

Humanities 395: Advanced Special Topic: PLEASURE

In Fall 2006, the Center for the Humanities will sponsor a semester-long course that will bring four distinguished scholars to campus as Distinguished Visiting Professors in the Humanities:

Carolyn Dean is Associate Dean of the Faculty and Professor of History at Brown University. She is the author of *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (1992); *Sexuality and Modern Western Culture* (1996); *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France* (2000), and *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust* (2004). In 1996 she was named the Rhode Island Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement for Teaching; she is currently engaged in a study of the recent emergence of “victim’s culture” in the United States and Western Europe.

Shuen-fu Lin is Professor of Chinese Literature in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan. He specializes in Chinese poetry of the middle periods, especially shi and ci poetry, literary theory, and early Daoist philosophical literature, and he regularly teaches a course on “The Pursuit of Happiness in the Chinese Tradition.” His books include *The Transformation of the Chinese Lyrical Tradition: Chiang K'uei and Southern Sung Tz'u Poetry* (1978) and *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the T'ang* (1986).

Janice Radway is Professor and Chair of the Literature Program at Duke University. Before coming to Duke, Radway taught in the American Civilization Department at the University of Pennsylvania, where she also served as editor of the *American Quarterly*. She is the author of *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1984), and *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle Class Desire* (1997). Her current research interests are in the history of literacy and reading in the United States, particularly as they bear on the lives of women. She is also working on an anthology of new work in American Studies and is a past president of the American Studies Association.

Claire Colebrook is Professor of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. She has published on continental philosophy, feminist theory, literary theory and Romanticism. Her books include *New Literary Histories* (1997), *Ethics and Representation* (1999), *Gilles Deleuze* (2002), *Understanding Deleuze* (2002), *Irony in the Work of Philosophy* (2002), *Gender* (2003) and *Irony: The New Critical Idiom* (2003). Her current research interests are the relationship between philosophy and literature, Romanticism and the influence of German Romanticism on literature in English, and she is writing a book on happiness and narrative theory.

Each of the four Distinguished Professors will be on campus for three weeks, during which time they will teach a module of a single four-credit upper-level interdisciplinary seminar in Fall 2005 open to juniors and seniors. A brief description follows:

“Pleasure”

Aug. 28 - Sept. 15 -- Professor Carolyn Dean: How have historians and other writers recently approached the representation of suffering in their work? How have attitudes toward representations of suffering and atrocities in historical narratives changed since the Second World War and especially in response to recent events? Why are narratives of human suffering from the Holocaust to photos of Abu Ghraib so often dubbed “pornographic”—as if to imply that they generate pleasure? Readings will include selections from Carolyn J. Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust*; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*; Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*; Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*; and Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma Studies,” from *History in Transit*.

Sept 25 - Oct 13 -- Professor Shuen-Fu Lin: “The Pursuit of Happiness in the Chinese Tradition: The First Episode”: The thematic focus of this segment of the course is what the philosopher-psychologist William James observed a century ago: “How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure.” Although the idea of the “pursuit of happiness” has a privileged place in American thinking, reflections on the happiness question can readily be found in many other cultures through the ages as well. In this segment of the course, we will study selected texts from early Chinese civilization as their creative and thinking authors pondered this age-old question and the meaning of life. We will discuss such issues as the generally life-affirming world views of the Chinese; the debates on how to construct a perfect society; what constitutes a good life; objective and subjective well-being; the fulfillments of spiritual cultivation, having a family and friends, work and play, and public service and/or private artistic and scholarly pursuit; and attitudes towards fate, suffering, evil, war, and death. Sample readings include texts in the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism (aka Taoism), Legalism, and Buddhism.

Oct. 23 - Nov. 10 -- Professor Janice Radway: “Chick Lit”: This seminar will focus on chick lit. and girls' zine production. Reading will include Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* and one other novel, plus several selections from some theoretical texts.

Nov. 13 - Dec. 1 -- Professor Claire Colebrook: “Happiness and the Narrative Life”: Why do human beings fail to act in their own interests? Two answers have dominated the Western tradition. The first, Aristotelian, approach argues for a distinction between happiness and pleasure, with pleasure being inhuman and transitory while happiness has to do with self-definition and a narrative life. The second, Freudian, approach argues for an essential conflict and tension in life with the pursuit of happiness often leading to a damaged life. This seminar will consider the following questions: What image or ideal of the self is presupposed in definitions of happiness? How is the concept of happiness tied up with notions of time and narrative? Do Freud's claims regarding the neurotic nature of Western civilization allow us to understand current claims about human life or do we need to think happiness through different models of selfhood? Readings will include Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* and selections from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*; Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death and the Remainder of Life*; and Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*.

Prerequisites: Junior or Senior Standing, and at least one of the following: ART 231 or 232; CHN 230, 241, 275, or 277; ENG 224, 225, 227, 228, 229, or 273; GRM/GLS 227 or 233; GWS 249; HIS 238, 239, or 33x; PHI 231, 235, 265, or 268; REL 216, or 222; THE 201, 202, or 203; some 300-level literature class; or permission of the instructor.

Questions should be directed to Alan Schrift, Director, Center for the Humanities, schrift@grinnell.edu.