

ENGL 4243/6243 Studies in British Literature
Cristina Maria Cervone
cmcervone@memphis.edu
spring 2021, MW 2:20 - 3:30

story + interpretation + wordplay >>> allegory?

Allegory tantalizingly seems to promise to help us lead a good life by breaking down complex ideas for easier understanding, as if some sort of schematic version of a story would help us learn something crucial and useful about ourselves and how we should behave. But when we read an allegory, before long we can be reaching for a pen trying to keep track of a maze of details that seem to proliferate out of our control.

Why do allegories draw us in only to play headgames with us? How are language and form crucial to their manner of working? How do they combine the creative side of writing and the interpretative acts we associate with literary criticism? We'll trace some of the uses to which allegory has been put as we examine sometimes contradictory theories about how allegory works and what parameters define it. Students with a strong interest in the multiplicity built into the English language or in forms of any kind are especially likely to enjoy this course.

Readings are likely to include some of the following (some will be read only in part): Plato's Allegory of the Cave; Prudentius' *Psychomachia*; de Lorris and de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*; de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*; the *Roman de Silence*; Langland's *Piers Plowman*; the alliterative dream vision *Pearl*; Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; Abbott's *Flatland*; and some examples of the genre as defined in the visual arts and present-day popular culture. By the end of the course, you should be able to identify distinct critical approaches to allegory and to apply these critical postures yourself to a variety of texts from the Middle Ages to the present day.

Course assignments can be tailored to concentration-specific interests and students from all concentrations are encouraged to take the course.

UNDERGRADUATE REQUIREMENTS: close reading paper, researched paper or project, close reading presentation

GRADUATE REQUIREMENTS: close reading paper, researched paper or project, researched presentation and leading of class discussion, book summary and critique