

PHIL 253-004  
Instructor: Dr. Kurt Brandhorst

Office Hours: Tue: 3:00-4:00  
Wed: 3:00-4:00  
(or by appointment)

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**Where to find information about this course:** all course information including the syllabus, assignments, and any additional announcements or changes to the schedule will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course.

**You should also check your GMU email regularly for class announcements.**

## COURSE SYLLABUS

In this course we will examine problems of text and authority presented by fictive literature. Through close readings of texts considered philosophical, theoretical and fictional we will address the problem of truth from different angles and get different answers to the question: 'what is true?' We will also explore the question of writing itself as both a productive and reproductive enterprise. What is the status of the author? What is the relationship between authority and truth in/of a text? Plato poses our first questions here by the elaborate framing of his own authority and the critical examination of the limits of the written word. In their own ways O'Brien and Lispector can be seen as responding to this Platonic challenge by transforming the relationships between truth, writing and reality. Similarly, Barthes and Cixous develop and deepen the problem of authority and the production of writing initiated by Plato. Through close reading and class discussion we will explore these philosophical issues that are not limited to the realm of literature but are perhaps best exemplified there.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

There are four texts you are expected to acquire for the course.

Lispector, Clarice, *The Passion According to G.H.*, I. Novey (trans), New Directions, 2012  
**ISBN-10:** 0811219682

O'Brien, Tim, *The Things They Carried*, Mariner Books, 2009  
**ISBN-10:** 0618706410  
(other editions acceptable)

Plato, *Five Dialogues*, G.M.A. Grube (trans), Hackett, 2002  
**ISBN-10:** 0872206335

Plato, *Phaedrus*, S. Scully (trans), Focus, 2003  
**ISBN-10:** 0941051544

Texts to be posted on Blackboard as pdf:

- Barthes, "The Death of the Author"
- Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"
- Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"
- Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization"
- Freud, "Medusa's Head"
- Freud, selection from *The Question of Lay Analysis*
- Gauthier, "Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?"
- Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"

I may post additional short texts to Blackboard as the semester progresses.

**Readings on BB:** Beginning in Week Four we will be using texts printed from Blackboard. Unless you have copies of the original source material (i.e. books), **you will be responsible for printing off each of the readings listed above so that you have a paper copy to work with in class.**

**Please note: this is a course requirement.** We will be doing close work with the texts both in class and for assignments. In addition, **all laptops, phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class time**, so you must have a paper copy of each class reading with you.

Printing costs should not exceed \$5 (in total), based on the JC print costs of 10c per page. A proportion of your participation grade will be attached to producing your own portfolio of readings (see section on participation below). Checklists for the portfolio will be distributed at the first class.

### **Course Reading Expectations**

The schedule of readings is given below. I will expect you to have done the set reading **before** the relevant class. This means reading through the set text or texts *at least* once; going back and re-reading either the whole text, or the passages that seem especially important/difficult/puzzling/interesting to you; and writing down your thoughts and questions on the text (I recommend keeping a notebook just for your reading notes for this course that you can bring to class, as a reminder of what you want to ask or comment on).

- If you don't have questions, you're not reading properly! If you do the reading in advance, you will get a lot more out of classes, because you will have a lot more to put in.

### **Questions and Problems:**

If you have a question about the course, or a problem with a class or assignment, please do one or more of the following:

- ask in class (often others will have the same question/concern, so this will help everyone)
- email me with a question or query: [kbrandho@gmu.edu](mailto:kbrandho@gmu.edu)
- come and see me in my open office hours or email me for an appointment

I will respond to emails as soon as I reasonably can, though as a general rule I will not answer emails in the late evening or between Saturday morning and Sunday evening. This means you need to plan ahead – *please don't leave questions about assignments or reading until the last minute!*

### **COURSEWORK AND GRADING**

Basic breakdown:

1. Attendance:	0%
2. Participation:	5%
3. Lispector Quiz	5%
4. Nietzsche Worksheet:	10%
5. Response Papers	15% each
6. Plato Mid-Term:	20%
7. Final Paper	30%

### 1) Attendance:

There are no points for showing up. However, showing up has value for all other aspects of assessment and you should not expect to do well on the course if you miss classes. **In addition, points can be lost for not showing up:** we only have 28 class meetings on the material of the course; every absence after the second will result in a 10% penalty in the participation grade. Hence 12 absences would result in a 100% reduction of the participation grade. Regarding the penalty, extenuating circumstances will be considered in line with University policies but cannot make up for the effect that an absence has in understanding the material.

