English MA Course ENGL 766

Special Topics I: Comparative Literature and Philosophy: Fall 2015

Theory and Practice of Metaphor, Allegory & Symbol Wednesdays 7 -10 pm

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**Course Description**. This course will examine and analyze figurative language—tropes—as fundamental elements of meaning in language and literature. Particular attention will be given to metaphor, symbol, and allegory as basic techniques used by writers in creating poetic meaning. We will alternate study of theoretical texts with literary illustrations. Poetry from the Bible and from Shakespeare, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce, for example, will be read to demonstrate the techniques of figurative representation as discussed by Paul Friedrich, Kenneth Burke, and René Wellek, as well as by contemporary theorists. For instance, romantic poetry will be used to illustrate the principles of metaphor as expounded by I. A. Richards.  Recent cognitivist theories of metaphor will also be explored in relation to traditional thinking about metaphor in ancient rhetoric (Cicero, Quintilian) and in the revolutionary new thinking of Vico, Herder, and Nietzsche. Linguistics and anthropology will be combined with criticism in the investigation of the phenomena of figurative language. These techniques will be compared with the allusive and incitatory poetics of Chinese classical poetry in the *Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*) and Tang Dynasty poets Li Bai, Du Fu, and Wang Wei. For instance, the role of occasional circumstance as informing meaning in Chinese poetry will be compared with Dante’s contextualizing his lyrics with existential-autobiographical prose in his *New Life* (*Vita nuova*).

**Theory Texts**

Kenneth Burke, “The Four Major Tropes”

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*

Paul Friedrich, “Poetic Language and the Imagination: A Reformulation of the Sapir Hypothesis”

Paul Friedrich, “The Symbol and its Relative Non-Arbitrariness”

Giambattista Vico, “Poetic Wisdom,” “Poetic Logic”

Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”

Max Black, “Metaphor,” in *Models and Metaphors*

William Franke, “Metaphor and the Making of Sense”

\_\_\_\_\_\_, “Symbol and Allegory”

Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, “Temporality of Rhetoric”

**Literary Texts**

Porphyry, “The Cave of the Nymphs”

Illustration: Blake, “The Sea of Time and Space”

Dante, *The New Life*

Charles Eliot Norton, “The New Life of Dante”

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “Dante and his Circle”

Julia Straub, “A Victorian Muse:

The Afterlife of Dante’s Beatrice in Nineteenth-Century Literature”

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book II

Wordsworth, “Memory”

Blake, Song of Los, Book of Urizen, Book of Los

Baudelaire, “Flowers of Evil”

Rimbaud, “Vowels” and “Eternity”

William Carlos Williams, “A Sort of Song”

**Asian Literature and Theory of Figures**

*Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*)

Tang poets Li Bo and Du Fu and Wang Wei

François Jullien, *Detours and Access*

**Student Participation and Assessment:**

1. Presentation. Each student will prepare a 10-15 minute presentation of a Chinese classic text, including some introduction to the text in general (its authorship and content and function in historical context) and some selected passages to be interpreted as examples.

2. Paper. A research paper of 10-15 pages (double-spaced) on a comparative topic of the student’s choosing. This essay should be an interpretation of a selected literary work (Eastern or Western) within a theoretical framework that reflects in some way on the linguistic, historical, philosophical, or religious underpinnings or implications of the literary text in question.

3. Oral Exam. Mid-term individual discussion with instructor to assess progress and set direction.