

## Literature and Deception (Hum/En 34)

Professor: Jocelyn Holland

Winter Quarter 2021

T/Th 1-2:30 p.m.

Zoom office hour (time to be determined)

email: [jholland@caltech.edu](mailto:jholland@caltech.edu) (feel free to email me any time with questions about the course)

Please note that this is a **preliminary syllabus**: the readings and grading breakdown will not change between now and January, but the final version will contain much more detailed information about Zoom meetings and Canvas activities.

Pdfs of all the readings will be placed on the Canvas website prior to the winter break, with the exception of two very inexpensive books for purchase (either as kindle or paperback):

1. *Don Juan*, by Molière (isbn: 015601310X). Please use the Richard Wilbur translation.
2. *Othello*, by William Shakespeare (isbn: 9780743477550). Please use the Folger Library edition.

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This course takes a broad look at acts of lying and deception as they have been imagined and portrayed in literary and philosophical texts. We will be looking at our topic from many points of view: as a problem of language (what are the signs by which we detect deception in speech and writing?); as a cultural and historical phenomenon (how do techniques of deception develop in response to particular historical settings, and are there any constants to be observed?); and also as a question of moral value – what distinguishes good deceptions from bad ones from a reader’s point of view, and what are the criteria according to which they are judged? We will also take a close look at what makes the act of lying different than other kinds of deception and ask a big question that has a long history attached to it: is all literature a lie? Along the way, in addition to acquiring historical and literary knowledge, you will have the opportunity to work on your writing, reading, and general analytical skills with plenty of support and feedback from me and your classmates.

Jan 5                    **Introduction**

### Mythological Liars, Tricksters, and Deceivers

- Jan 7                    Prometheus            (Hesiod’s *Theogony*, excerpt)
- Jan 12                  Hermes                (Homeric Hymn to Hermes)
- Jan 14                  Loki                    (*Poetic Edda*, the death of Balder and Loki’s punishment)

### Approaches to Lying in Early Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology

- Jan 19                  Are there liars in an ideal state? (Plato’s *Republic*, excerpts)
- Jan 21                  Lying and confession (St. Augustine, excerpts from “On Lying” and his *Confessions*)

### Lying as a Cultural and Political Practice

- Jan 26                  Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*  
Day 1, story 1: Deception in the name of religion  
Day 2, story 9: A wife uses disguise to prove her innocence  
Day 7, story 1: A wife takes a lover and tricks her husband  
Day 7, story 5: A husband tries unsuccessfully to catch his cheating wife  
Day 7, story 9: A story of deception in plain sight  
[note: each of these stories is 2 to 3 pages in length]
- Jan 28                  Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (chapter 18); Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (excerpt)
- Feb 2                    Miguel de Cervantes, “The Deceitful Marriage”

### **The Evil Liar**

Feb 4 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act 1

Feb 9 *Othello*, Acts 2 and 3

Feb 11 *Othello*, Acts 4 and 5

### **The Liar as Seducer**

Feb 16 Molière, *Dom Juan, or the Feast with the Statue*, Acts 1 and 2

Feb 18 Molière, *Dom Juan, or the Feast with the Statue*, Acts 3 and 4

### **The Horses Don't Lie**

Feb 23 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Book 4, chapters 1-6)

Feb 25 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Book 4, chapters 7-12)

### **Literary Fakes**

March 2 The Ireland Shakespeare Forgeries (see document on Canvas)

March 4 The Ossian controversy (see document on Canvas)

### **Only the Truth: Your Final Paper**

March 9 Workshop for the final paper

### **Grading breakdown:**

Short homework assignments:  $7 \times 5\% = 35\%$

Online attendance during class time: 15% [if you are zooming in from a faraway time zone, let me know!]

Midterm paper (short essay, date t.b.d.): 20%

Final paper (longer essay, date t.b.d.): 30%