

Conversations of the West: Self and Alter Ego (Spring 2007)

In defining the nature of individuality, Western thought and literature have given special importance to the self's relationship with its alter ego or double. Aristotle coined the expression "A friend is another self," and the bond of fellow-warriors is the starting point of the discussion of love in Plato's Symposium. Brotherhood and friendship as human reflections of God's relationship with mankind, created "in His image," is a major theme of the Jewish Scriptures and fundamental for understanding the Christian ideals of charity and conversion. The appearance of depth psychology in the late classical period, and its rapid development in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have led to an increasingly subjective definition of the self and its relationship with the world.

Among other questions, this course asks: How does the Western definition of the self shape our understanding of friendship and loyalty? What is the relationship between Western ideas of friendship and the theory and practice of justice? How does the alter ego of antiquity gave rise to the Doppelgänger or "evil twin" in the nineteenth century and the mad narrator of the twentieth, and what does this say about the changing Western definition of what it means to be a person?

The course focuses on antiquity (ca. 1200 B.C. to 500 A.D.), and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Classical notions of the self and the double are examined in the Symposium, Seneca's Letters to Lucilius, Sophocles's tragedy Philoctetes, and Virgil's Aeneid. The Biblical understanding of the self-double paradigm is seen in passages from Tanakh and the New Testament and its internalization in St. Augustine's Confessions. The problem introduced by Descartes and early-modern skepticism is seen reflected in the relationship of knight and squire in Cervantes's Don Quixote de la Mancha, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and several stories by Henry James's. Finally, the erasure of the boundary between self and double in twentieth-century thought and literature is seen in the poetry of Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms, Samuel Beckett's Molloy, Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire, and Philip K. Dick's A Scanner Darkly.

Texts (in chronological order):

Holy Bible (Oxford College Edition)
Sophocles, Philoctetes in Sophocles II (University of Chicago)
Plato, Symposium (Penguin Classics)
Virgil, Aeneid (Bantam)
Seneca, Letters from a Stoic (Penguin)
St. Augustine, Confessions (Oxford)
Cervantes, Don Quixote de la Mancha (American Library)
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Simon and Schuster)
Henry James, Eight Tales of the Major Phase (Norton)
Fernando Pessoa, A Little Larger than the Entire Universe (Penguin)
Samuel Beckett, Molloy (Grove Press)
Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire (Vintage)
Philip K. Dick, A Scanner Darkly (Vintage)

Topics in Conversations of the West: Self and Alter Ego (Spring 2007)
Syllabus

Date	Assignment
January 16 and 18	Introduction to the course
January 23 and 25	Philip K. Dick, <u>A Scanner Darkly</u> entire (278 pages)
January 30 and February 1	Vladimir Nabokov, <u>Pale Fire</u> : “Forward,” the poem “Pale Fire,” and the “Commentary” on lines 1 through 136 (the rest of the commentary is optional, though students are encouraged to skip to the end) (minimum 135 pages)
February 6 and 8	Fernando Pessoa, <u>A Little Larger than the Entire Universe</u> (selections to be announced) and Samuel Beckett, <u>Molloy</u> entire (234 pages)
February 13 and 15	Henry James, <u>Eight Tales of the Major Phase</u> “Brooksmith,” “The Altar of the Dead,” “The Great Good Place,” “The Jolly Corner” (120 pp.)
February 20 and 22	Mary Shelley, <u>Frankenstein</u> entire (275 pages)
February 27 and March 1	Cervantes, <u>Don Quixote de la Mancha</u> Part I, chapters 1-10, 15-22, 47-50
March 6	<u>Don Quixote</u> Part II, chapters 1-17, 22-28, 41-47, 64-67, 71-74 (a total of about 40% of the entire book)
March 8	Midterm Exam
March 20 and 22	St. Augustine, <u>Confessions</u> Books 1-3 and 7-9 (115 pages)
March 27 and 29	Virgil, <u>Aeneid</u> Books 1-2, 4, 6-7 and 10-12 (227 pages)
April 3 and 5	Seneca, <u>Letters from a Stoic</u> pp. 33-56, 63-72, 86-100, 109-139, 151-196 (120 pages)
April 10 and 12	Plato, <u>Symposium</u> entire (61 pages) and Sophocles, <u>Philoctetes</u> entire (58 pages)
April 17 and 19	New Testament selections (to be announced)
April 24 and 26	Tanakh (Hebrew Bible; selections to be announced)

Date to be announced

Final Exam