

MISANTHROPY AND LITERATURE

SPRING 2019 — PHIL 194Z-01

TU TH 1:30 – 2:50 260-012

John Holliday • 100-102M

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our guiding question will be what value misanthropic literature has, particularly when there's so much praise for writers whose work contains a so-called generous spirit. When we appreciate the writing of someone like Thomas Bernhard—a notorious misanthrope—what exactly are we appreciating? Is it some manner of catharsis? Or is it a purely formal affair, a strict matter of aesthetic content? Or are we somehow appreciating the expression of misanthropy itself? These questions will take us into the domains of ethics, psychology, literary criticism, and, of course, artistic value. We'll explore the paradox of tragedy, theories of moralism, theories of humor, and the distinction between form and content.

COURSE GOALS

DELIVERABLES

Complete an individual research project, one that you draft, present, revise, and could, in principle, successfully submit to and confidently present at an academic conference.

LEARNING GOALS

(1) Think critically about literary value. (2) Gain purchase on our guiding question. (3) Develop comfort with the academic research process. (4) Understand the expectations of philosophy conferences.

TEXTS

REQUIRED

Bennett, Claire-Louise. 2017. *Pond*. Riverhead Books. ISBN-10: 0399575901.

Bernhard, Thomas. 2010. *Woodcutters*. Translated by David McLintock. Vintage Books. ISBN-10: 1400077591.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. 1994. *Notes from Underground*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Vintage Books. ISBN-10: 067973452X.

Moshfegh, Ottessa. 2016. *Eileen*. Penguin Books. ISBN-10: 9780143128755.

Additional required texts will be posted on Canvas.

RECOMMENDED

Kertész, Imre. 2004. *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*. Translated by Tim Wilkinson. Vintage Books. ISBN-10: 9781400078622.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Course Requirement	%
Participation	15
Discussion Questions & Comments	5
Discussion Lead	10
Research Plan	5
Abstract & Outline	5
Extended Abstract	10
Extended Abstract Comments	15

Conference Presentation	10
Final Paper	25

Note: All work should be typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font (double-spaced), with one-inch margins.

PARTICIPATION

The success of this class turns largely on your presence and contribution to discussion. You are generally expected to attend every class. But one absence will be overlooked, no questions asked. Further absences will be excused *only* on account of medical reasons, religious observances, or personal emergencies. For any medical reason, you must, at minimum, submit a note in which you testify that you were too ill to attend class. For any religious observance, you are required to notify me of this *in advance*. Personal emergencies will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. All students begin the course with a 100% participation grade (100 points). For every unexcused absence, your participation grade will be reduced 20 points. For every 15 minutes of unexcused lateness, your participation grade will be reduced 5 points.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

For every class in which we discuss texts, you are required to prepare one question and one comment prior to class (one sentence each is sufficient). These questions and comments must be posted on Canvas by 11:59 p.m. of the day before the texts are discussed; they also must be distinct from any other questions and comments already posted. *Late questions/comments will not be accepted for credit*. Each question/comment will be assessed on a 2-point scale.

DISCUSSION LEAD

During one class session, you are required to lead discussion. You are expected to have a thorough understanding of the texts to be discussed and to have reviewed and critically considered the Discussion Questions & Comments posted for the session's discussion. Your primary job is to keep discussion moving in a productive direction. Your performance will be assessed against a 100-point rubric.

RESEARCH PLAN

You are required to submit a plan for your research project. This plan must articulate and motivate your research question and include an annotated bibliography of 3–5 key research texts and a standard bibliography of at least six additional texts. The research plan will be assessed on a 100-point scale.

ABSTRACT & OUTLINE

You are required to submit an abstract for your research paper along with an outline for the paper's whole. The abstract should briefly articulate the research issue/problem and what you will argue in response to that issue/problem (100–175 words). The outline should list all headings and subheadings and give a brief description of each section's goal (50–150 words). The abstract and outline will be assessed on a 100-point scale.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

You are required to submit an extended abstract for your paper (1000–1250 words). This abstract should extend your discussion of the issue/problem and, most importantly, articulate the paper's primary argument in full. The extended abstract will be assessed on a 100-point scale.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT COMMENTS

You are required to comment on two of your colleagues Extended Abstracts (250–300 words). Each comment should include a brief explanation of what you understand the paper's goal to be (75 words max) and a discussion of the most pressing issues and objections you envision with respect to the paper's primary argument. *Late comments will be penalized severely*. Each comment will be assessed on a 50-point scale.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

You are required to present a working draft of your research project in class (in 7–9 minutes, with 8 minutes being your target time) and respond to questions from the class. You should present using either slides or a handout; you should not read a draft of your paper. *No late presentations are permitted.* You are also expected to actively participate in the Q&A period of your colleagues' presentations. Your performance will be assessed against a 100-point rubric.

FINAL PAPER

You are required to submit a final paper (3000–3500 words, not including references). Your paper should be in a state where it could, in principle, be successfully submitted to and presented at an academic conference. Your paper will be assessed on a 100-point scale.

