

Philosophy 2220 (DE): Philosophy and Literary Arts
Summer, 2013
Joseph Arel

Course Description

In this course we will attempt to understand literary arts philosophically. We will do this by reading philosophical and literary texts which explore the theoretical foundations of literary works, as well as exploring philosophical themes within particular works. We will read novels, short stories, as well as philosophical discussions on many topics including the nature of tragedy, the self's relation to writing, why we write, mimesis, catharsis, and existentialism. We will read, among others, Aristotle, Sophocles, Plato, Nietzsche, Borges, Calvino, and O'Connor.

Course Objectives

1. Gain an ability to profitably read literary texts with a philosophical eye
2. Understand some of the basic concepts and themes of philosophical approaches to literary arts
3. Gain an appreciation for the philosophical important of literary texts
4. Develop a greater philosophical acumen

Student Expectations

Students should expect to spend 8-10 hours a week in this course working through the readings and participating in discussions. Some of the readings will be longer than in other philosophy courses because we will be reading some novels. Do not let this scare you off, as the reading will move by much more quickly than reading a dense, philosophical text. However, after you finish reading, it is important to take some time to reflect on what you just read with a philosophical mind. You will have to ask yourselves questions afterwards in order to truly gain philosophical insights from the experience of reading the text.

Academic Misconduct

Any form of plagiarism is a serious offense and it will be treated as such. To better understand what is expected of you, please read the material on the following links.

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

<http://www.open.uoguelph.ca/current/undergrad-portal/open-learning-handbook/academic-responsibilities.aspx>

Instructors have the right to use software to aid in the detection of plagiarism or copying and to examine students orally on submitted work. For students found guilty of academic misconduct, serious penalties, up to and including suspension or expulsion, can be imposed. Hurried or careless submission of work does not exonerate students of responsibility for ensuring the academic integrity of their work. Similarly, students who find themselves unable to meet course requirements by the deadlines or criteria expected because of medical, psychological or compassionate circumstances should review [the University's regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration](#) in the calendar and discuss their situation with the instructor and/or the program counselor or other academic counselor as appropriate.

Required Texts

Book (to buy)

Coetzee, J.M., "Life and Times of Michael K," Vintage Press
Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Illych and Other Stories*, Penguin
Calvino, Italo, *If on a winter's night a traveler*, Harcourt
Sophocles "Antigone", Smith & Brown
Aristotle, *Poetics*, Hackett
Melville, Herman. *Bartleby and Benito Cereno* (Confirmed), Dover
Kafka, Franz, *The Complete Stories*, Schocken Books

Texts Available Through the Course Website

- Barthelme, Donald. "Not-Knowing"
- Barthelme, Donald. "The Balloon"
- Borges, Jorge Luis
 - "Pierre Menard, author of *Quixote*"
 - "The Library of Babel"
 - "The Circular Ruins"
 - "Tion, Uqbar, Orbus Tertius"
 - "Lottery of Babylon"
 - "Funes, the Memorious"
 - "Borges and I"
 - "On Exactitude in Science."
- Calvino, Italo. "Whom Do We Write For? Or The Hypothetical Bookshelf."
- De Beauvoir, Simone. "Introduction" to *The Second Sex*.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wall-Paper"
- Kafka, Franz. "In the Penal Colony"
- Melville, Herman. "Bartleby the Scrivener"
- O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man is Hard to Find"
- Plato. *The Republic*.
- Plato. "Ion"

Course Evaluation and Assignments

Assignment	Grade	Due
Weekly Discussions (12)	Each week will be worth about 2% of your final grade. Together these will make up 25% your final grade	Sunday at Midnight each week
Short Reflection Paper (1)	5%	Sunday May 19 th at Midnight,
Short Essays (3)	15% each x 3 =45%	Essay 1 Due Sunday, June 9 th at Midnight (at the end of week 4) Essay 2 Due Sunday, June 24 th at midnight (at the end of week 7) Essay 3 Due Sunday, July 7 th at midnight (at the end of week 8)
Final Essay (1)	25%	Due Thursday, August 8 th at Midnight