### 2) Participation:

Class discussion is an essential feature of the course and I will regularly invite participation. Please come prepared to discuss the material as assigned and be ready to take part in classroom activities. This means both reading and thinking about the texts in advance of the class meeting. Participation is distinct from both presence and mere talk. There will be short reading quizzes from time to time and I will be using Blackboard to set reading/discussion questions each week. You will be expected to participate in these Blackboard discussions: post a serious and meaningful comment for at least 8 of the 14 weeks to receive participation points.

**Portfolio of readings:** as noted above, from Week 4 onwards you are responsible for printing off the set readings for each class (all readings will be available on BB). A checklist of the required readings will be provided in class 1. As having a paper copy of the text to work with in class is essential, 1/5 of your participation grade will be dependent on producing your own portfolio of course readings. Once you have printed off the readings for the course, you should ask another member of the class to check your portfolio is complete, sign off the check list for you, and hand it to me. **This must be completed by the end of class on Thursday September 14th (week 3).**

### 3. Lispector Quiz:

There will be a short quiz on *The Passion According to G.H.* on the final day of discussion of Lispector (Nov. 30th)

### 4) Nietzsche Worksheet:

There will be a take-home worksheet on Nietzsche. This will involve 5 or 6 short answer questions. Answers are expected to be text based.

### 5) Response Papers:

During the course of the semester 3 response paper topics will be assigned (see course outline below for dates); **you will be expected to complete 2 of these assignments**. The responses will be 3-4 typed pages and will involve no more than 25% summary of the assigned text: analysis, evaluation and critical explication are expected (this is an occasion for you to demonstrate thought as well as understanding). These assignments will have firm due dates and no responses will normally be accepted late without specific extenuating circumstances --- please contact me if you are not able to meet the deadline. **NB: I will answer content and formal questions about these papers in advance of the due date but under normal circumstances I will not read drafts for these papers --- this is a matter of volume and fairness; I may, however, propose to you as an individual that you should submit a draft. My office hours (see above) are a good time to meet to discuss your ideas and pose questions.**

### 6) Plato Mid-Term:

At the end of our discussions of Plato, there will be a take-home exam. The exam will focus on the exposition of key concepts and arguments from the readings. This exam paper will be made available on Blackboard on Wednesday September 30<sup>th</sup>. NB: this is worth 20% of the final grade so give this serious attention.

### 7) Final Paper

The final paper of 5-7 pages will be produced in stages and will involve peer review. There will be a due date in Week 14 for drafts of the final paper. These drafts will be made available to a group of your peers and the class sessions of Week 15 will be given over to the peer review process. In addition I will be holding additional office hours that week to discuss your drafts. The paper is worth 30% of the final grade: 5% for timely submission of a comprehensive draft (this

is all or nothing --- i.e. you meet the deadline or you don't; you provide a comprehensive draft or you don't) and 25% for the final product. Further information about the paper and the peer review process will be made available later in the semester.

#### **\*) Plagiarism**

This is a major violation of trust and academic integrity. Do not present others' work as your own. Passive Plagiarism (failing to cite sources) is as bad as Active Plagiarism (downloading an essay off the internet). Also, work submitted for this course must be uniquely created for this course. If I suspect plagiarism I will inform you and the university administration in writing. **NB: I reserve the right to conduct an oral examination on any piece of work.**

**The Honor Code:** "All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at [academicintegrity.gmu.edu](http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu). All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review."

#### **Commitment to Diversity**

In keeping with the general ethos of the University, this class seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across differences. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

NB This does not mean not being critical: respecting others' views means taking them seriously, and taking them seriously means thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, asking questions, and offering constructive criticisms or alternative viewpoints where appropriate. It also means thinking about where the views of others challenge our own, and being open to what they have to teach us. Valuing diversity is not just an attitude – it is a matter of developing an active practice. Amongst other things, this practice involves:

- learning to listen to other perspectives;
- being open to criticism of one's own views;
- being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one's views, but being willing to change one's mind;
- not rushing to judgment;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another person (or text or theory) as one can manage;
- *and* being willing to accept that there will always be things one cannot see or understand;
- learning to express criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices.

Never be afraid to ask a question or to risk saying something that might be wrong – that is how we learn. But equally, never be afraid to listen to the questions and answers of others, and to let their views challenge and change how you think.

#### **Submitting Written Work**

All written assignments must be submitted on the Blackboard site for this course by the relevant deadline (see course schedule below). There will be a clearly marked section on Blackboard for each assignment.

