

Jonathan Gross, Prof.
Department of English
2347 N Racine
(773) 325-1780
jgross@depaul.edu

Spring, 2011
TH 11:10-12:50
Office Hours: T/TH: 9:30-11:00
& by appointment
773 771-2901

Honors 205: **Orpheus in literature and the visual arts:** HONORS INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTS.

Professor Jonathan Gross



Background Note: Through courses in the arts, honors students will learn about other cultures while developing their capacity to understand and respond to works of art. Honors students with the exception of students in Theatre and Music (who already encounter the arts in their major programs) take two courses in the creative arts. One of these is a studio course or practicum chosen from college and departmental offerings in applied theatre courses, studio art, music, and creative writing. The other course is Honors 205, an interdisciplinary Honors course designed to complement and inform this creative activity. The Honors arts course asks students to become more perceptive and informed audiences of artistic works and helps them to examine and analyze works of art both as formal structures and as elements of a cultural and historical setting. Students will be advised but not required to begin with Honors 205 before moving on to applied work in a studio course.

Honors 205 offers interdisciplinary study of two or more art forms in a particular historical period, looking at relations among the arts and between art and its cultural contexts. The course will focus two or more art forms from the visual arts, drama, cinema, or music; work in the

course will be interdisciplinary and will include close analysis, readings, visits to relevant performances or exhibits, and papers. Possible topics for sections of Honors 205 include American Theater and Photography During the Great Depression, Modernism in Painting and Music, and Baroque Sculpture and Painting in Latin America.

Course Objective: This course will examine the figure of Orpheus in the 20th century, as depicted in literature and the visual arts. What do modern treatments of the Orpheus legend owe to their classical predecessors? Are they entirely new in conception or are there certain themes--such as loss, the backward glance, the seductive power of music, the fragile nature of passion, the peculiar charm of music to tame animals--consistent throughout time. How have writers such as Sartre, Tennessee Williams, and J.M. Coetzee made use of Orphic themes to draw similarities between the dismembered Orpheus and Christ. What is the nature of myth and how have visual artists and writers helped to shape myths elastic enough to hold competing interpretations?

COURSE CALENDAR

Weeks One - Three: Orpheus in Literature and the Visual Arts, Background

Week One: Introduction (Tuesday) and clips from Jean Cocteau's 1949 film, *Orphée*. (TH)

Week Two: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (T); Virgil's *Georgics* (TH)

Week Three: Paintings from the Renaissance, depicting Orpheus; Orpheus as Christ symbol; Orphism; discussion of tropes and themes; alteration from core myth as developed over time in Greece and the Renaissance Italy

Weeks 4-10 Orpheus in Literature and the Visual Arts, 20th Century

Week Four: Marcel Camus, *Black Orpheus* [film shown in class]

Week Five: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus* [philosophical essay explaining racial issues in film]

Weeks Six and Seven: Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending*

Weeks Eight and Nine: Coetzee's *Disgrace* [which features a man writing an opera on Orpheus]; clips from film shown.

Week Ten: Oral reports and summary of Student Projects on Orpheus

Course Assignments:

Students will be asked to turn in assignments that pose three questions related to the work of art under discussion. Grades of check, check minus and check plus will be given, along with commentary. These serve as the basis for evaluation of writing and response. Comments should be read closely as providing guidance for the final paper.

Final Paper

Abstract of 500 words due week 5: 25%

Rough Draft of 5 pages due Week 7: 25%

Final Draft of 10 pages plus bibliography due during finals week: 25%

Class Participation: 25% (3 absences lowers your grade by 15 points; 4 unexcused absences lowers your grade by 20. If a student misses three weeks of classes they will not pass the course).

Students will write a ten page paper making use of works in literature and the visual arts, showing how writers make use of visual representations of Orpheus and how visual artists have drawn inspiration from classical and modern writers. An essay on the film *Black Orpheus* and Sartre's essay, for example, might explore the question of race in Orpheus. An essay on Tennessee Williams and Jean Cocteau might consider the Orpheus legend as an exploration of homosexuality (Orpheus is, after all, torn apart by Maenads after he rejects their advances while grieving for Eurydice), or it might consider how plays and films demand that artists treat similar subjects differently. In Coetzee's *Disgrace*, students might compare the film and the novel, or explain why it is that the lead character, David Lurie, is writing an opera about Byron and Teresa Guiccioli which is modeled on Gluck's *Orphée*. What Orphic films might be found in this postcolonial novel about South Africa by a Booker prize winning author? Creative responses are also welcome, for students in music, or theater; photoessays, with commentary can be turned in in lieu of a research paper with permission of the instructor (here the model will be the Exhibit Catalogue with an introductory essay discussing the works of art you have chosen, treating the final assignment like a exhibition catalogue; models can be provided for you and sample papers shown). Opera fans might wish to focus even more closely on operatic versions of the Orpheus legend that have drawn on literary and visual symbols, such as the sophisticated and comic, *Orpheus in the Underworld*, by Offenbach.