Philosophy Department

Kalamazoo College
1200 Academy St. Kalamazoo, MI 49006

PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE
FALL 1998

PROFESSOR: Chris Latiolais
Philosophy Department
Kalamazoo College
Humphrey House #202
Telephone #: 337-7076
Offices Hours:
1) Mon. 2:00 - 3:00.
2) Tues. 10:30- 12:30.
3) By Appointment.

TEXTS:


6. Bakhtin, Mikhail:
   A) "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism", in Speech Genre and Other Essays (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

   B) "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel" and "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel", in The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981):

COURSE GOALS:

This course is an introduction to the philosophy of literature. The fundamental question we address in this course is how "story-telling" in ordinary life and literature are related. In everyday situations, we tell ourselves and others stories about our aspirations, actions and predicaments. These narratives are our fundamental means of communicating how we make sense of, and give meaning to, our involvements. In literature, artists create complex narratives — often improbable or fantastic, but sometimes realistic — about make-believe characters and their worlds. How are such narratives structured? Are there analogies or connections between mundane and artistic narrative representations of life? Are experiences, actions and events structured like stories? Can literary stories alter our own sense of self and world? What is the role of time in human experience, action and self-understanding and how is time represented in literary artworks? With these questions, we address the "large" philosophical question about the role of art in human life. A basic intuition guiding the instructor's organization of the course is that the continuity of everyday life and the coherence of artistic literature are, of course, distinct though closely related.

In the first part of the course, we will explore how 20th-century philosophers have analyzed the connection between narrative structures and the temporal unity of the human self. In the second, we will examine, firstly, Bakhtin's idea that literary forms can be classified in terms of their different ways of representing time and, secondly, his ambitious claim that the history of Western literature presents the evolving literary assimilation of the real-life experience of time. The order of our literary readings -- a pre-modern epic (Beowulf), a modern novel (Heart of Darkness) and a postmodern novel (The Crying of Lot 49) -- reflects our intention to test this theory. If Bakhtin's classification of literary forms has any merit, then everyday life and literary creations "correspond" to each other in intricate ways. More importantly, if Bakhtin's sketch of Western literary history has any merit, then traditional philosophical accounts of personal identity are seriously flawed. Finally, our attention will turn to the so called "post-modern" critique of the unity of the text and the coherence of the self. We end by taking note of recent attempts in psychology to use Bakhtin's ideas to re-conceive the foundations of narrative self-psychology. In many ways, the overall goal of the course is to attain a better understanding of how narrating -- i.e. "telling stories about" -- actual and possible situations allows humans to "give meaning to" or "make sense of" their lives.

EVALUATION:

Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, quizzes, two midterm examinations and a final paper.

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<tr>
<th>Class Participation, seminar presentations and discussion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Midterm assignments</td>
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POLICIES:

Open, respectful and critical discussion is crucial for success in this course. Quizzes allow students and instructor to cross-check comprehension of texts, and midterm assignments provide students with the opportunity to exercise their growing command of issues. In the final paper (due on Friday of finals week) students will be required to apply their understanding of course material to a specific essay question. 3 unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction.

BRIDGE READING COMPONENT: Students interested in exploring interdisciplinary links between course material and their major course of study will be given special readings and assignments. Tutorial meetings are required, and the final paper must be completed in consultation with a professor in a home department.

**Psychology:** Students interested in studying interdisciplinary connections between the philosophy of literature and the field of psychology may choose, in consultation with the professor, readings from the Psychology Bridge-Reading List (See Philosophy Homepage). Students will be encouraged, however, to read Hermanns and Kempen's The Dialogical Self: Meaning As Movement (Academic Press, Inc., San Diego, 1993).

**English:** Students interested in gaining familiarity with literary criticism will be encouraged to read standard texts dealing with prominent schools of literary interpretation.

**Political Science:** Students interested in examining how the philosophy of literature may be connected to normative political issues will be given readings dealing with group-based political theory.

PORTFOLIO WORK: Some of the assignments of this course may well be revised and used as portfolio entries. The portfolio requirement of the K-plan demands, among other things, that students form some narrative account of their educational development and its contribution to their life-goals. Given that the course is devoted to the study of narrative structure and identity formation, the professor encourages students to use midterm assignments as a basis for raising philosophical questions about the role of education within a reflectively held life-plan.

SCHEDULE OF READING

INTRODUCTION:

TUES, SEPT 22ND: Introductory Lecture: Philosophy and Literature: WEEK ONE
1. NARRATIVE UNITY, BIOGRAPHICAL WHOLESNESS AND THE TEMPORAL CONTINUITY OF THE EXPERIENCE AND ACTION:

THURS, SEPT 24TH:
1. Carr:
   A) Introduction
   B) "The Temporal Structure of Experience and Action."
2. Begin reading Beowulf.
3. Quiz # 1.

TUES, SEPT 29TH:  
WEEK TWO
1. Carr:
   A) "Temporality and Narrative Structure."
   B) "The Self and the Coherence of Life."

THURS, OCT 1ST:
1. Carr: "Temporality and Historicity."
2. Quiz #2.

2. BEOWULF AND BAKHTIN'S ANALYSIS OF EPIC TEMPORALITY.

TUES, OCT 6TH:  
WEEK THREE
1) Carr: "From I to We."
2) Beowulf

THURS, OCT 8TH:
1. Beowulf (Cont.)
2. Merleau-Ponty, "Spatiality of One's own Body and Motility" [Handout:].
4. Quiz #4.

TUES, OCT 13TH:  
WEEK FOUR
1. Beowulf (Cont.).
2. Bakhtin: "Epic and Novel" (Cont.)

THURS, OCT 15TH:
1. Beowulf (Cont.).
2. Bakhtin: "Epic and Novel" (Cont.)
3. Midterm Assignment #1.

TUES, OCT 20TH: WEEK FIVE
  1. Bakhtin: "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel."
  2) Begin reading Heart of Darkness

THURS, OCT 22ND:
  1. Bakhtin: "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel." (Cont.)
  2. Quiz #5.

TUES, OCT 27TH: WEEK SIX
  1. Bakhtin: "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel." (Cont.)
  2. Heart of Darkness (Discussion: Author, Narrator and Character).

4. THE TEMPORALITY OF THE BILDUNGSROMAN AND THE IDEAL OF SELFHOOD AS A NARRATIVE UNITY:

THURS, OCT 29TH:
  1. Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism", in Speech Genre and Other Essays (Handout).
  2. Heart of Darkness (Discussion: Author, Narrator and Character).
  4. Midterm Assignment #2.

TUES, NOV 3RD: WEEK SEVEN
  1. Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism" (Cont.)
  2. Frederic Jameson: Excerpt from Postmodernism

5. THE POST-MODERN FRACTURING OF NARRATIVE UNITY: DISCONTINUITY, SELF-IRONY AND MULTIPLE VOICES.

THURS, NOV 5TH:
  2. The Crying of Lot 49.

TUES, NOV 10TH: WEEK EIGHT
  1. Kristeva, "The Semiotic and the Symbolic" (Cont.)
  2. The Crying of Lot 49 (Cont.).
  3. Final Assignment.

THURS., NOV. 12TH:
  1. Kristeva, "The Semiotic and the Symbolic" (Cont.)
  2. The Crying of Lot 49 (Cont.).
TUES., NOV. 17TH:
  1. Discussion of Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49.

THURS., NOV. 19TH:
  1. Discussion of Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49.

TUES, NOV 24TH:
  1. Student Evaluations.

FINALS WEEK

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This page currently maintained by Chris Latiolais
Please direct any questions or comments to the Chair of the Department.
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