

Love and Death

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DESCRIPTION: Social theorist Sigmund Freud argues that human activity is driven by psychologically defined energies focused on love and death. Theologian Jonathan Edwards claims that genuine love for all being is a gift of God rather than a natural human virtue. Both claims have sparked controversy. By examining these claims, as well as others, this course explores possible relations between love and death in human life, illustrated in theory, fiction, and film. We shall raise such questions as: How does love differ according to the kind of relationship in which it finds expression (for examples, parental love, friendship, sexual intimacy, love for strangers and enemies, neighborly love, self-love, love for learning, love for justice, and devotion to a transcendent reality)? What does love require in regard to how we live and die? How does our awareness that death is inevitable inform our views and experiences of love? What role does love play in the significance we attribute to death?

REQUIRED READINGS: The following texts are available at the bookstore or, if noted by [R], on reserve:

Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Bible, I Corinthians 13 and Song of Solomon [R]

Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*

Erdrich, *Last Report on the Miracles of LittleNoHorse*

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" [R]

Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

Nuland, *How We Die*

Partnoy, *The Little School*

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*

Plato, *Dialogues*, "Symposium" [R]

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS: In addition to the reading requirements, there are writing, speaking, class participation (therefore, attendance), and film requirements.

Possible Films (depending on availability): Selections from "American beauty," "Antonia's Line," "Dead Man Walking," and "Lone Star"

Writing: You will be required to write your own obituary (1-2 typewritten pages long), a paper proposal (2 typewritten pages long), a paper (6-9 typewritten pages), and a serious rewrite of your paper. (Page-length specifications do not include footnotes, endnotes, or bibliography.)

You are required to write your own obituary; we will discuss how to do this the first day of class

The semester project will address a topic of your choice, provided it meets with my approval. Topics will be submitted according to a specific format (a specific question, followed by a short description of how you plan to approach your question and an annotated bibliography of at least six outside sources in addition to relevant class assignments). Once I have graded your paper and returned it to you, you will re-write the paper and resubmit it. The formats for proposal and paper are attached to this syllabus. Due dates for proposals, papers, and rewrites are noted in the schedule. Each day late will

reduce the grade by 1/3 letter; I will not accept written work later than 4 days beyond the due date.

Speaking: You are required to present your work for your paper to the class toward the end of the semester. The format for this presentation is attached to this syllabus.

Class Participation: The benefit of this class depends heavily upon your keeping up with the reading assignments and upon your active, conceptually thoughtful, respectful, verbal participation during class meetings; therefore, attendance is required. More than three absences will result in an automatic grade of F for the course.

Portfolio: Each student is required to keep a portfolio of critical analyses of the reading assignments and films. During the semester I will call on you to present your analysis to the class. I will grade the oral critiques. Each analysis should consist of two printed pages that minimally includes the following information..:

- (1) a statement of the central thesis or issues or themes and summarizing the argument (or author's stance, in the case of fictional or poetic works and films);
- (2) attention to how the work fits into a wider context of the general theme of love and death;
- (3) your assessment of both strengths and limitations of the author's position, as well as your suggested alternatives;
- (4) a concluding question, that follows logically from your analysis, that forces you to raise issues you have not thought about before or need to think about in a new way. You will use this question to initiate class discussion.

Failure to turn in a written critique will lower your overall grade.

GRADE CALCULATION:

Obituary	No grade
Paper proposal	10%
Paper	20%
Rewrite of Paper	20%
Oral Presentation	20%
Oral Critiques	20%
Class Participation	10%

OFFICE HOURS:

Tuesdays and Wednesdays 2:30-4:00 p.m. and by appointment. If I am not available when you call or come by, leave your name and phone number and I shall return your call.

SCHEDULE

Date:	Topic:	Assignment for Next Class:
Sept. 2	Introductions	Obituaries
4		“American Beauty”
6	Love & Death among the Middle Classes	Freud, I-VIII
11	Making Civilization	
13		I Corinthians 13 Edwards, I & II
18	Loving Being/God	Edwards, III-VIII
20		
25	LIBRARY & MEDIA LECTURE	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
27	Values Worth Living For	Plato, <i>Apology</i>
Oct. 2		Plato, <i>Crito</i>
4	Values Worth Dying For Proposals due at beginning of class	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i>
9		Partnoy, <i>The Little School</i>
11		Nuland, Intro and chaps.6-8; chapt.12 and <i>Epilogue</i>
16	How do we die?	Albom, <i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>
18		“Dead Man Walking”
23	Papers due at beginning of class	Plato’s <i>Symposium</i> [R] & Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” [R]

Oct.	25	Fall break	
	30	How Do We Love?	<i>Bible, “Song of Solomon”[R] & “Lone Star”</i>
Nov.	1		Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i>
	6	The Inseparability of Love & Death	
	8		Erdrich, <i>Last Report of the Miracles of Little No Horse</i>
	13		
	15		
	20	Working Session on Oral Presentations Papers Due at Beginning of Class	
	22	Thanksgiving	
	27	Oral Presentations	
	29	Oral Presentations	
Dec.	4	Oral Presentations	
	6	Oral Presentations	
	11	Oral Presentations	
	13	Oral presentations Course Evaluations Attendance absolutely required	

FORMAT FOR PROPOSAL, ORAL PRESENTATION, AND ESSAY:

A] **Proposal** (Required):

State your topic in the form of a question and relate it briefly to the general issue of love and/or death. State briefly how you intend to approach your question. Include an annotated bibliography of at least five sources not assigned in class, with a brief statement of how you expect these sources to help you for each entry. Your entire draft should not exceed two typewritten pages double-spaced.

B] **Oral** (Suggested):

Introduce yourself. State your question. Give a presentation in response with special attention to what most excited you about your topic and what bothered you most as you pursued your topic. Conclude by asking the class a new question this topic raised for you, and be prepared to lead brief discussion in response. Your presentation should last 10-15 minutes plus 10 minutes for discussion. Your presentation, including discussion, needs to last minimally 20 minutes and must not exceed 25 minutes.

C] **Essay** (Required):

Your essay should consist of a clearly stated and well argued thesis in response to your central question, between 6 and 9 typewritten pages (double-spaced) in length. In addition, you should include endnotes and bibliography. You must draw on relevant reading assignments from class. As you work on your project, please draw upon the resources of your peer tutor, the reference librarians, Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, *Easy Writer*, the writing center, and the MLA style sheet. Two copies are due for each version of your essay.

Please note: There will be no extension of due dates. Written work is due at the beginning of class. Late work will incur a 1/3 letter grade deduction (a .3 point penalty on a 4.0 scale) for each day late.

A Note On Grading:

I will use the following criteria to evaluate your papers and exams:

1. **Focus** on the question or issue: Does the essay address a stated question or issue? Is there a clearly stated, well argued thesis?
2. **Evidence**: Do the examples support the argument sufficiently?
3. **Organization**: Is the essay logically organized?
4. **Scope**: Does the essay deal with all the important aspects of the question or issue?
5. **Originality**: Are there new ideas or interesting interpretations of the evidence?
6. **Quality of research**: Does this essay reflect the best use of the resources available?
7. **Writing**: How well is the paper or exam written? Do mechanical errors (spelling and poor grammar) detract from the quality of the ideas expressed? If the exam is an in-class exam, I do not grade writing.

These are my standards for grades:

- A** an extremely well-written paper or exam which not only covers all the major points but does so in an original and insightful way
- B** a solid and well-written paper or exam which demonstrates a good understanding of the material
- C** a paper or exam with many strengths but which lacks sufficient depth or focus; a paper flawed by poor organization and mechanical errors; a paper which fails to integrate the evidence into a larger interpretation or which fails to provide sufficient evidence to support the argument
- D** a paper or exam with major problems; see me for details
- F** a paper or exam which never was

For your oral presentations, I will be grading you on the content of your reports (what you say, how important it is and how conceptually clear it is), as well as the following:

1. **Organization**--was your presentation clearly and logically organized?
2. **Clarity**--could we hear you and could we understand what you were trying to say?
3. **Eye Contact**--did you make eye contact with everyone in the seminar and not just with the professor?
4. **Enthusiasm**--did you convey the importance of your topic and your interest in it?