PHIL 115: PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE
Fall 2004
MW 1:30-2:45 LIB-127
General Education Area C4
Writing Intensive
WebCT-Assisted

“When you come tomorrow, bring my football boots. Also, if humanly possible, Irish water spaniel. Urgent. Regards. Tuppy.”

“What do you make of that, Jeeves?”

“As I interpret the document, sir, Mr. Glossop asks you, when you come tomorrow, to bring his football boots. Also, if humanly possible, as Irish water spaniel. He hints that the matter is urgent, and sends his regards.”

Yes, that’s how I read it too.”

P. G. Wodehouse

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PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT  MND-3232  278-6424

OFFICE HOURS:  M 4:00-5:00;  W 3:00-4:00;  By Appointment

BOOKS:

Sophocles. Philoctetes.
Johan Spies. The Faustbuch.
Christopher Marlowe. Doctor Faustus.
Johann von Goethe. Faust. (Selections)
Tirso de Molina. The Playboy of Seville.
Lorenzo da Ponte. The Punished Libertine (libretto of Mozart’s opera Don Giovanni)

TOPICS:
This course will investigate one way in which literature can have philosophical content: by embodying philosophical claims in literary characters. We will investigate examples involving literary characters who, for one reason or another, have achieved mythical status. Such characters may pose philosophical problems or represent solutions to philosophical problems which the culture that produced the myths found to be especially pressing. When their problems changed the characters changed as well, sometimes in revealing ways.

We will investigate what philosophical problems and claims are embodied in a selection of mythical characters from antiquity, the early modern period, and the nineteenth century. We will conclude with some arguments about present myths and their content.
GOALS:
At the end of the course students should:
1. Have an improved understanding of different forms of literature, including novels, plays, opera, as well as film.
2. Recognize particular philosophical questions or answers to philosophical questions as they are embodied in literary characters.
3. Distinguish between what is overtly represented in a literary work and beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, etc., which the work presents to the audience.
4. Develop the capacity to write organized, cogent, and well-argued argumentative papers on the philosophical content of literature.

REQUIREMENTS:
Two exams at scheduled times: midterm (15%); final (15%)
Four papers: Papers 1-3 on assigned topics (4 pages: 15% each); Paper 4 (7-10 pages: 20%)
Quizzes and Class Participation (5%)

POLICIES:
WebCT
The class will use some elements of WebCT. I will make important course content available, including the lecture slides. You will take the reading quizzes, midterm, and final on WebCT. You will also submit papers via WebCT.

The WebCT site is available at https://online6.csus.edu.

Class Meetings
I expect attendance at every class meeting. If for some excellent reason you cannot make class, let me know – preferably in advance. If this is impossible let me know by 5:00 on the day you miss. I will lower you a grade increment for every unexcused absence.

Class meetings will begin at 1:30 with a calling of the roll. Be on time. Anticipate. Excuses don’t cut it: I will treat a pattern of late arrival as an unexcused absence.

I expect silent attention during class periods. If there is a class discussion I will serve as moderator; please wait to be recognized before making a contribution.

If you wish to ask a question, answer a question, or make a contribution to the class, please ask to be recognized. There is no excuse for conducting a private discussion during class time. I will treat a pattern of talking in class as an unexcused absence.

Reading Assignments
You will be responsible for the entirety of all readings assigned. However, at times I will indicate in the syllabus below that I will pay particular attention to some part of a reading. As a result, it may happen that other parts of the reading will not be treated in class. You will be responsible for them anyway. If you don’t understand something, ask a question. Remember, students’ questions help me too.
**Exams**
You will be able to take the midterm and final via WebCT. I will “open the window” for each exam for twenty-four hours (from noon to noon). The exams will be timed; once you begin, you will have one hour for the midterm, two hours for the final.

We will review the material for each exam briefly during the class preceding, explaining what concepts and abilities the exam will test for. I welcome questions, even at times outside that review period.

There will be no makeup exams.

**Papers**
Follow the directions for argumentative papers found in the “Guidelines for Writing Philosophy Papers” at the Philosophy Department website. Go to the Main Page (http://www.csus.edu/phil), click on “Dept. Program and Requirements,” then click on “Guidelines…” Or go directly to:
http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/writing.htm

Papers will be graded according to the “Grading Guidelines for Philosophy Papers.” Go to the same menu as for the paper guidelines, or go directly to:
http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/grading.htm

Submit your paper as an editable attachment through WebCT by the date and time due. Late papers will be lowered a grade increment for every day past the due date. I will leave the window open for submitting papers for five days past the due date.

Save a copy of your earlier drafts and notes. If I suspect plagiarism, the burden of proof will be on you. You can sustain that burden by showing me the work you did preparing the paper: notes, early drafts, etc. Keep what you need to show me that it’s your work.