Weekly Discussions

Each week, students will be expected to participate in online discussion groups. At minimum, students should post one comment and respond to another posting. Posting should include *substantial philosophical content*. “Great point,” “I doubt it,” or “That was awesome” do not count as substantial philosophical contributions. These comments are welcome as long as you *also* include substantial discussion points. Discussions should reflect your careful consideration of the readings and ideas. Although this is assigned, I assume you are taking this class because you are genuinely interested in learning about ancient philosophy. For this reason, it is hoped that the discussions are comprised of people genuinely interested in doing something quite unique: having the ability to participate in worthwhile philosophical discussions with other intelligent people.

In general, you may think of yourself as making two different kinds of discussion contributions:

1. Careful analysis of the text
 - a. This type of contribution should reflect your ability to read and analyze the text we are reading and, perhaps, those we have already read. Including

discussion of other material you happen to have read will generally distract the discussion since we have not all read the same things. So, instead, think of yourself as aiming at a focused and close analysis of the text.

- b. Citing the text is not only helpful, but often necessary for us to follow what you are saying and where you are getting your ideas on the text. Cite the text just like I have done in the modules.
2. Thoughtful contribution on the larger philosophical issues
 - a. In addition to analyzing the text, we will be thinking about the meaning of the philosophical content in general. We will talk about whether or not we think the philosopher is on the right track, what this could imply or lead to with respect to other issues, and also what strikes us as particularly interesting or important.

Make sure over the course of the semester you give both types of contributions. If for example, you only gave us contributions of the second type during the entire course, you would be missing out on one of the most important learning objectives of the course.

There may be more than one discussion question at for a given module. In these cases, you simply have the opportunity to choose from the list, or to participate in discussing more themes or ideas related to the week's reading.

Short Reflection Paper

In order to begin this course, I would like you to reflect on a piece of literary art that you have read (a poem, short story, a novel, etc.). The question I would like you to answer is: how did this piece of literature accomplish a philosophical goal? Read the module for the first week. Then, think about the ways in which literature is uniquely able to accomplish philosophical goals. Think about the writing you have. What did the author do in order to express philosophical truth? When you write this paper, state what you take philosophy to be. State what you take literature to be. Focus your paper specifically on why this piece was successful philosophically as a piece of literature.

This length of this assignment is 2 pages double-spaced (minimum).

Short Essays

You will write 3 2-3-page papers throughout the semester. They will each be worth 15% of your final grade.

In all of your essays for this class, you will want to have a focused thesis statement to let the reader know what your central point, and main argument, will be. Each paper you write will be an argument. There are many types of arguments that you might give. For example, you may want to argue for a given way to interpret an aspect of one of our short-stories. When doing this, you would tell your reader, in the first paragraph, the main point you will be making. This will

be the point of your paper. Everything you write should contribute to accomplishing what you say in this one sentence.

Short Essay #1: Analysis of “Antigone”

For this short essay, you will use Aristotle’s *Poetics* to write an analysis of Sophocles’ “Antigone.”

Module 3, on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, should help you, and you will probably want to use Aristotle’s discussion of pity, terror, and catharsis in your analysis. However, the *Poetics* discusses many other elements of tragedy, including representation, action, plot, the parts of a tragedy, and how it is distinguished from comedy and epic poetry. You may want to draw on these elements to strengthen your analysis.

You will not have the time or space to go through each element of Aristotle’s discussion and apply it to Sophocles’ play. So, you will instead want to focus your analysis a few, or even one, element of the play that you think Aristotle could help to discuss in an interesting and productive way.

Short Essay #2: Mimesis in “The Balloon”

For this essay, I would like you to reflect on Barthelme’s “The Balloon” in light of Plato’s discussion of mimesis that we discussed in Module 2. The balloon, throughout the story, brings the issue of imitation, representation, and mimesis to the fore. It would be difficult, from any perspective in the story, to think of the balloon as just a simple duplication of a balloon. What, then, is mimesis in light of Barthelme’s “The Balloon”?

