

Philosophy in Literature (Lower Division)

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Course Description:

Literature is an excellent place to find philosophical issues, often presented with more passion than can be found in the dry writings of professional philosophers. By studying some important literary works of Western literature, this course introduces students to some central philosophical issues, and it will serve as a stepping stone for our exploration of various views about freedom, responsibility, religious belief, personal identity, and the nature of time. One of our main aims will be to get a sense of some distinctively philosophical ways of formulating and arguing about issues which are discussed in both literature and philosophy. A welcome by-product will be an enriched appreciation of the literary works by attending to these philosophical issues.

We will begin with a look at two diametrically opposed views about the power of ideas. First, Chekhov's short story is a melancholy, but somewhat optimistic take on leaving home, and the profound changes that come with it. In the opposite corner we'll find Ionesco's tragic play about the corruptive power of ideology. One character is a logician, who embodies the dry and ineffective philosopher, disconnected from reality and life.

Our class will be somewhere closer to Chekhov, I hope: not a force for evil, but an introduction to new ways of thinking about the most important things in life.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to regularly attend lectures and sections, and, although it should go without saying, to read the assigned texts. There will be four assignments for this course: two short papers (about 1500 words each), each worth 20%, and two in-class exams: a midterm and a final exam, worth 25%, and 30%, respectively. Essay assignments will be due on the following dates:

1st Essay: 1/31, at 5:00pm.

2nd Essay: 3/28, at 5:00pm.

The exams are going to take place on the following dates:

Midterm exam: 2/28, during class.

Final exam: 5/9, from 1:00 to 3:00.

Late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date and will be marked down 1/3 of a grade point (e.g. from a B+ to a B) for each 24 hour-period of lateness. Section participation is worth 5% of the full grade and can make a real difference in borderline cases.

Readings:

See the schedule of readings.

Schedule of Readings:

The schedule is subject to change. Revisions will be announced in class and posted on the course website.

I. Introduction - the Power of Ideas

Week 1	1/10	Introduction
	1/12	Chekhov: <i>The Fiancée</i>
Week 2	1/17	No class, MLK Day
	1/19	Eugène Ionesco: <i>Rhinoceros</i>

II. Responsibility and Duty

Week 3	1/24	Sophocles: <i>Antigone</i>
	1/26	Sophocles: <i>Antigone</i> – ctd.

III. God, Free Will and Morality

Week 4	1/31	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 1
	2/2	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 2
Week 5	2/7	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 3
	2/9	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 4
Week 6	2/14	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 5
	2/16	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 6
Week 7	2/21	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 7
	2/23	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 8
Week 8	2/28	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 9
	3/2	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 10
Week 9	3/7	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 11
	3/9	Fyodor Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> – Book 12

Spring Break – 3/14–3/16

IV. Personal Identity and Memory

Week 10	3/21	Franz Kafka: <i>The Metamorphosis</i>
	3/23	Virginia Woolf: <i>Orlando</i>
Week 11	3/28	Virginia Woolf: <i>Orlando</i> – ctd.
	3/30	Marcel Proust: <i>Swann's Way</i>
Week 12	4/4	Marcel Proust: <i>Swann's Way</i> – ctd.
	4/6	Marcel Proust: <i>Swann's Way</i> – ctd.

V. Knowledge and Reality

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Week 13	4/11	Jorge Luis Borges – <i>The Garden of Forking Paths</i>
	4/13	Jorge Luis Borges – <i>The Library of Babel</i>
Week 14	4/18	José Saramago – <i>All the Names</i>
	4/20	José Saramago – <i>All the Names</i> – ctd.
Week 15	4/25	José Saramago – <i>All the Names</i> – ctd.
	4/27	Concluding Class (No reading).