PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

HOURS: Monday, Wednesday 3:15-5:05
CLASSROOM: Education 334

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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 006002107

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 7: INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS LITERATURE FOR?

Wednesday January 9: 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
(Suggested: Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation vol. II, pp. 433-4)
TEST CASE: Sophocles, Oedipus The King; Lydia Davis, “New Year’s Resolution”

Monday January 14: LITERATURE AS GOOD LIES
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy §1, §7, §8, §24, §25; The Will to Power §853;
Beyond Good and Evil §1, §4, §24; The Gay Science §54, §107, §290, §299, §344; The Genealogy of Morals III:23-25
TEST CASE: Sophocles, Oedipus The King

Wednesday January 16: 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
TEST CASE: Marcel Proust, The Steeples at Martinville [excerpt from Swann’s Way]

Monday January 21: NO CLASS (MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY)

Wednesday January 23: LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION: METAPHOR CONTINUED
Max Black, “Metaphor”
Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”
(Suggested: David Hills, “Aptness and Truth in Verbal Metaphor”)
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 23, 7p.m.: SCREENING: “Crimes and Misdemeanors” (w. & d. Woody Allen, 1989, 104 min)

Monday January 28: 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]
Virginia Woolf, Incandescence [excerpt from A Room Of One’s Own]
TEST CASES: Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”; “Crimes and Misdemeanors”

Tuesday, January 29, 5 p.m.: TAKE-HOME EXERCISE. Please send as email attachment to both professors and your TA.

Wednesday January 30: 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: “Crimes and Misdemeanors”; Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (read at least to p. 48)

Monday February 4: 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)
TEST CASES: “Crimes and Misdemeanors”; Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (read at least to p. 122)

Wednesday February 6: LITERATURE AS IMAGINATION
Richard Moran, “The Expression of Feeling in Imagination” (focus on sections 1 & 3; omit section 4)
TEST CASE: Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (finish the novel)

Wednesday February 6, 7p.m.: SCREENING: “The Usual Suspects” (W: Christopher McQuarrie, D: Bryan Singer, 1995, 106 min)
Monday February 11: LITERATURE AS EDIFICATION
Martha Nussbaum, “‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’: Literature and the Moral Imagination”
Tamar Gendler, “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance”
TEST CASE: Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway; “The Usual Suspects”

Wednesday February 13: LITERATURE AS CLARIFICATION
Joshua Landy, “A Nation of Madame Bovarys”
(Suggested: Richard Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism”)
TEST CASES: Geoffrey Chaucer: “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (incl. prologue & epilogue), “Valediction” (aka “Retraction”);

Friday February 15, 5 p.m.: FIRST PAPER DUE. Please send as email attachment to both professors and your TA.

Monday February 18: NO CLASS (PRESIDENTS’ DAY)

Wednesday February 20: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A POEM / PORTRAIT
Michel de Montaigne, “To the Reader”; “Of Giving the Lie”; “Of Presumption”
Suggested reading: Anderson & Landy, “Philosophy as Self-Fashioning: Alexander Nehamas’s Art of Living”
TEST CASES: Shakespeare, Sonnet 35

Friday February 22, 4:00-6:30 p.m.: NARRATIVE SELFHOOD EVENT (extra credit available)
Saturday January 15, 10 a.m. – 6:45 p.m.: NARRATIVE SELFHOOD EVENT (extra credit available)

Monday February 25: 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 27: 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

Monday March 4: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS
TEST CASE: Plato, Gorgias

Tuesday March 5, 5:30-7:00 p.m.: Robert Gooding-Williams on “Obama, DuBois, Autobiography” (extra credit available)

Wednesday March 6: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS (II)
TEST CASE: Plato, Gorgias

Monday March 11: 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 13: CONCLUSIONS

Thursday March 21, 5 p.m.: SECOND PAPER DUE. Please send as email attachment to both professors and your TA.