Comparative Literature 210: Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts

Course Instructor: Michael Subialka (msubialka@ucdavis.edu)
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description:

This graduate seminar will focus on the rich intersection of literature, philosophy, and the arts, with attention to aesthetic forms including performance (theater and film) and the visual arts. Comparative literature as a field has long been a space where literary production and philosophical theory overlap in fruitful ways, and in recent years there has been growing attention to the specific intersection of (literary or artistic) form and (philosophical) argument coming from a number of disciplines. The seminar will focus on several theoretical approaches to this intersection, foregrounding work by contemporary scholars who ask what it means to think through (literary or artistic) form and how attention to that form changes our understanding of philosophical thought. In the second half of the seminar, participants will draw on their own field of expertise to present on and lead class discussions of specific (literary, philosophical, filmic, theatrical, visual, etc.) texts that relate to the conceptual problems addressed in the readings from the first half. These texts will be chosen by the seminar participants (in consultation with the instructor) based on their own areas of specialization and integrated into the course syllabus.

Objectives:

The seminar will provide participants with a theoretical framework to address aesthetic questions that are important to contemporary critical debates about the relationship between literature, philosophy, and the arts. These theoretical tools will then be applied to participants’ specific areas of focus. We will address questions about the relationship between literature/the arts and, among other areas: ethics, cognition and self-formation, situated materiality, metaphysics, political consciousness, and historical self-understanding.

Requirements and Grading:

The seminar is structured around student-led discussion. The grade will be determined by a combination of three elements: (1) 50% a seminar paper (on a topic to be discussed with the instructor in week 5); (2) 30% two course presentations; and (3) 20% seminar participation. For (2), each participant will be responsible for two presentation/discussion-leader sessions. One will be when the seminar participant leads discussion of a text (theoretical/critical or literary/artistic). These presentations will be on the main text we read in any given week and will include texts selected by participants from within their own field of research expertise. The other type of presentation will be when the participant acts as a respondent and should involve the participant
drawing on secondary readings to situate, criticize, or illuminate the primary text we are considering in that week.

**Primary Course Readings:**

De Sanctis, Francesco. “Leopardi e Schopenhauer. Dialogo tra A e D.” [Translation to be provided.]


*(Potential) Supplementary Course Readings:*


**Schedule:**

In general, each week will focus on one main text and also introduce a second (or more) text(s) that can be used to refine our insights into the main text. The text of primary focus is listed first in each week. In weeks 1 and 2 we will use a literary test case to think through some of the questions and issues raised by the theoretical texts, TS Eliot’s *Four Quartets.* The specific texts we focus on in the second half of the seminar will be determined by seminar participants in consultation with the instructor during the first two weeks of the seminar (hence the syllabus will be “filled-in” then).

Week 1a: Nussbaum; Eliot
Week 1b: Nussbaum – Diamond – Haines; Eliot
Week 2a: Landy; Eliot
Week 2b: Landy – Gumbrecht; Eliot
Week 3a: Schopenhauer
Week 3b: Schopenhauer – Wellbery
Week 4a: Leopardi
Week 4b: Leopardi
Week 5a: De Sanctis
Week 5b: De Sanctis

Week 6a: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 6b: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 7a: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 7b: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 8a: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 8b: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 9a: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 9b: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 10a: Student-Led Text and Discussion
Week 10b: Student-Led Text and Discussion