

TEACHERS GUIDE

A Course on Philosophy and Literature.

RATIONALE

One of the principal purposes of a philosophy and literature or a philosophy in literature course is to examine the manner in which direct and indirect discourses work together. Sometimes this is done by depicting a similar theme told directly against a narrative's indirect approach. For example, existential theology can be read via Paul Tillich (direct discourse) or it can be read via Kierkegaard (indirect), cf. the *überman* in Nietzsche (largely direct discourse) with Dostoevsky's *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* (indirect).

Another purpose would be the way that fiction can explore philosophical themes, as such. The advantage fiction has is its empirical richness. The deficit is the mode of discourse requires much more active participation on the part of the reader to put together the narrative in a way that makes sense.

KEY THEMES OF THE BOOK

- The manner in which any person in the world undergoes self-examination in order to ascertain what values really represent the way s/he wants to live her or his life.
- The role of *desire* as the driving aspect of worldview. The place and function of desire as an element of reflected worldview is highlighted.
- Materialism as an element in one's worldview and in the world at large.
- Trust in others (Michael's separation from Aisling)
- Ethics (what is our ethical evaluation of the actions of the major characters?)
- Freedom and determinism (the events that befall Michael and his reactions to them)
- Epistemology (how one comes to know truths of practical reason)
- Love and its power to shape our lives.
- Feminist Ethics (the interplay between the affective, the rational, and self-interest)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To be able to identify the various modes of discourse.
- To be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each mode of discourse.
- To be able to recognize how various key themes (as per above) might be represented in each mode of discourse.
- To acquire the ability to move between direct and indirect modes in a way that enriches each.
- To be able to represent these skills in an essay

SAMPLE SEMESTER SYLLABUS

Assigned Books:

Michael Boylan, *The Extinction of Desire* (the case study for all the theoretical explorations);

Recommended reading:

Eileen John and Dominic McIver Lopes, *Philosophy of Literature: An Anthology* or The Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism.

[teaching note: this conception of the course requires that one identify three theory-groups that will be used, in turn, on the sample text—here *The Extinction of Desire*. I will fill in three stand-ins, but obviously these are meant to be illustrative.]

Weeks One – Four

Weeks One through Three

Begin with classical theories: Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and then segue to Sydney, Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Shelley, Coleridge, Wollstonecraft. Set out what each theory describes as the purpose of art and how it achieves its purpose.

Week Four

Apply the group-one theories to *The Extinction of Desire* as a testing ground. One five-page paper.

Weeks Five – Eight

Weeks Five through Seven

The text and the Author—R.S. Crane, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida.

Week Eight

Apply the group-two theories to *The Extinction of Desire* as a testing ground. One five-page paper.

Weeks Nine – Twelve

Weeks Nine through Eleven

Audience and Social Criticism—Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Homi Bhabha, György Lukács.

Week Twelve

Apply the group-three theories to *The Extinction of Desire* as a testing ground. One five-page paper.

Weeks Thirteen-Fourteen

Teacher and peer group criticism in order to rewrite one of the first three papers as an eight-page essay.

Literature

The Extinction of Desire can be used as an additional novel in any Contemporary American Literature course. It probably fits best within the *bildsroman* books, within books that have Buddhist backdrops, and those linking poetry and narrative.

A Course on Literary Theory

(see: **Philosophy and Literature, above**)