

ITALIAN STUDIES/MUSIC 204W

The Sound of Silence: Music, Literature, and European Modernity

Fall 2025

Monday and Wednesday 2:30 pm to 3:45 pm

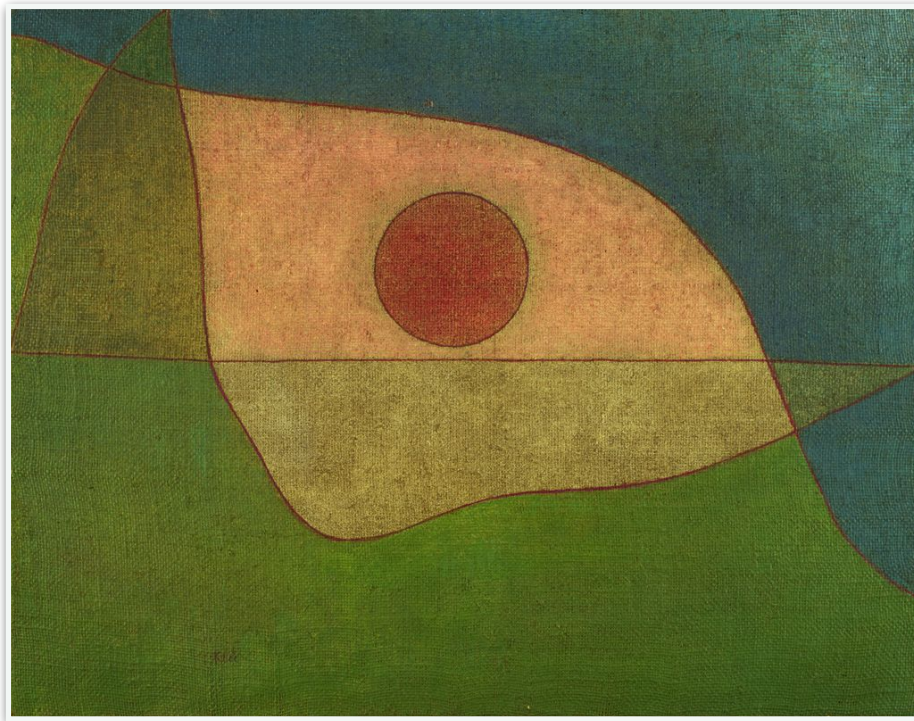
Instructor: Cecily Cai

Email: ccai@hamilton.edu

Office: Christian A. Johnson Hall 209

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 12 to 1 pm and by appointment

You are welcome to come and see me with or without questions. If you would like to meet outside my OHs, please email me directly.



Paul Klee, *Blick der Stille* (Gaze of Silence), 1932

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course explores the nature of silence in literature and music as a way to understand how sound, or lack thereof, comes to shape European modernity. We will discuss the history of silence as a philosophical concept, as a response to crisis, alienation and negation, gendered muteness, as well as the aesthetics of dissonance.

This is a writing-intensive course. All texts will be read and discussed in English. Students with reading knowledge of foreign languages are encouraged to read primary sources in the original language.

Course Requirements

Throughout the term, you will complete **three essays** and **five creative assignments**. There will also be **a final project** to be presented during the last week of class. Readings will be provided as PDFs on Blackboard (Documents), and there will be a course playlist on Spotify (link to be provided during the first week of class).

Essays: The writing process will start from outlines and paragraphs. You are welcome to meet with me or sign up for a peer tutoring appointment at the Writing Center. I will discuss general writing concerns in class. After you turn in your essay, you will receive feedbacks from me on how to strengthen your arguments and improve the flow of your writing. In addition, you may also receive feedbacks from your classmates during in-class peer review sessions.

Your first two essays (4-5 double-spaced pages) will be on specific aspects of our course readings and discussions. Your third and final essay (7-8 double-spaced pages) will grow out of an interdisciplinary and/or comparative project. In preparation for your final essay, I encourage you to meet with me to discuss and narrow down your topic.

Creative assignments: You will complete **two individual annotation assignments** and **two group podcast assignments**. There will be two separate workshops during class (see calendar below) to walk you through these assignments.

