C-870 Imagining Forgiveness Artistically
Fall 2012 (Thursdays 1:00–4:00 PM)
Location—Home of Prof. Frank Burch Brown

Frank Burch Brown, Professor
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Faculty Secretary:
Joyce Krauser, 931-2350
Meetings by appointment

Course Description
In this course we will look particularly at artistic interpretations of situations in which forgiveness, while seemingly called for, is seen as inherently difficult or problematical—perhaps even impossible. We will examine artistic works in which aesthetic and ethical tension, and any sense of possible resolution, involves questions or confusions regarding exactly who is needing to extend forgiveness, or why, or to whom. Works will include recent films, historical narratives, Shakespeare plays, and contemporary fiction. Readings will also include theological and ethical discussions. When it comes to student presentations and papers, students will have the option of making their own selections as to which artistic or theoretical work(s) to study. Interdisciplinary in nature, the course draws together aesthetics, ethics, theology, and religious studies—in addition to disciplines relevant to the study of various arts.

Assigned Sources
W. A. Mozart, The Marriage of Figaro (various options of recording or DVD; with reference to Peter Shaffer’s Amadeus in movie form—originally a play)
Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych & Other Stories (Barnes and Noble Classics), ISBN 978-1593080693 (pb)


Handouts (as available) or items posted selectively to the InsideCTS internet site.
Requirements
(1) Reading of material by the date for which it is assigned
(2) Active participation in class (attendance plus apt—if not rapt—discussion)
(3) One 20-minute (max) presentation to class
(4) One formal paper, 10-12 pp., not including bibliography, double-spaced, 12-pt. font size. This paper involves both research on and interpretation of a topic pertinent both to the matter of forgiveness and to matters of aesthetics/artistry—e.g. music, film, dance, drama, visual art (including photography, sculpture), or a newer, possibly interactive digital medium
(5) Final Exam (essay format)

Grades
Class Participation 10%
Presentation in Class 20%
Paper 50%
Final Exam 20%

Format
Normally the class will include relatively brief lectures and periodic comments from the professor on portions of assigned material. It will also include attention to, and discussion of, artistic examples. This class is intended to be less a “spectator” event than a participatory one. A class such as this can function well, therefore, only when attendance is regular and when students are prepared. As a matter of courtesy, you are asked to notify the professor when an absence is anticipated. It is also helpful to contact the professor (normally by email) when an unanticipated absence has occurred.

Electronic/Digital Devices
In case this needs to be said (and I’ve discovered it does): No cell phone calls or texting or unauthorized use of internet in class, please. You are asked to silence all cell phones. Digital and other electronic devices can be used only if dedicated to the purposes of this particular class. Any multi-tasking should be done the old-fashioned way: mentally—or through creative doodling.
TENTATIVE & FLEXIBLE COURSE OUTLINE

Sept 6  Forgiveness: combining aesthetics, ethics, and theology/religious thought (concepts and approaches, with examples from recent films)

Sept 13 Problems with forgiveness, imperatives of forgiveness. Wiesenthal, The Sunflower, Book One, pp. 3-98; classic and post-Holocaust Jewish ideas of forgiveness

Sept 20 Wiesenthal, selected responses to The Sunflower (to be assigned), printed in the same volume. R. Browning and Reed, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Courage, Chapter 2, pp. 48-74. The Reader (movie, 2008, Stephen Daldry, director; possible alternative for some students: reading the book The Reader by Bernhardt Schlink)


Oct 11 Emotions, aliens, and forgiveness. Shakespeare, The Tempest (Also recommended: contemporary film version with Helen Mirren as Prospero—! ). R. Browning and Reed, Chapter 4, pp. 99-123. Excerpts from DVD of documentary film Shakespeare Behind Bars.

Oct 18 1st READING WEEK

Oct 25 The music of forgiveness. Mozart, The Marriage of Figaro. (Recording or DVD your choice, see professor recommendations); also movie version of Peter Shaffer’s Amadeus.

Nov 1 Judgment and grace (putting God in the picture). Rembrandt’s Return of the Prodigal (Hermitage) and other works; Henri Nouwen, Return of the Prodigal (all). Film: The Mission [excerpts in class]. Student presentation (1).

Nov 8 Dying to forgive. Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych; Film excerpts, The Last Station. Student presentation (1)

Nov 22  2nd Reading Week (Thanksgiving Break)

Nov 29  The ends of forgiveness: closed and open

Dec. 5  To be determined. Student presentations (2)

Dec. 13**  Papers Due
Student presentations (2)
Film: The Straight Story [excerpts in class]

Dec. 20  Final Exam