE: Milan Kundera, Ignorance

Thursday March 19, 5 p.m.: SECOND PAPER DUE. Please upload to Dropbox on the Coursework site.

* You may wish to consult the professors about which parts to attend to in these readings.