History 3277: European Thought and Culture: The Twentieth Century
Spring 2018
Instructor: Prof. Kern

DESCRIPTION: A survey of the most dynamic period in all of Western cultural history, roughly 1890-1940, which saw a spectrum of revolutionary developments: modern art (Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kandinsky); modern literature (James Joyce, Marcel Proust); relativity and quantum theory (Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg); modern music (Arnold Schönberg, Igor Stravinsky); psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud); and existential philosophy (Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir). Smack in the middle was the hugely destructive First World War.

The first part centers on novellas by Joseph Conrad and Thomas Mann that foreshadow the decline of Western Civilization. The second part covers Friedrich Nietzsche and the “death of God”; my book on the impact of the telephone, wireless, cinema, automobile, airplane on time and space; and Virginia Woolf’s challenge to men and women in her classic feminist manifesto, A Room of One’s Own. The third part is divided between Freud’s efforts to diagnose and treat mental illness, Sartre’s analysis of what it means to be a human being, and De Beauvoir’s application of that philosophy to help explain why women in her time were “the second sex” and a proposal of how to equalize and enhance the humanity of both genders.

ASSIGNMENTS: Students write three papers (5 pages each) based on the readings and class discussions.

READINGS:
Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness
Thomas Mann, Death in Venice
Friedrich Nietzsche, Nietzsche and the Death of God, edited by Peter Fritzsch
Stephen Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918
Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own
Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (selections)
Jean-Paul Sartre, The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre (selections)
James Joyce, Ulysses (selections)

No prerequisites