

Introduction to Literary Theory

Allegory and Equivalence

CSLC 502, 22075D, Fall 2015, Thursdays, 3:00 pm - 5:50 pm, VKC 105

This course is not so much about allegory as it about conceiving an abandonment of allegory as our common condition of reading. Allegory names response to the demand upon our enterprise (in a moment of its intensification): what does it serve? How does it relate to our world? We will take it as one figure, among others, for producing that relation, which we have for too long misidentified as “interpretation.”

Our opening provocation is that allegory is the condition of all literary economy, which is to say the place of its justification, of the consignment of its work and the recovery of its every excess, for it is the mechanism through which while remaining itself (that is, both literature and literary) literature is also, simultaneously, offered to the world that reads it. Thus does allegory—at least as we have understood it in relation to “politics” and to “history”, to the world and to the Real—bear upon two scenes of expropriation. The first would be markedly historical or historicist and concerns the exodus of literature into the world to which our reading hopes to relate it. Fredric Jameson’s famous essay on “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational. Capitalism” (and, naturally, the book that pursues the same consequences at some length—though in a context somewhat less problematic—The Political Unconscious) explores that involuntary communication or obligatory delivery of the literary to a world. Yet his writing does not consider the second scene of expropriation that we will also consider here and which relates not to historical events but rather to Being, if also in a a historical sense. Allegory is thus also the intolerable condition of remaining with literature.

Major authors include: Abraham and Torok, Avicenna, Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, Deleuze and Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud, Fredric Jameson, Karl Marx, Jean-Luc Nancy, Plato, Reiner Schürmann, and others. Students from all departments are welcome.



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