**Grades**
Exams will be graded on the following scale:

- A 100-94
- A- 93-92
- B+ 91-90
- B 89-84
- B- 83-82
- C+ 81-80
- C 79-74
- C- 73-72
- D+ 71-70
- D 69-64
- D- 63-62
- F 61-

Papers will be graded by the criteria in the Style Manual. Letter grades on papers will be converted to the highest number for that grade.
Quizzes will be given a grade of 2 (good or adequate), 1 (inadequate), or 0 (not turned in.) You have to be present at a class meeting to take a quiz. An average above 1.5 will give you 100 for that component (5%) of your final grade.

The course grade will be determined by the weighted average of the exams, quizzes, and papers.

SYLLABUS

Week 1   9/6   Introduction
The nature of philosophical problems
Characters as embodiments of problems and solutions
The function of myths

I. Classical Antiquity: Odysseus
Whoever approaches the Olympian gods with another religion in mind, searching among them for moral elevation, even for sanctity, for disincarnate spirituality, for charity and benevolence, will soon be forced to turn his back on them, discouraged and disappointed.
Nietzsche

Week 2   9/11   Who Put the ‘Diss' in 'Odysseus'?
[Odyssey, Bks. 5-10]

9/13   Odysseus as Trickster
[Odyssey, Bks. 11-17]

Week 3   9/18   The Cosmic Order and the Moral Order
[Odyssey, Bks. 18-24]

9/20   The Career of Odysseus after Homer
[Philoctetes]

Week 4   9/25   Philosophy and the Deus ex Machina
[Philoctetes]

II. The Early Modern Period: Faust, Don Juan, Don Quixote

Faust
I pray to God that he may relieve me of God.
Meister Eckhart

9/27   The Nutty Professor
[The Faustbuch]

Week 5   10/2   Forbidden Knowledge
[The Faustbuch]
10/4 “...(A) Mortal God”  
[Doctor Faustus]

Week 6 10/9 “Lente, lente currite noctis equi”  
[Doctor Faustus]

10/11 Romantic Epistemology  
[Faust, Part I]

Paper #1 due: Wednesday, October 11, 1:30 p.m.

Week 7 10/16 “Make good use of your time! It hurries past….”  
[Faust, Part I & Part II]

10/18 “Ewige Weiblich”  
[Faust, Part II]

Don Juan

Grief for the discovery of some defect of ability is SHAME, or the passion that discovers itself in BLUSHING, and consists in the apprehension of something dishonorable; and in young men is a sign of the love of good reputation and commendable; in old men it is a sign of the same, but, because it comes too late, not commendable. The contempt of good reputation is called IMPUDENCE.

Thomas Hobbes

Week 8 10/23 The Chivalric Code  
[Lecture]

The midterm exam window will open on Monday, October 23 at 3:00 pm, and remain open until Tuesday, October 24, 3:00 pm. The exam must be taken during that time.

10/25 The Dilemma of Chivalric Virtue  
[The Playboy of Seville]

Week 9 10/30 “God exacts full payment/In His own due time”  
[The Playboy of Seville]

11/1 Music and Meaning  
[Lecture]

Week 10 11/6 "But in Spain, A Thousand and Three"
[Viewing of Don Giovanni, Act I, Scenes 1-3]

Paper #2 due: Wednesday, October 27.

11/8 The Net Closes Around the Don
[Viewing of Don Giovanni, Act I, Scene 4 – Act II, Scene 2]

Week 11 11/13 The Guest of Stone
[Viewing of Don Giovanni, Act II, Scenes 3-5]

III. The Nineteenth Century: Brunnhilde, Siegfried

11/15 The Nietzschean Turn
[On the Genealogy of Morals, First Essay]

Brunnhilde

Nature is a pander, Time a wrecker, and Death a murderer. I have always preferred to stand up to these facts, and build institutions on their recognition. You prefer to propitiate the three devils by proclaiming their chastities, their thrift, and their loving kindness; and to base your institutions on these flatteries. Is it any wonder that the institutions do not work smoothly?

George Bernard Shaw

Week 12 11/20 The Ring
[Reingold, Scenes 1 and 2]

11/22 The Spear
[Reingold, Scenes 3 – 4]

Week 13 11/27 The Sword
[Walkure, Act I]

11/29 The Sword Shattered
[Walkure, Acts II, III]

Paper #3 due: Monday, November 29.

Siegfried

And it is the great noontide, when man in the middle of his course between animal and Superman celebrateth his advance to the evening as his highest hope, for it is the advance to a new morning.

Nietzsche

Week 14 12/4 A New Hope
[Siegfried, Act I-II]
Paper #4 due: Friday, December 15.

The final exam window will be open from Monday, December 18, 12:00 noon until Tuesday, December 19, 12:00 noon.