Annotation: You will choose a segment of music (between 30 seconds and 1 minute) and provide a written description of the music. Your annotation should communicate to an audience to whom the music is not accessible. By the end of Sunday, you should submit your written annotation on Blackboard with segment (track name and time range). During class the following Monday, I will present the submitted annotations anonymously and ask you to rank the annotations based on a given rubric. One bonus point (1% on top your final grade) will be awarded to the best annotation and half a point to the second best (0.5%).

Podcast: You will form a group of 3 or 4 to talk about a recent object (e.g. an image, a video, an article, a book, etc.) that speaks to a particular aspect of silence. The length of the podcast should be between 2 to 3 minutes. You will upload your podcast to Blackboard together with a short written statement that includes a title for this podcast, a short summary, and each participant's contribution. In the class after each podcast is due (**September 21** and **October 21**), each group will present their podcast to class with a short introduction.

There will be two in-class workshops on podcast production (**September 15** and **October 6**)

Final project: Near the end of the semester, each of you will create a short wordless film (at least 3 minutes). You will then use a soundtrack (preferably wordless) and provide a subtitle when the video is playing, as if you were annotating the film. You will need to submit a written proposal for your final project by **November 21 with a written explanation (up to 300-500 words)** that explains your project and how it addresses silence and/or how it relates to our class discussions throughout the semester. You need to submit your final project to me by **December 7**, and all your video clips will be presented during our last class of the semester on **December 10**. There will also be an in-class video workshop on **November 17**.

Grading

10%	Attendance
10%	Participation
15%	Essay 1
15%	Essay 2
20%	Essay 3
20%	Annotation (3% each) and Podcast (7% each: 5% submission + 2% presentation)
10%	Final project

Required Books

- Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (Trans. Philip Boehm) ISBN: 978-0811228725

Course Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is essential for success in this course. You may miss three classes without these absences affecting your grade. If you have more than three unexcused absences, your final grade will be dropped by half a letter grade for every class missed. For example: a B becomes a B- with the third unexcused absence, a C+ on the fourth, etc.

Classroom: Please observe normal rules of courtesy in class and refrain from engaging in disruptive behavior. Repeated and unjustified late arrivals and early departures will result in the lowering of your participation grade.

Special Note on Participation: This course is conducted in the style of a seminar. It is essential that you arrive not only punctually but also prepared to discuss the required readings with your classmates. Eating or checking messages, looking at non-course related materials, etc., are not allowed. Laptops and tablets are allowed only for course materials. Cell phones must be turned off during class. Lack of engagement in class will affect your participation grade. I welcome and encourage contribution from everyone in class, but please be respectful when others are speaking. That means if you would like to respond to someone's questions or comments, please wait until that person is done speaking. You may also raise your hand, and I will invite you to speak when it is your turn.

Late Assignments: I will specify assignments at the end of each class. Readings must be completed **by the start of each class**. All other assignments must be turned in by the due date (11:59 pm Eastern Time) indicated on the calendar below. It is also your responsibility to check **Blackboard Announcements** should any changes be made to the assignments. Late assignments will be lowered by half a grade for each day that they are late within a three-day range. For each day it is late, your grade will be lowered by half a letter grade. After the third day, the assignment will no longer be accepted. If you need extra time for your assignments due to anything personal or health-related, please contact me in advance.

Honor Code

Please refer to the Honor Code website: <https://www.hamilton.edu/student-handbook/studentconduct/honor-code>. Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course and will be immediately reported to the Honor Court.

Statement on Special Needs

Hamilton College will make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation(s) and would like to make a formal request for this course, please make sure to let me know within the first week of class. You will need to provide Allen Harrison, Associate Dean of Students (aharriso@hamilton.edu) with appropriate documentation of your disability.

Writing Support

In this writing-intensive course, you will be trained to write effectively and cite properly. Other than in-class writing tutorials, peer review sessions and individual draft meetings with me, I encourage you to seek support from peer tutoring at the Writing Center (Kirner-Johnson 152 wcpapers@hamilton.edu). You will be required to sign up for at least one appointment (for either your first or second essay) at the Writing Center by **November 7**. Please note that you will need to have a full draft in hand before your appointment.

Research Support

Ask a librarian or research tutor for help with your research for this class. You can drop by the Research and Design Studio in Burke Library or contact your library liaison, Kristin Strohmeyer (kstrohme@hamilton.edu). She will be able to help you find and evaluate relevant sources, find high quality graphics and images, effectively cite sources according to our discipline and copyright standards, and successfully make use of library resources and services.

