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Religion and Literature

Instructor

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Institution

University of Pennsylvania

Course Description

This course explores some ways in which religious ideas and practices appear in works of literature from different cultures. The focus is on modernity, since it is the last several centuries that have presented the greatest challenges to traditional religious systems, and therefore the most complex translation of religiosity into literary forms. Most of the reading selections will be from the Christian tradition (Shelley, Colodi, Goethe, Camus, Reynolds), but there are also several works that deal with issues in Judaism and modernity (Singer, Ozick, Abraham), and one novel (Rushdie) from the contemporary Islamic tradition. No specialized knowledge of these traditions is presumed; the necessary background will be presented in the lectures.

This is a WATU affiliated course. We recommend that all students, especially those who have not fulfilled the Writing Requirement, take the WATU option; this will involve writing a draft of each of the three papers. Successful completion of this option counts for one half of the Writing Requirement. Students who do not need another writing credit are urged to write the drafts anyway, but it is also possible to take the course without the WATU option. See below for due dates of drafts and final papers. All students are required to do the in-class writing assignments.

There will be three five-page papers required, one for each section of the course. Each has a slightly different and increasingly sophisticated objective:

First Paper (draft due Monday, September 21, final due Monday, October 5) is a close reading of one of the works in Section I of the course. This paper is meant to sharpen analytical and reading skills.

Second Paper (draft due Monday, October 26, final due Monday, November 9) is a comparison of religious ideas in any two works read in Sections I and II of the course, excluding the book analyzed in the first paper.

Third Paper (draft due Monday, November 23, final due Friday, December 11) is a thematic discussion that should begin with a problem rather than with a text. It must deal at least in part with one of the works in Section III of the course.

There will be many discussions of these papers as the course progresses.

In-Class Writing will be done in section in the weeks of September 14, October 21 and November 16. Students will be given a question or a statement and asked to write for approximately twenty minutes. These exercises are required but will not be graded. They will be the basis for discussion on the class listserve.

Grades will be computed as the average of four factors: three papers and participation. Participation includes

contribution to discussions in section and on the listserv, consultation with the professor and T.A. in office hours.

Course Outline

I. Creation of Human Beings

September 9 Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Golem
No Recitations Week of September 9

September 14-18 Cynthia Ozick, "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" from The Puttermesser Papers (bulkpack)
Recitations begin: writing in section 9/16, 9/18

September 21-25 Carlo Collodi, Pinocchio
Paper 1 first draft due September 21

Sept. 28-October 2 Danny Pitt-Stoller, Pinocchio: A New Musical (bulkpack) **Paper 1 drafts returned September 28**

October 5-9 Mary Shelley, Frankenstein
Paper 1 final draft due October 5

October 12-16 Frankenstein continued

II. Religion and the "Coming of Age" Novel

October 19 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

October 21-23 Pearl Abraham, The Romance Reader
Writing in section 10/21, 10/23

October 26-30 Sheri Reynolds, The Rapture of Canaan
Paper 2 first draft due October 26

November 2-6 Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children
Paper 2 draft returned November 2

November 9-13 Midnight's Children, Continued
Paper 2 final due November 9

III. The "Modern" Soul and the Challenge of Belief

November 16-20 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust pt. 1
Writing in section 11/18, 11/20

November 23-27 NO CLASS (AAR and THANKSGIVING)
Paper 3 draft due November 23

Nov. 30- December 4 Albert Camus, The Fall
Paper 3 draft returned December 4

December 7-11 Denise Levertov, The Stream and the Sapphire

Texts

The following books have been ordered from House of Our Own Books, 3920 Spruce Street, and are on reserve in Rosengarten:

Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Golem (Farrar, Straus, Giroux)

Carlo Collodi, The Adventures of Pinocchio (Oxford)

Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Oxford)

Pearl Abraham, The Romance Reader (Riverhead Books)

Sheri Reynolds, The Rapture of Canaan (Berkley Books)

Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children (Penguin)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust pt. 1 (Oxford)


Albert Camus, The Fall (Vintage)

Denise Levertov, The Stream and the Sapphire (New Directions)

There is also a bulkpack available at Campus Copy Center, 3907 Walnut St. It contains two items also on reserve at Rosengarten:

Cynthia Ozick, "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," from The Puttermesser Papers (Knopf)

Danny Pitt-Stoller, "Pinocchio: A New Musical"

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