Paper Topics

1. Due Wednesday, September 29.
From Don Quixote, Part I, Chapters V and VI:
(Don Quixote’s relatives and friends, worried about his delusions, decide upon a cure.)

The house keeper said, “Woe is me? I’m...as sure as death that those accursed books of chivalry that he continually reads have turned his brain topsy-turvy...The Devil and Barabbas take such books, for they have ruined the finest mind in all La Mancha!” The niece said the same and a little more: “You must know, Master Nicholas, that it was a frequent occurrence for my uncle to read those soulless books of misadventures for days and nights on end. At the end of that time he would cast the book from his hands, clutch his sword, and begin to slash the walls. You might have cured him* before things reached such a state, and you would have burned all those excommunicated books (he has many, mind you), for they all deserve to be burned as heretics.”

“I agree with that,” said the curate, “and I hold that tomorrow must not pass without a public inquiry being made into them. They should be condemned to the fire to prevent them from tempting those who read them.”

The curate asked the niece for the keys of the room where the books, the authors of the mischief, were kept, and she gave them to him willingly. The first that master Nicholas the barber handed to him was Amadis of Gaul in four parts. “There is,” said the curate, “some mystery about this, for I have heard it said that this was the first book of chivalry printed in Spain and that all the rest owe their origin to it. I am therefore of the opinion that we ought to condemn it to the fire without mercy because it was the lawgiver of so sinister a sect.”
“No, your reverence,” said the barber, “for I have heard that it is the best of all the books of its kind. Since it is unrivaled in its style, it ought to be pardoned.”

“That is true,” replied the curate, “and for that reason we may grant it life for the present.

“What great bulky thing is that?” asked the curate.

“This,” replied the barber, “is Don Olivante de Laura.”

“The author of that,” said the curate, “is the same man who wrote The Garden of Flowers, and to tell you the truth I cannot decide which of the two books is the more truthful, or rather the less untruthful. All I can say is that he must go into the yard for a braggart and a nincompoop.”

“The next one is Florismarte of Hyrcania,” said the barber.

“Is Sir Florismarte here?” asked the curate. “By my troth, then he must come to a swift end in the yard, in spite of his strange birth and fantastic adventures, for his dry and unsympathetic style deserves no other fate. To the yard with him.”

(*In the 17th century barbers performed minor surgery and other medical procedures.)

The author Cervantes is having a bit of fun in this passage, giving his own reviews of books of chivalric romance (which were, along with pastoral poems, the bestsellers of his day).

Update the passage: what is your favorite candidate for a work of literature, or a type of literature, that should be suppressed.

Some possible candidates:

- Science fiction
- Pornography
- New Age self-help manuals
- “American Idol”
- The Left Behind Series
- All episodes of Star Trek: The Next Generation
- Steven King ick-fests
- BBC dramatizations of those British novels that bored us stupid in high school
- High-toned Merchant/Ivory snoozathons like Remains of the Day
- Bodice ripper romances
- Wagner operas
- Gangsta rap
- The plays of Harold Pinter
- Anime
- Biographies of 16-year old gymnasts
- Memoirs by World Wrestling Federation Superstars
- Vintage Japanese monster movies (except Rodan, which was cool)
- The last thirty years of Peanuts
- Anything written by a self-described “activist”
- Anything that has the faintest chance of being chosen for Oprah’s Book Club
- Adam Sandler movies (Adam Sandler himself to be burnt at the stake)
The entire oeuvre of Quentin Tarantino?
Instruction manuals for idiots?
Let your imagination out for a trot.

Give your reasons for destroying the stuff. (Not that we really would burn it…)
Give your reason for any exceptions.

Alternatively, you could argue for saving the literature from those who want to burn it. In that case, give positive reasons for the value of the literature; don’t just appeal to general arguments against censorship.

2. Due Wednesday, October 27.
Employing the distinction between what is represented in a work of literature and what is presented, write an essay about a work where that distinction is especially conspicuous. What is represented? What is presented? Do you think the author is conscious of the gap? Does the author use the distinction to make a point? If so, what is the point? How is the difference shown in the work? How does the difference function to produce the effect it produces? How does the gap affect the worth of the work?

Some illustrative examples where the representation/presentation gap appears:
Goethe’s Faust (obviously!)
A Clockwork Orange
The Godfather

3. Due Monday, November 29.
Take a work of literature (broadly construed) that, you believe, has philosophical content – either poses a philosophical question or proposes an answer.
State the philosophical question (or answer).
Show how the work presents its philosophical content.
Provide a critical consideration of the work, both of its philosophy and of how well the work presents its philosophical content.
Consult with me first.

4. Due Friday, December 15.
Revise Paper #3 in light of my comments on it, and your reconsideration of it. Produce a better organized, more cogent, better-argued version of the paper.