PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

HOURS: Monday, Wednesday 3-4:50
CLASSROOM: 60/109; FILM SCREENINGS IN 460/334

INSTRUCTORS
Lanier Anderson, Philosophy
Office: Building 1
Office hours: by appt.

John Holliday, Philosophy
Office: 100/102M
Office hours: W 12-2 p.m.

Joshua Landy, Comp. Lit.
Office: 260/104
Office hours: by appt.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS
Radhika Koul, Comp. Lit.
Taylor Madigan, Philosophy

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
Toni Morrison, A Mercy Harvest 0307264238

Additional readings may be found on Canvas.
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 major tracks in literature and philosophy. Affiliation with these tracks is, however, not a requirement.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADING
NB: requirements are the same regardless of unit count.
Close reading / argument reconstruction (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 the first day and an additional third of a letter grade every second day thereafter.
NB: in order to pass the class, you must secure a passing grade on every component.
Monday September 24: **INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS LITERATURE FOR?**

Wednesday September 26: **LITERATURE AS TRUTH, LITERATURE AS LIES**
- **LITERATURE**: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*; Lydia Davis, “New Year’s Resolution”
- **PHILOSOPHY**: Plato, *Republic* X, 595a-608b

Monday October 1: **LITERATURE AS GOOD LIES**
- **PHILOSOPHY**: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* §7, §24; *Beyond Good and Evil* §24; *The Gay Science* §54, §78, §107, §290, §299, §344; *The Will to Power* §853. (Suggested: *Beyond Good and Evil* §4.)
- **LITERATURE**: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*;

Wednesday October 3: **LITERATURE AS EXPRESSION (METAPHOR)**
- **THEORY**: Marcel Proust, The Septet of Vinteuil [excerpt from *The Captive*]

Wednesday October 3, 7 p.m.: **SCREENING**: “Adaptation” (w. Charlie Kaufman, d. Spike Jonze, 2002, 114 min)

Monday October 8: **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”

Wednesday October 10: **LITERATURE AS EMOTION-GENERATOR**
- **THEORY**: William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, paragraphs 5-8, 15, 26
- Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art*, pp. 50-51

Monday October 15: **LITERATURE AS EMOTION-GENERATOR II: INTIMACY**
- **THEORY**: John Holliday, “Emotional Intimacy in Literature”
- **LITERATURE**: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (read at least to p. 49, i.e. end of third chapter)

Tuesday, October 16, 5 p.m.: **CLOSE READING / ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION DUE**. Please upload to Assignments on the Canvas site.

Wednesday October 17: **LITERATURE AS EMOTION-GENERATOR III: THE ROLE OF SOUND**
- **LITERATURE**: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (read at least to p. 78, i.e. end of fourth chapter)
- **THEORY**: Peter Kivy, *Once Told Tales* (excerpt)

Monday October 22: **LITERATURE AS MAKE-BELIEVE**
- **LITERATURE/FILM**: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (read at least to p. 136, i.e. end of seventh chapter); Charles Johnson, “Moving Pictures”
- **PHILOSOPHY**: Kendall Walton, “Fearing Fictions”
  (Suggested: Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Ch. 1, esp. pp. 11-16, 21-43, 51-54)

Wednesday October 24: **LITERATURE AS MAKE-BELIEVE II**
- **PHILOSOPHY**: Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Ch. 1, esp. pp. 11-16, 21-43, 51-4 (also recommended: pp. 57-69); Christopher Bartel, “The Puzzle of Historical Criticism”
- **LITERATURE**: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (no additional reading required for today, but please read ahead if you have time)
Monday October 29: LITERATURE AS IMAGINATION
  LITERATURE: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (finish the novel)
  PHILOSOPHY: Richard Moran, “The Expression of Feeling in Imagination” (focus on sections 1 & 3; skim section 4)

**Monday October 29, 7p.m.: SCREENING: “Vertigo” (w. Alec Coppel/Samuel Taylor, d. Alfred Hitchcock, 1958, 128 min)**

Wednesday October 31: LITERATURE AS EDIFICATION
  PHILOSOPHY: Martha Nussbaum, “Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination”
  LITERATURE: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (whole novel); Coppel/Taylor/Hitchcock, “Vertigo"

Friday November 2, TIME TBA: event with R. A. Briggs and Anna Zusman. Extra credit available.

Saturday November 3, 5 p.m.: FIRST PAPER DUE. Please upload to Assignments on the Canvas site.

Monday November 5: LITERATURE AS CLARIFICATION
  LITERATURE/FILM: Coppel/Taylor/Hitchcock, “Vertigo”; Lydia Davis, “The Old Dictionary”
  THEORY: Joshua Landy, “Chaucer: Ambiguity and Ethics”

Wednesday November 7: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A (TRUE) STORY
  PHILOSOPHY: Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition”;
  Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress” (read pp. 348-51; pp. 340-43 are also recommended)
  LITERATURE: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (excerpts)

Monday November 12: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A (TALL) STORY
  LITERATURE: Samuel Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*
  Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* §34, §54, §78, §110, §290, §307, §335, §341, §354

Wednesday November 14: LITERATURE AS A WAY OF LIFE: LIFE AS A POEM / PORTRAIT
  LITERATURE: Shakespeare, Sonnet 35

November 19-23: NO CLASSES—THANKSGIVING WEEK

Monday November 26: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS
  PHILOSOPHY/LITERATURE: Plato, *Gorgias*

Wednesday November 28: LITERATURE AS CATALYST: FORMATIVE FICTIONS (II)
  PHILOSOPHY: Plato, *Gorgias*

Monday December 3: LITERARY PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE (I)
  LITERARY PHILOSOPHY: Michel de Montaigne, “Of Repentance”
  PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE: Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*

Wednesday December 5: LITERARY PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE (II)
  LITERARY PHILOSOPHY: Michel de Montaigne, “Of Repentance”
  PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE: Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*

Thursday December 13, 5 p.m.: SECOND PAPER DUE. Please upload to Assignments on the Canvas site.