GRADING SYSTEM

Grades for all assignments will be calculated in terms of raw %. Unless accommodations are made in advance, late assignments will be penalized at least 2.5% per day they are late. Final grades for the course will be calculated as follows:

%	97	93	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	67	63	60	0
letter	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	NP

GRADE DISPUTES

It is my job to make every effort to grade as accurately and fairly as possible, and I take that job seriously. But should you believe I've made an error in recording or assessing any of your assignments, please let me know as soon as possible. If you believe there is an error in recording, speak with me in person (during office hours or before or after class). If you believe there is an error in assessment, speak with me in person (during office hours or by appointment) *and* submit a signed letter detailing why you believe reassessment should be considered. All disputes submitted in a timely manner will receive a response within one week. ***No disputes will be considered after Friday, June 14th.***

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to comply with Stanford's Honor Code. Any violations of this Code will be confronted and reported. For more information, visit <https://communitystandards.stanford.edu>.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

If you are unable to meet the deadlines of any course requirements due to religious observances, you are required to notify me of this *in advance*. If you are unable to meet the deadlines of any course requirements due to medical reasons, you must give me a note signed by a health care professional documenting the date of a medical appointment or time during which illness prevented the completion of course requirements. If you are unable to meet the deadlines of any of the course requirements due to personal reasons, speak to me as soon as possible (some form of documentation will be required). *No requests for accommodation of any kind will be considered after the last day of class.*

SPECIAL NEEDS AND SITUATIONS

Students with Documented Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty. Unless the student has a temporary disability, Accommodation Letters are issued for the entire academic year. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <https://oae.stanford.edu/>).

COURSE SCHEDULE

NOTE: THE DAY READINGS ARE LISTED IS THE DAY THEY WILL BE DISCUSSED.

WEEK 1: LITERARY VALUE & MISANTHROPY

Tu 4/2	Literary Value
Th 4/4	<i>No Class</i>

WEEK 2: MISANTHROPY ITSELF

Tu 4/9	Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from Underground</i> (1–60) Benatar (2015) “The Misanthropic Argument” Wasserman (2015) “Against Anti-Natalism” (excerpt: 18–19)
Th 4/11	To Do: Select Discussion Lead date Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from Underground</i> (finish: 61–130) Gerber (2002) What is So Bad about Misanthropy? (excerpt: 41–42 & 54–55)

WEEK 3: MISANTHROPY & AESTHETICS

Tu 4/16	Suggested: Make appointment to discuss research interests Bennett, <i>Pond</i> (1–63) Freitas et al. (2018) “Consistent Belief in a Good True Self in Misanthropes” (excerpt: sections 1, 3, and 5)
Th 4/18	Bennett, <i>Pond</i> (65–124) Goldman (2001) “The Aesthetic”

WEEK 4: STYLE & COGNITION

Tu 4/23	Bennett, <i>Pond</i> (finish: 125–195) Robinson (1985) “Style and Personality in the Literary Work”
Th 4/25	Moshfegh, <i>Eileen</i> (1–66) Davies (2007) “The Cognitive Value of Literature” (excerpt: 142–152)

WEEK 5: EMOTION

Tu 4/30	DUE: Research Plan (Canvas + hard copy) To Do: Make appointment to discuss Research Plan Moshfegh, <i>Eileen</i> (67–116) Smuts (2007) “The Paradox of Painful Art”
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Th 5/2 | Moshfegh, *Eileen* (117–179)
Small Group Feedback Session

WEEK 6: EMOTION

Tu 5/7 | Moshfegh, *Eileen* (181–233)
Tullmann (2018) “Sympathy and Fascination”

Th 5/9 | Moshfegh, *Eileen* (finish: 233–260)
Clavel-Vazquez (2018) “What Rough Heroines Tell Us about Imaginative Resistance”

WEEK 7: HUMOR

Tu 5/14 | **DUE: Abstract & Outline** (Canvas)
Bernhard, *Woodcutters* (1–39)
Frantzen (2017) “The Demonic Comedy of Thomas Bernhard”

Th 5/16 | Bernhard, *Woodcutters* (40–79)
Tapley (2006) “The Value of Humor”

WEEK 8: HUMOR & MORALITY

Tu 5/21 | **DUE: Extended Abstract** (Canvas)
Bernhard, *Woodcutters* (80–110)
Lewis (2005) “Schopenhauer's Laughter” (focus on sections 4–7)

Th 5/23 | Bernhard, *Woodcutters* (111–140)
Gaut (1998) “Just Joking”

WEEK 9: CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Tu 5/28 | **DUE: Extended Abstract Comments** (Canvas + hard copy)
Bernhard, *Woodcutters* (finish: 141–181)

Th 5/30 | **Conference Presentations**

WEEK 10: CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Tu 6/4 | **Conference Presentations & Wrap-up**

FINAL PAPER DUE Monday, June 10 @ 12:00 pm (Canvas)