**Unless otherwise noted**, one paper copy must also be handed in at class or to the PHIL 253 course essay box in the Philosophy Office (Robinson B 465) during office hours (9am-4pm, weekdays). The paper copy should normally be handed in by 4pm on the day of the deadline.

Please note:

- The **date of submission** will be taken from when you upload the work on Blackboard. If there is a system problem that means you can't upload the work, email me and let me know.

- Once a paper copy is submitted, you can expect feedback/comments and notice of your grade. For paper copies submitted on the due date, I make every effort to mark and return this work within 2 weeks. Paper copies submitted after the due date but before the end of the semester go to the end of the grading queue (note that I have 4 classes this semester) and will be returned as soon as possible. If no paper copy is submitted by the end of the semester a grade will still be entered but you will not get feedback/comments on your work.

Extensions can be arranged in exceptional circumstances if you have a good reason for submitting work late but you must let me know (by email is fine). Extensions cannot be given beyond the last day of the exam period. **Whenever possible it is much better to try to arrange an extension with me in advance.** This will make things less stressful for all concerned: you will be able to plan your assignments more effectively; I will be able to plan my grading and give better (less rushed) feedback.

### COURSE OUTLINE

NB: The reading schedule is subject to change

#### WEEK ONE

Reading: Course Syllabus

Plato, *Meno* 80a-86c (NB: these are margin numbers --- not page numbers)

Aug 29: INTRODUCTION

Aug 31: Plato, Recollection and the Forms

#### WEEK TWO

Reading: Plato, *Phaedo*

Sep 5: Death, Authority and Myth

Sep 7: Misology and Truth

#### WEEK THREE

Reading: Plato, *Phaedrus*

Sep 12: Rhetoric of Love

Sep 14: Love and the Forms

#### WEEK FOUR

Reading: Plato, *Phaedrus*

Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies..." (pdf on Blackboard)

Sep 19: Speaking and Writing

Sep 20: **Mid-Term Assigned**

Sep 21: Truth, Language and Metaphors

**Sep 22: Mid-Term Due**

#### WEEK FIVE

Reading: Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies..." (pdf on Blackboard)

Sep 26: Lies and the Human Condition

Sep 28: The Problem with Truth

#### WEEK SIX

Reading: O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, pp. 1-128 (up through "Ambush")

Oct 3: True Stories

**Nietzsche Worksheet Assigned**

Oct 5: Telling Stories

**Nietzsche Worksheet Due**

#### WEEK SEVEN

Reading: O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, pp. 129-233

Oct 10: **NO CLASS**

Oct 12: Authors, Narrators and Truth

**Response Paper 1 Assigned**

#### WEEK EIGHT

Reading: Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (pdf on Blackboard)

Oct 17: What is an Author?

**Response Paper 1 Due**

Oct 19: The Death of the Author

#### WEEK NINE

Reading: Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" (pdf on Blackboard)

Oct 24: The Author of the Quixote

Oct 26: Fiction Changes the World

**Response Paper 2 Assigned**

#### WEEK TEN

Reading: Gauthier, "Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?" (pdf on Blackboard)

Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization" & *The Question of Lay Analysis* (pdf on Blackboard)

Oct 31: What is 'écriture féminine'?

**Response Paper 2 Due**

Nov 2: Freud, Lacan and Phallic Logic

#### WEEK ELEVEN

Reading: Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (pdf on Blackboard)  
Freud, "Medusa's Head" (pdf on Blackboard)

Nov 7: Freud and Woman

Nov 9: The Laugh of the Medusa

#### WEEK TWELVE

Reading: Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (pdf on Blackboard)  
Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.* (pp. 3-43)

Nov 14: Writing the body, writing woman  
**Response Paper 3 Assigned**

Nov 16 *The Passion According to G.H.*

#### WEEK THIRTEEN

Reading: Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.* (pp. 44-97)

Nov 21: *The Passion According to G.H.*  
**Response Paper 3 Due**

Nov 23: **NO CLASS**

#### WEEK FOURTEEN

Reading: Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.* (pp. 99-198)

Nov 28: *The Passion According to G.H.*

Nov 30: *The Passion According to G.H.*  
**Lispector Quiz**

Dec 1: **Drafts of Final Paper Due**

#### WEEK FIFTEEN

Reading: Peers' Draft Papers

Dec 5: Peer Group / Writing Workshops

Dec 7: Peer Group / Writing Workshops

**FINAL PAPER DUE: MONDAY DEC 11<sup>th</sup>**