

Honors 254
Fall 2011

Professor Martha Helfer
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172 College Ave Rm. 103
Office hours MW 2-2:30 and by appt.

Civilization and Its Discontents

Course description: The search for self-definition – what it means to be “me,” and what it means to be “me” in a society often hostile to the individual – is one of the basic drives that characterizes the human being, and is an enduring theme of world literature. This course examines the search for self-definition in mainstream literature of the Western Enlightenment tradition, in conjunction with selections from philosophy, aesthetic theory, cultural criticism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. Emphasis will be placed on developing critical reading and writing skills.

Learning goals: Students will learn to analyze seminal texts that have helped shape contemporary views of literature, culture and art, and will demonstrate critical reasoning skills.

Course requirements: careful preparation of assigned readings (10%), active class participation (10%), and four take-home essay assignments (80%). **Note:** students must complete **all** assignments to receive credit for this course.

Course books (available at the bookstore):

Goethe, *Faust, Part One*
Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
Spiegelman, *Maus I,II*
Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
Orwell, *1984*
Wolf, *Cassandra*

Additional readings will be placed on reserve on Sakai.

Syllabus:

I. Enlightenment models of self-definition: Kant and Goethe

9/7 Goethe, “Dedication”
9/8 Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”

II. Aesthetic models of self-definition: Schiller and Goethe

9/12 **assignment I due**
Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of the Human Race* (Letters 1-9)
9/14 Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of the Human Race* (Letters 1-9)

- 9/19 Goethe, *Faust I*
- 9/21 Goethe, *Faust I*

- 9/26 Goethe, *Faust I*
- 9/28 Goethe, *Faust I*

- 10/3 Goethe, *Faust I*
- 10/5 Goethe and Schiller on aesthetic models of self-definition: comparison

III. Dialectical models of self-definition: Hegel and Shelley

- 10/10 **assignment II due**
Hegel, “master-slave dialectic”

- 10/12 Hegel, “master-slave dialectic”
Shelley, *Frankenstein*

- 10/17 Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- 10/19 **no class: reschedule**
Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Hegel and Shelley on dialectical models of self-definition: comparison

IV. Perverse models of self-definition: Nietzsche and Dostoevsky

- 10/24 Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense”
- 10/26 Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

- 10/31 Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
- 11/2 Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: comparison

V. Psychoanalytic models of self-definition: Freud and Orwell

- 11/7 **assignment III due**
Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
- 11/9 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

- 11/14 Orwell, *1984*
- 11/16 Orwell, *1984*

- 11/21 Freud and Orwell: comparison

VI. The Holocaust -- trauma and self-definition: Celan and Spiegelman

11/28 Celan, "Death Fugue"; Spiegelman, *Maus*

11/30 Spiegelman, *Maus*
Celan and Spiegelman: comparison

VII. Feminist models of self-definition: Angela Carter and Christa Wolf

12/5 The Brothers Grimm, *Little Red Riding Hood*; Carter, *The Company of Wolves*

12/7 Wolf, *Cassandra*

12/12 Wolf, *Cassandra*

12/19 assignment IV due at 2 p.m., 172 College Ave

Policy on attendance: Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory, and students are expected to arrive punctually.

photocopy fees: Five cents per photocopy.

Plagiarism policy: Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own. Students found guilty of plagiarism will be disciplined to the fullest extent of the university code on academic integrity.

ADA policy: The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric difficulties. Please contact the instructor of this course at the *beginning* of the semester to discuss any such accommodations for this course.