

SCAND 480: Kierkegaard and Decadence in European Literature

Spring Quarter, 2007

Prof. Jan Sjøvik

Raitt 305N Phone: 543-0645 (office); (425) 333-4826 (home)

Office hours: TBA

Email: sjavik@u.washington.edu

This course has a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it will offer an introduction to Søren Kierkegaard's thought through reading and discussion of some of his core texts. Secondly, it will elucidate core European literary texts from the so-called decadent period. Hence, roughly the first half of the course will focus on *Either/Or*, parts I and II, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, and *Stages on Life's Way*. In addition to providing an introduction to Kierkegaard's thought, these readings will help us theorize decadence as a literary phenomenon in European and Scandinavian literature during the period of approximately 1880-1914. Our Kierkegaardian theory of decadence will emphasize loss of meaning, irony as a name for the distance between *Sinnverlust* and individual attempts at meaning creation, and the despair associated with the failure of such attempts.

The second half of the course will consider representative texts of the decadent period from the perspective of a Kierkegaardian conception of decadence. Can Kierkegaard help us read these texts in a more fruitful way? Can we develop a fuller perspective on Kierkegaard by studying decadent literature? Are there general implications of pursuing this local and specific instance of a dialectical relationship between philosophy and literature? Should we, in fact, try to bring literary and philosophical text into dialogue with each other at all? The texts that have been ordered include J.-K. Huysmans, *Against the Grain*, Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Arne Garborg, *Weary Men*, and Hjalmar Söderberg, *Doctor Glas*.

All texts are available at the University Book Store, but you may use any edition.

Grading: Your course grade will be based on class participation, including brief reports (50 percent), and a paper of approximately ten pages (50 percent). The paper may be devoted solely to a discussion of Kierkegaard's thought or be a more traditional critical and/or research paper that explores the relationship between Kierkegaard's thought and one or more of the four novels discussed in the course.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS:

Mar 26 M Introduction to the course. Kierkegaard's Danish background, his place in European intellectual history, and his influence on creative writers.

Mar 28 W The Kierkegaardian aesthete. *Either/Or*, part I, not including *The Seducer's Diary*.

Apr 2 M *Either/Or*, part I, cont.

Apr 4	W	<i>The Seducer's Diary.</i>
Apr 9	M	First hour only. The ethical man. <i>Either/Or</i> , part II.
Apr 11	W	Cont.
Apr 16	M	Kierkegaard's Abraham. <i>Fear and Trembling.</i>
Apr 18	W	<i>Repetition.</i>
Apr 23	M	<i>Stages on Life's Way</i> : "In Vino Veritas" and "Some Reflections on Marriage."
Apr 25	W	<i>Stages on Life's Way</i> : "Guilty/Not Guilty."
Apr 30	M	Catch-up day.
May 2	W	J.-K. Huysmans, <i>Against the Grain.</i>
May 7	M	<i>Against the Grain</i> , cont. Then on to Oscar Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray.</i>
May 9	W	First hour only. <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> , cont.
May 14	M	Arne Garborg, <i>Weary Men.</i>
May 16	W	<i>Weary Men</i> , cont. Then on to Hjalmar Söderberg, <i>Doctor Glas.</i>
May 21	M	Finish <i>Doctor Glas</i> . Begin viewing <i>Babette's Feast.</i>
May 23	W	Finish viewing and discuss <i>Babette's Feast.</i>
May 28	M	Memorial Day
May 30	W	Concluding observations. Brief presentation of paper projects.

Papers are due by 9 am on Thursday, June 7, 2007.