

Call for Papers

The Aesthetics of Suffering

November 23-24, 2012
Department of English
National Taipei University of Technology
Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

Keynote Speakers:

Laura Quinney, Brandeis University

William Flesch, Brandeis University

Art and suffering are intricately entwined. An experience from which life cannot escape, suffering is a subject to which artists return repeatedly. From Sophocles to Augustine to Dante to Adorno, the aesthetes, theologians, and philosophers of western culture have tried to understand human pain and, through understanding and aesthetic transformation, pursue solace for such affliction. From the popular image of the artist who suffers for, because of, or through his art, to the works which define the nature and the limits of human pain, to the aesthetic image which transforms that pain into beauty, the aesthetics of suffering have a rich history in theory and in practice. This conference will explore the varied means by which art has confronted the suffering which, in one form or another, one degree or another, touches the lives of everyone, artist and non-artist, citizen and philosopher alike. Our discussions will be organized around two central questions: (1) How has art contributed to our understanding—or exposed the limits of our capacity to understand—the nature of human suffering and pain? (2) In its attempt to provide us understanding or offer us consolation, how does a work of art manage to transform an image or experience of pain into an image or experience of beauty?

Such questions about suffering and its aesthetic representations are relevant to virtually every period of literary and aesthetic history. As an aesthetic and philosophical problem, the topic is one of concern to scholars in various disciplines across the humanities, from philosophers to aestheticians to theologians to historians. A very human subject, it is one which touches any observer of art or of the world. Therefore the Department of English of National Taipei University invites papers from across the disciplines which explore compelling questions about the (moral and practical) limits of artistic representations, the paradoxical generation of beauty from pain, or any other aspect of the aesthetics of suffering. Possible paper topics include (but are not limited to):

- The aesthetics of torture, damnation, hell, and the Crucifixion
- Human suffering and Redemption
- The elevation of tragedy
- Psychological and physical pain
- War literature
- Desensitization (gore and excessive violence, pushing boundaries)
- Representing the Holocaust (insufficient representations, the limits of art)
- Sadism and masochism
- Existentialism and modern angst
- The problem of evil and of pain
- Suffering artists
- The Passions
- Cycles of affliction: vengeance, anger, grief
- Melancholy
- Stoicism and the virtues of suffering
- Poetics of suffering
- Feminist literature
- Postcolonial literature
- African-American literature
- Life Writing

Please email 250-300 word abstracts by **August 1** to: 50149@mail.ntut.edu.tw. Abstracts should include name and affiliation, email address, postal address, and telephone number. Participants will be notified by August 15. The deadline for the submission of the completed papers is **November 12**.