

Literature and Deception

Are literary texts by their very nature deceptive? What power do they have to convey truths and falsehoods? How do our judgments regarding the truth value of literature differ from how we evaluate other kinds of writing, such as scientific texts? These questions have been at the center of debates about the status of literature since antiquity and continue well into the time period that is the focus of this class (1500 - 1800). By the end of the course, students should have gained insights into an important topic in European literature and improved their skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking (as well as the fine art of deception). Literary readings from Boccaccio, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Machiavelli, Molière, and Swift. The discussions will be augmented by various theoretical approaches to the concept of lying (Kant, Nietzsche, Freud, Arendt). Instructor: Holland