Philosophy 253/Philosophy and Literature

W. Froman (Telephone extension: 2017; office hours Wednesdays, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.; office location: Robinson B455)

Fall 2017

This course is a study of philosophical themes in literature. The literary works come from the opening age of the European and the Western traditions up through very recent times. These works include plays, novels, short stories, poetry and sacred literature. The topics addressed in the course include: fate, evil, the implications of the transition from the pre-modern to the modern age, the question as to whether the human being is basically distinct from the other animals or not (and if so, how), the role that asking such questions can play in our lives, the question of meaning in life, and the status and the role of imagination in literature and in life.

The following is a list of texts in the order in which we will study them. Reading assignments for each week will be announced in class.

**Texts:** *Antigone* by Sophocles

*The Book of Job* from the Bible

*Galileo* by Berthold Brecht

*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

*The Beast in the Jungle* by Henry James

*Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka

*Tonio Kroeger* by Thomas Mann

*The Stranger* by Albert Camus

*Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett

Selected poems by Emily Dickenson and by Wallace Stevens (photocopied and distributed in class)

**Schedule** (subject to change depending on the needs of the class):

First session, May 22nd: Introduction

Second session, May 24th: *Antigone* by Sophocles

Third session, May 26th: *Book of Job*

May 29th, Memorial Day/no class

Fourth session, May 31rd: Transition from ancient world to start of modernity.

Fifth session, June 2nd: *The Life of Galileo* by Brecht

Sixth session, June 5th: *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad

Seventh session, June 7th: *Heart of Darkness by Conrad*

Eighth session, June 9th : *The Beast in the Jungle* by Jame

Ninth session, June 12th: *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka

Tenth session, June 14th: *Tonio Kroeger* by Mann

Eleventh session, June 16th: *The Stranger* by Camus

Twelfth session, June 19th: *Waiting for Godot by Beckett* (video+discussion)

Thirteenth session, June 21st: poetry by Emily Dickenson and Wallace Stevens (photocopies distributed in class)

**Student Written Work**: There will be two sets of essay questions distributed in class to

which students will respond in writing outside of class. The questions will address ideas

in the course readings that will have been discussed in class. There will be a choice of

questions in each set. The first set of essays will be distributed when we complete our study of THE LIFE OF GALILEO. The grade for the semester will be an average of the two grades for the two sets of essays. In writing the essays, students are permitted to make use of the actual texts that we will have studied, and students are permitted to make use of their notes in class. But use of any other source, printed or on-line, is not permitted, and each student must work entirely by herself or by himself. (The Honor Code is in effect in this course.)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full

description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic

integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic

integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you

will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the

performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another

aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. All discussion and debate will proceed in this course with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

MASON EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University

information, including messages related to this class. See http://masonlive.gmu.edu for more

information.

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic

accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. http://ods.gmu.edu

OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES:

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES “Ask a Librarian”

http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS): (703) 993-2380;

http://caps.gmu.edu

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university

policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other

policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/. All members of the university

community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

USE OF ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT IN CLASS Students may use electronic equipment in class for the purposes of taking notes, consulting a text that we are studying when using an on-line edition, consulting a dictionary, or checking the time. But no other use of electronic equipment is permitted and if the instructor has reason to think that electronic equipment is being used by anyone for some other purpose, the instructor can ban the use of electronic equipment totally.