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PHIL 441.01: Philosophy and Literature

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Philosophy 441/Philosophy and Literature

Professor Deborah Slicer

L.A. 148/243-2527/ds7p@selway.umt.edu (I only enter cyberspace twice a week.)

O.H.: tba

Our course consists of 3 inter-related projects. (1) We'll assess Martha Nussbaum's claims that (a) there are certain moral truths that only literary prose can articulate, and (b) that the act of carefully reading literature can engage and develop readers' moral capacities, while most (all?) analytic treatments are unable to engage such capacities. (2) We will assess Nussbaum's claims as we work our way slowly and lovingly through one novel (*The Bird Artist*), an autobiography, sort of (*The Woman Warrior*), a play (*Hamlet*), and a first-person narrative (*Walden*). (3) We will discuss our literary characters' struggles to construct/discover a "moral self," pretty much taking as a given Charles Taylor's concept of the moral self. The big question is what can literature help us discover about the moral self (other selves as well as our own) that analytic philosophy misses all together, seriously obscures, or dismisses as irrelevant to moral life? And *how*, very specifically, does literature work its magic? Here's how the semester looks.

9/3 Hello, business, intro. remarks

9/5 Chpt. 1, Introduction, Martha Nussbaum

9/10 Chpt. 4, Flawed Crystals, Nussbaum

9/12 Chpt. 5, Finely Aware, Richly Attuned, Nussbaum

9/17 The Self in Moral Space, Charles Taylor (x)

9/19 *A Poetry Handbook*, Mary Oliver, preferably all, required p. 1-34, 52-57, 60-108. Define terms on our glossary (x) as you read Oliver. We'll focus on reading poems that I'll hand out in class.

9/24 More poems

9/26- 10/10 *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston,
Arrogance and Love, Marilyn Frye (x)

9/15 **paper 1 due in class, discuss topics with class, please bring short xerox summary of your topic, 1 copy for all.**

9/17-10/31 *Hamlet*, The Great One, read the whole play by 9/22, then reread it.

11/7 Chpt. 2, The Discernment of Perception..., Nussbaum

11/12-21 *The Bird Artist* and the film *A Heart in Winter*, read the novel as we watch the film. Please read the novel and see the film twice.

11/26 **paper 2 due in class, discuss topics, bring short summary for all**

12/3-11/12 *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau

also read various chpts by Martin Bickman prior to starting *Walden* (x)

12/3 Speaking a Word for Nature, Scott Russell Sanders (x)

12/17 finals day, 10:10-12:10, paper 3 due in class, finish *Walden* if we need the extra time (no final)

Texts

The Woman Warrior, Maxine Hong Kingston

Hamlet, Shakespeare

The Bird Artist, Howard Norman

Walden, Henry David Thoreau

Love's Knowledge, Martha Nussbaum

A Poetry Handbook, Mary Oliver

(x)--these articles are on e-reserve (secret password: Phil 441), and hard copies available at Mansfield desk.

Requirements

2 papers (5-6 pages)--55%

A final paper that is a revision and expansion of the one of the shorter papers (10 pages)--35%

Presentation of a very focused passage from one of our literary texts--10%

I highly recommend you read each piece of literature at least twice!

This is primarily a discussion class, so attendance and participation are mandatory.