PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

HOURS: Monday, Wednesday 3:15-5:05
CLASSROOM: Forum Room, Meyer

INSTRUCTORS

Joshua Landy, French & Italian
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NB: SIGN UP at jloh.pbwiki.com

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
Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*  Harper  0060002107
Ian McEwan, *Atonement*  Doubleday  0307388840

OTHER READINGS

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 (max. 400 words): 10%
First paper (c. 1800 words): 30%
Second paper (c. 2500 words): 40%
Participation (including regular attendance at lecture and section): 20%
Monday January 4: INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS LITERATURE FOR?

Wednesday January 6: LITERATURE AS TRUTH, LITERATURE AS LIES
Plato, Republic X, 595a-608b
Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation vol. I, sections 34, 51; two-page introduction
TEST CASE: Sophocles, Oedipus The King

Monday January 11: LITERATURE AS GOOD LIES
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy §1, §7, §24, §25; The Will to Power §853;
Beyond Good and Evil §1, §5, §24; The Gay Science §54, §107, §290, §299, §344; The Genealogy of Morals III:23-25
TEST CASE: Sophocles, Oedipus The King

Wednesday January 13: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION (METAPHOR)
Marcel Proust, The Septet of Vinteuil [excerpt from The Captive]
T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet”
M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp. 326-33
(Suggested: M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp. 8-26)
TEST CASE: Marcel Proust, The Steeples at Martinville [excerpt from Swann’s Way]

Friday January 15, 3-5 p.m.: FILM AND PHILOSOPHY EVENT (extra credit available)
Saturday January 16, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.: FILM AND PHILOSOPHY EVENT (extra credit available)

Monday January 18: NO CLASS (MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY)

Wednesday January 20: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION: METAPHOR CONTINUED
Max Black, “Metaphor”
Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”
TEST CASES: Emily Dickinson, “I Dwell in Possibility”; Wallace Stevens, “Man and Bottle”;
Charles Baudelaire, “The Swan”; Ernest Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants”;
Lydia Davis, “Away from Home”

Wednesday January 20, 7p.m.: SCREENING: “Adaptation” (Charlie Kaufman)

Monday January 25: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION: AN OBJECTION [“DEATH OF THE AUTHOR”]
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]
Wayne Booth, [“The Implied Author”], from The Rhetoric of Fiction
Virginia Woolf, Incandescence [excerpt from A Room Of One’s Own]
TEST CASES: Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”; “Adaptation”

Tuesday, January 26, 5 p.m.: SHORT DIAGNOSTIC EXERCISE. Please send as email attachment to both professors and your TA.

Wednesday January 27: LITERATURE AS MAKE-BELIEVE
Kendall Walton, “Fearing Fictions”
(Suggested: Kendall Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, Ch. 1, esp. pp. 11-16, 21-43, 51-4.)
TEST CASES: “Adaptation”; Ian McEwan, Atonement (read at least to p. 72)

Monday February 1: LITERATURE AS MAKE-BELIEVE / SIMULATION
Kendall Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, Ch. 1, esp. pp. 11-16, 21-43, 51-4 (recommended further reading: pp. 57-69)
Gregory Currie, “The Moral Psychology of Fiction”
TEST CASES: “Adaptation”; Ian McEwan, Atonement (read at least to p. 250)
Wednesday February 3: LITERATURE AS IMAGINATION
   Richard Moran, “The Expression of Feeling in Imagination”
   TEST CASE: Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (finish the novel)

**Wednesday February 3, 7p.m.: SCREENING:** “The Usual Suspects” (W: Christopher McQuarrie, D: Bryan Singer)

Monday February 8: LITERATURE AS EDIFICATION
   Martha Nussbaum, “‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’: Literature and the Moral Imagination”
   Tamar Gendler, “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance”
   TEST CASE: Ian McEwan, *Atonement*; “The Usual Suspects”

Wednesday February 10: LITERATURE AS EDIFICATION: SOME HEATED OBJECTIONS
   Richard Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism”
   Joshua Landy, “A Nation of Madame Bovarys”
   TEST CASES: Geoffrey Chaucer: “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (incl. prologue & epilogue), “Valediction” (aka “Retraction”);
   “The Usual Suspects”; Lydia Davis, “The Old Dictionary”

Friday February 12, 5 p.m.: FIRST PAPER DUE. Please send as email attachment to both professors and your TA.

Monday February 15: NO CLASS (PRESIDENTS’ DAY)

Wednesday February 17: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A POEM / PORTRAIT
   Michel de Montaigne, “To the Reader”; “Of Giving the Lie”; “Of Presumption”
   TEST CASES: Shakespeare, Sonnet 35; Lydia Davis, “New Year’s Resolution”

**Friday February 19, 3:15-5:00 p.m.: Alva Noë, “Art as a Philosophical Practice”** (recommended; date to be confirmed)

Monday February 22: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A (TRUE) STORY
   Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition” (*After Virtue*)
   TEST CASE: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (excerpts)

Wednesday February 24: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A (TALL) STORY
   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* §34, §78, §110, §290, §307, §335, §341, §354; *Ecce Homo* frontispiece
   TEST CASE: Samuel Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*

**Wednesday February 24, 5:15-7:00 p.m.: Giovanni Ferrari on Irony** (recommended)

Monday March 1: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS
   TEST CASE: Plato, *Gorgias*

Wednesday March 3: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS (II)
   TEST CASE: Plato, *Gorgias*

Monday March 8: LITERARY PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE
   LITERARY PHILOSOPHY: Michel de Montaigne, “Of Repentance”; “To Flee from Sensual Pleasures at the Price of Life”
   PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE: Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*

Wednesday March 10: CONCLUSIONS

**Monday March 15: Blakey Vermeule, “Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?”** (recommended)

Tuesday, March 16: Louis Menand & Alison Simmons, “Philosophy and Literature in Conversation” (recommended)

Thursday March 18, 5 p.m.: SECOND PAPER DUE. Please send as email attachment to both professors and your TA.