AS.100.392
The Art of Lying: Lie, Dissimulation, and the "Fake News" in Pre-modern Europe
Tuesdays, 1:30-4:00

Classroom:
Prof. Pawel Maciejko
Classroom: Gilman 77
Office Hours: Tues 4-5
Email: pmaciej1@jhu.edu

Course Description:

This course will examine the attitudes to lie, falsity, and dissimulation in pre-modern European society. We shall begin by exploring the concepts of lie and discussions of permissibility of lying in canonical texts of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We shall focus on the texts composed between the 16th and the 18th centuries and explore questions posed by theologians (“Is lying always a sin?”), “Can one lie to protect lives?”, “Can God lie?”), philosophers and politicians (“Are the rulers subject to different morality than the ruled?”, “Are politicians bound to lie?”), and courtiers (“Is not telling the truth a necessary part of being polite?”, “Is all civility based on falsehood?”). We shall then move beyond the question of lying and probe the questions of dissimulation, self-fashioning, and false or invented identities. We shall end with a discussion of early romantic “cult of sincerity”.

Learning Goals:

The main goal of this course is to acquaint the student with an important historical phenomenon. However, in an age in which the questions of the permissibility of lying and self-invented identities are on a foray, the course may have some contemporary significance.

Required Texts:


Course Requirements:
This seminar puts heavy emphasis on close reading and careful analysis of the reading assignments. The reading assignments listed below a given session should be completed by the date under which they appear.

The final decision on any grade derives from my global assessment of your work and cannot be quantified exactly. Roughly speaking, however, the breakdown is as follows:
- Participation: 40%
- First assignment (3-pages): 20%
- One 10-page final paper: 40%

No extensions will be granted without my prior permission, and late papers will be graded lower at the rate of one grade-step per day (A to A-, A- to B+, etc). Needless to say, complete honesty and probity in your work is a must. For information, see http://ethics.jhu.edu

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact Dr. Richard Sanders, in Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

01/29: Christian foundations

Readings:

The New Testament, Galatians 2-3


02/05: Jewish foundations

Readings:

Hebrew Bible, Genesis 18:12-13; 50:16-17
Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 65b, Ketubot 16b


02/12: Muslim Foundations
Readings:


**Assignment:** write a brief comparison of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim attitudes to lying.

02/19 No Class

02/26: Machiavelli and Raison D'etat

Readings:


03/05: Nicodemism and Crypto-Catholicism

Readings:


**Assignment due**

**03/12: Court Culture**

Readings:


**03/26: The Conversos and Crypto-Judaism**

Readings:


**04/02: Theatre of the World**

Readings:

Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream*


04/09: Dissimulating in the New World

Readings:


04/16: Casuistry and Mental Reservation

Readings:


04/23: Libertinism

Readings:

Movie: Milos Forman, Valmont (1989)

04/30: The Rhetoric of Frankness

Readings:

