

Literature & Philosophy (PHL388H1F) – Syllabus

Instructor: Willie Costello

Lectures on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 15:00 to 18:00 in Sidney Smith 2110. Instructor's office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 13:30 to 14:45 in Sidney Smith 2104, or by appointment.

Course description

Literature (and fiction, more generally) has always been a prominent and powerful aspect of human life and society. More than mere entertainment, the stories we tell have personal, cultural, and political import extending far beyond the pleasure they provide. However, literature is also (literally speaking) *false*: it is fiction, after all. How, then, does something so lacking in literal truth exert such an influence over our actual lives? What exactly do we gain or learn from literature? And can we gain or learn the same things in any other manner?

This course is an investigation into these questions, and an examination of their prominent contemporary answers. We will look at a variety of ways in which literature has been characterized in attempt to resolve these problems: literature as authorial expression, as metaphor, as make-believe, as emotional simulation, as moral imagination, as moral philosophy, as moral education, and as a way of life. Throughout our discussions of these philosophical ideas, we will also examine particular works of literature, as exemplifying or contradicting the theories we consider.



One closing, clarificatory note: Although this course is titled “Literature” & Philosophy, don't think that our investigation is limited to so-called “high” works of the “literary canon”. Our discussions will pertain to *all* forms of narrative fiction, of which literature is but one example. Other forms include myth, fable, film, television, theatre, opera, and maybe even certain comics and video games, and in lecture I will be relating course ideas and concepts to these other forms as well. You, too, are encouraged to bring your own aesthetic experiences with fiction, of whatever variety, to bear on our discussions.

Texts

The philosophical articles and shorter literary works we will be discussing will be freely available through the course website. In addition, students are expected to acquire the following books, available at the following local bookstores:

At the Bob Miller Book Room (180 Bloor West (downstairs); M–F 9:00–18:00, SA 10:00–17:00):

- Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*
- Aristotle, *Poetics* (tr. Malcolm Heath)
- Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle*
- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground* (tr. Pevear & Volokhonsky)
- Plato, *Republic* (tr. Grube & Reeve)
- Plato, *Meno* (tr. Grube)
- Jan Zwicky, *Plato as Artist*

At Bakka Phoenix Books (84 Harbord; M–F 11:00–19:00, SA 11:00–18:00, SU 12:00–17:00):

- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (10% off at Bakka Phoenix)

At Theatre Books (101 Spadina; M–SA 10:00–19:00, SU 12:00–17:00):

- Edward Albee, *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* (20% off at Theatre Books)

Evaluation

Your grade for the course will be determined by the following four components: participation, in the form of twice-weekly “micro-assignments”; two essays; and a final exam. The final is intended to test your comprehension of course material, and the essays are intended to evaluate your analytical writing abilities. The “micro-assignments”, in turn, are intended to prepare you for these essays, and help you develop the skills they require. These are short credit/no-credit tasks, completed through the course website before each lecture, and whose proper answers will be discussed as part of every lecture. The full grade breakdown is as follows:

<i>Component</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Due date</i>
Micro-assignments	10%	each lecture
First essay	20%	May 29
Second essay	30%	June 19
Final exam	40%	exam week

- » Essay assignments must be handed in *in person at lecture* on the day they are due; late papers will be docked 10% if handed in within the first 24 hours after the lecture at which they are due, and 5% for each subsequent 24 hour period after that (unless accompanied by valid documentation). For example, a first essay handed in between 6 p.m. May 29 and 6 p.m. May 30 will be docked 10%. Late papers should be submitted, in PDF format, to willie.costello@mail.utoronto.ca. To repeat, on-time assignments cannot be submitted by email, and any assignment submitted on or before the due date by email will automatically be docked 10%.

- » **Micro-assignments must be completed by 9 a.m. the day of each lecture.** Responses submitted after this deadline will receive no credit. There will be ten micro-assignments in total over the course of the term, and each micro-assignment counts for 1% of your final grade. Full credit for responses is awarded when the student has made a honest attempt to answer all parts of assignment. Determination of this criterion is at the discretion of the course grader.

Plagiarism and all other forms of academic dishonesty will be treated with the greatest severity in this course. Students should make themselves familiar with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters; see www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability and/or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services at 416-978-8060 or accessibility.utoronto.ca.

Email policy

If you ever have any questions for me, you should come ask me *in person*, either at lecture or during my office hours. Email contact is acceptable in exceptional circumstances, but you should not expect emails to be answered in less than 48 hours. If the answer to your question can be found in this syllabus or on the course website, I will not write back. I will also not respond to emails regarding philosophical, content-based questions about the course material; these are the sort of question that should be brought to office hours. But if, after reading these stipulations, you still believe that it is appropriate to email me, my email address is willie.costello@mail.utoronto.ca.

You are, however, encouraged to forward me links to articles and videos you come across that seem related to our discussions! The issues we will be talking about are of more than just academic interest, and one of the goals of this course is to help you see how these issues relate to and arise in our everyday lives.