Short Essay #3

Modules 5, 6, and 7, on “Existentialism in Literature” and the “Crisis of Modernity,” deal with a variety of issues revolving around what we might call “the human condition.” These works all reflect on what it’s like to live in the modern world where we need to figure out for ourselves what is meaningful.

Pick a reading or readings and choose a theme related to the experience of being human.

Final Essay

You will write one 5-7 page essay. This will be due at the end of class. You may choose any topic you would like. Think about the kinds of questions and discussions you have had throughout the course. I will provide some sample topics towards the end of the semester to get you thinking.

Grading Guidelines

80 - 100 (A) Excellent

An outstanding performance in which the student demonstrates a superior grasp of the subject matter, and an ability to go beyond the given material in a critical and constructive manner. The student demonstrates a high degree of creative and/or logical thinking, a superior ability to organize, to analyze, and to integrate ideas, and a thorough familiarity with the appropriate literature and techniques.

70 - 79 (B) Good

A more than adequate performance in which the student demonstrates a thorough grasp of the subject matter, and an ability to organize and examine the material in a critical and constructive manner. The student demonstrates a good understanding of the relevant issues and a familiarity with the appropriate literature and techniques.

60 - 69 (C) Acceptable

An adequate performance in which the student demonstrates a generally adequate grasp of the subject matter and a moderate ability to examine the material in a critical and constructive manner. The student displays an adequate understanding of the relevant issues, and a general familiarity with the appropriate literature and techniques.

50 - 59 (D) Minimally Acceptable

A barely adequate performance in which the student demonstrates a familiarity with the subject matter, but whose attempts to examine the material in a critical and constructive manner are only partially successful. The student displays some understanding of the relevant issues, and some familiarity with the appropriate literature and techniques.

0 - 49 (F) Fail

An inadequate performance.

The following chart outlines the grading standards for each of the grade levels.

A	B	C	D	F
A+ 90-100%	B+ 77-79%	C+ 67-69%	D+ 57-59%	F 0-49%
A 85-89%	B 73-76	C 63-66%	D 53-56%	
A- 80-84%	B- 70-72	C- 60-62%	D- 50-52%	

These grading guidelines are endorsed by the University of Guelph and can be found at:
<http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/id/ta/tahb/tah6a.html>

Problems, Questions, Contacts

Instructor

Joseph Arel jarel@uoguelph.ca

Please use the main class forum for asking general questions concerning the class so everyone can benefit from your question (and they usually will). Contact me concerning private matters.

Distance Education Contact Information

Technical Support:

Office of Open Learning
University of Guelph
519-824-4120 ex. 56939
Toll-Free (Can/U.S.): 1-866-275-1478
Room 153 Johnston Hall
help@open.uoguelph.ca

General Inquiries:

Office of Open Learning
University of Guelph
(519) 824-4120 ex. 55000
(519) 824-1112 (fax)
Room 160 Johnston Hall
info@open.uoguelph.ca

Schedule

1. Introduction to “Philosophy and Literary Arts”
2. Plato on Mimesis
 - a. Reading: Selection from the *Republic*
3. Aristotle’s *Poetics*
 - a. Reading: Aristotle’s *Poetics*, pages 1-25, 40-42
4. Tragedy in Sophocles’ *Antigone*
 - a. Read “*Antigone*” by Sophocles
5. Existentialism in Literature
 - a. Reading: Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*
6. Crisis of Modernity I: Kafka and Melville
 - a. Readings: “*Bartleby the Scrivener*” by Melville and “*In the Penal Colony*” by Kafka

7. Crisis of Modernity II Tolstoy and O'Connor
 - a. Readings: Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Illych* and O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"
8. Ignorance as the Origin of Writing: Plato and Barthelme
 - a. Readings: Plato, "Ion," and Barthelme, "Not-Knowing" and "The Balloon"
9. Feminism in Literature
 - a. Readings: "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Gilman and "Introduction" to the *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir
10. How we Write: Reading and the Problem of Authorship: Borges
 - a. Reading: Selections from Borges
11. Writing about Writing: Calvino
 - a. Reading: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*" by Calvino (read all)
12. Writing about Writing: Calvino
 - a. Reading: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*" by Calvino (read all)