

Co n y Propos D ssec ng E

F c y e ers e no De Leon s r Co s B s op

den s os e B c d y n Corn e Ann Nes y nd eorge Zen er

Though the notion of Evil is not unique to any one culture, to any one time, Evil is usually understood through concepts of the forbidden (taboos), opprobrium, retribution, revenge, and punishment. In the West, since the advent of Christianity, Evil has been inseparable from the idea of original sin. Characterized by personal and particular notions of fidelity (to Jesus, saints, priests and, through feudalism, to kings), Christianity is incompatible with the notion of universalism, a characteristic of modern society (industrial, technological, bureaucratic, whether capitalist or socialist) which has replaced God with other absolutes such as the State, Race, Progress. Through this secularization of the notion of Evil, “sinning” against these absolutes constitutes an evil / criminal act in modern society. In this summer collaborative, we will explore questions such as: What is the nature of evil? What constitutes an evil act? Is evil necessary? Were the necessity for absolutes to dissipate, would the concept of evil also disappear? Why are representations of evil so prevalent in the arts?

In order to address these questions, our research community—made up of two faculty members and four students—will draw upon materials and methodologies from a variety of disciplines:

Proposed Budget

Book purchases/copying charges for central texts: \$600

Group trip to Portland to see *Wynona*

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E nd e De on c n E en r's Poetry

I have two goals for my participation in the LARC community this summer: first, to help develop the newly revised senior seminar in comparative literature with Gaetano DeLeonibus; second, to pursue my research on the poetry of Elena Shvarts, a central figure in late and post-Soviet Russian culture.

Last summer, with the help of a LARC curriculum grant, Gaetano, Amadou Fofana, Ortwin Knorr, and I redesigned the comparative literature senior seminar on the humanities seminar model. We aimed to create a more collaborative and truly comparative course which will bring together students from a variety of literature programs to study texts connected by a central theme. We thought particularly carefully about the type of writing and research assignments that we could scaffold throughout the course so that students would be equipped to write strong independent seminar papers by the end of the semester. The course, approved by Academic Programs this past fall, will be taught for the first time in spring '17 by Gaetano; the initial topic is evil. This summer Gaetano and I, along with our LARC student collaborators, will explore various theoretical and literary texts on evil. We will also test out and refine the writing and research assignments we have planned for the senior seminar.

These pedagogical goals reflect my faculty role in the collaborative, but I will also take on a student role, conducting my own research on evil and the demonic in Elena Shvarts's poetry.

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O ec E n od ess or d

The calamities of the early 20th century stripped Europeans of their moral foundations based within the Enlightenment and Christian tradition, encouraging the rise of existentialism and thus the dismantling of what were once seen as ethical absolutes, like good and evil. Hannah Arendt, one of the most remarkable thinkers of this time, deviated from existentialism's fundamental claim of relativity in her book *On Violence* when she proclaimed totalitarianism as an "objective evil." The identification of an absolute evil by an existentialist lead me to wonder how else Arendt, in a philosophical niche founded on the concept of universal relativity, wrestles with evil? Furthermore, can her secular and political comprehension of evil provide a new lens for addressing the human rights abuse, corruption, and indifference that plagues our unprecedentedly godless 20th and 21st century? I will use Arendt's *On Violence*, *On Revolution*, and *Men in Evil* to guide me in exploring my questions. By focusing on the ways she identifies evil, its socio-political forms, catalysts, and antithesis: objective good, I can investigate the mind of a wildly transformative philosopher.

I first encountered Arendt in my 20th century European thought course, where we read authors from Heidegger to Fanon in the context of the 20th century intellectual crisis. Not only did I learn

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and writings of Black Nationalists and Muslim activists because these people endeavored to present blackness and Islam as good rather than evil.

This research contributes to the collective's goal of understanding how conceptions of evil function in religious and national realms. The professors' expertise would nuance my project as