Spring 2015 Undergraduate Course Descriptions

Noam Pines
COL 203: Women in Jewish Literature
Cross listed with JDS 209
PIN: 23573
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:00-11:50
Clemens 708

The course will chart the role of women in modern Jewish literature. We will consider portrayals of women in traditional Jewish sources, and focus on the way that Jewish women authors sought to challenge or develop such portrayals in their own writings.

Noam Pines
COL 275: Jewish Rebels in Music-Punk Jews
Cross listed with JDS 264
PIN: 22372
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:00-2:50
Clemens 708

The course will follow the careers of Jewish rebels in music, visual art, and literature in the twentieth century. We will attempt to determine the appeal of an anti-cultural stance (such as we find in Dada, Beat poetry, and Punk) to people of Jewish heritage. Discussions will include figures such as Tristan Tzara, David Bomberg, Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg, Lou Reed, The Ramones, Martin Rev and Alan Vega, and more.

Kalliopi Nikolopoulou
COL 303: Art & Violence
A: 23739
Mondays & Wednesdays 11:00-12:20
Clemens 640

Ever since Romanticism, we often think of the artistic genius in relation to violence, madness, and self-destruction. But this relationship of art to violence is not so new. Already in antiquity, Plato was wary of the destructive effects art can have on the human psyche, and this was the reason he proposed to ban the poets from the city. Later on, at the end of the nineteenth century, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche equated this violent impulse of art with the “Dionysian principle”—namely, the part of artistic inspiration that comes from the dark, divine madness of Dionysus, god of intoxication. In this seminar, we will focus on two modern novellas, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, both of which explore the significance of violence, madness, and death in relation to artistic creativity.
Heart of Darkness, a story about the violence of colonialism, centers around the mysterious and horrifying figure of Kurtz, who is himself portrayed as a painter, orator, poet, and musician—in short, as an artist. The most violent of the novella’s characters is the artistically inclined man. While set in a different context, Death in Venice presents us with yet another angle of this violent aspect of art. In this novella, death is the price another artist must pay in order to reclaim the heights of his long lost inspiration. Mann writes this narrative while consciously responding to Nietzsche’s philosophical treatise, The Birth of Tragedy, in which the philosopher discussed art in terms of the strife between two opposing but equally important forces: the rational plastic form (the Apollonian principle), and the tragic, terrible truth (the Dionysian principle).

Required Readings: Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (Penguin), Thomas Mann, Death in Venice (Vintage), Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy (Vintage)

In addition to these three texts, we will read: a short article by Chinua Achebe (his interpretation of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness); excerpts from Plato’s Ion and Republic (on the poets’ madness and the dangerous effects of poetry); excerpts from Euripides’s Bacchae (in comparison with the Dionysian scene in Death in Venice). Course Objective: There is one principal objective in this class: to learn how to practice close reading by way of developing your critical and analytical skills. Course Requirements: There is one principal objective in this class: to learn how to practice close reading by way of developing your critical and analytical skills. Course Requirements: Attendance is mandatory (after two absences, the grade is affected negatively). There will be six scheduled quizzes and the two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. A final paper of 5–7 pages is required. This is not a research paper, but an argumentative paper in which students analyze a text and present a thesis with supporting textual evidence. Students will also be asked to present a 5–minute summary of the thesis of their papers.

Yitian Zhai
COL 301/311: Love & Wisdom East & West
A: 24229
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00-12:20
Clemens 640

Wisdom or love—which one is more fundamental to our pursuit of the meaning of life? This class will examine the selected texts from Western and Chinese intellectual traditions—Plato, Aristotle, Confucianism, and Daoism—to explore the answers for this question. Rather than choosing love or wisdom, perhaps we need to explore how wisdom of love and love of wisdom have formulated the relations between the personal and the political in different cultural traditions. Regarding this, we will introduce some contemporary perspectives (such as, globalization, multiculturalism, and gender) to explore this topic. In the globalization epoch, we need an understanding of the value of human life that does not subordinate personal desires to political or economic goals. Yet how to imagine a new politics that respects cultural and sexual differences? You are invited to take this class if you would like to explore the following questions:

What is the relationship between love and truth?
How do love and truth formulate the meaning of life?
How to approach cultural difference (i.e., Chinese culture)?
Are there different attitudes to love and gender in the East and West?
Why is the dialogue between Eastern and Western cultures important?