Technical Support

We will have three in-class workshops (**September 15 / October 6 / November 17**) conducted by Mike Revenaugh (mrevenau@hamilton.edu) and Forrest Warner (fwarner@hamilton.edu). Unless otherwise stated, these workshops will take place in the Couper Classroom on the first floor of Burke Library. They will provide you with the tools and information you need to complete your creative assignments.

In addition, there are peer tutors to help you with any issues you may have with your digital projects. You can drop in or sign up for appointments (“Make an Appointment” at the bottom of this page: <https://www.hamilton.edu/offices/lits/research-instructional-design/team-members/student-tutors>).

CALENDAR*

Week	Texts	Assignments
Week 1 September 1, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jhumpa Lahiri, “Jubilee” [PDF and URL] Zadie Smith, “The Silence” [PDF and URL] Alain Corbin, <i>A History of Silence: From the Renaissance to the Present Day</i> (excerpt) [PDF] Heinrich Böll, “Murke’s Collected Silences” [PDF] 	Guest lecture survey (due September 7)
Week 2 September 8 September 10 (Guest Speaker: Marlene HeiB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wim Wenders, <i>Wings of Desire</i> [Kanopy] David Caldwell and Paul W. Rea, “Handke’s and Wenders’s <i>Wings of Desire</i>: Transcending Postmodernism” [PDF] Rainer Maria Rilke, “To Music” & “You Must Not Understand This Life” & “Sonnet I, 1” from <i>The Sonnets to Orpheus, The Duino Elegies</i> (selections) [URL/PDF] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Wanderer’s Nightsong II” (“Wanderers Nachtlid II”) [URL] Friedrich Schlegel, “Sunset” (“Abendröte”) [URL] Franz Schubert, “Abendröte” D. 690; “Wanderers Nachtlid II” D. 768 [Spotify] Jane K. Brown, “In the beginning was poetry” from <i>The Cambridge Companion to the Lied</i> [PDF] James Parsons, “Introduction: why the Lied?” from <i>The Cambridge Companion to the Lied</i> [PDF] 	Prepare for the podcast workshop
Week 3 September 15 (podcast workshop #1) September 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ingeborg Bachmann, selected poems [PDF] Paul Celan, “Death Fugue” [PDF and URL] *Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” [PDF] J. M. Coetzee, “Paul Celan and His Translators” from <i>Inner Workings</i> [PDF] George Steiner, <i>The Poetry of Thought</i> – 8 [PDF] Wim Wenders, <i>Anselm</i> [Kanopy] 	Podcast #1 (due September 21)
Week 4 September 22 September 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ingeborg Bachmann, <i>Malina</i> (chapters 1 and 2) 	Annotation #1 (due September 28)
Week 5 September 29 October 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ingeborg Bachmann, <i>Malina</i> (chapter 3) Richard Wagner, <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> [Met Opera on Demand] 	Essay #1 (due October 5)

Week	Texts	Assignments
Week 6 October 6 (podcast workshop #2) October 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “The Letter of Lord Chandos” [PDF] • J. M. Coetzee, “Postscript” from <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> [PDF] • Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i> (selections) [PDF] • Robert Musil, <i>The Man without Qualities</i> (chapter 1) [PDF] • Carl Schorske, <i>Fin-de-siècle Vienna</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • George Steiner, <i>The Poetry of Thought</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Richard Cockett, <i>Vienna: How the City of Ideas Created the Modern World</i> [PDF] • Arnold Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 2 [Spotify] 	
Week 7 October 13 October 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stefan Zweig, <i>The World of Yesterday</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Stefan Zweig, selected short stories [PDF] • André Aciman, Introduction to <i>Journey into the Past</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Eric Kandel, <i>The Age of Insight</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Richard Strauss, <i>Der Rosenkavalier</i> [Met Opera On Demand] 	Podcast #2 (due October 21)
Week 8 October 20 October 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Franz Kafka, “The Silence of the Sirens” [PDF] • Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> (Book XII) [PDF] • Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> Book VI (Tereus, Procne and Philomela) [URL] • Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment” from <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> [PDF] 	Annotation #2 (due October 26)
Week 9 October 27 October 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boethius, <i>Fundamentals of Music</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Ovid, <i>Heroides</i> 10 (Ariadne) [URL] • Claudio Monteverdi, <i>Lamento d'Arianna</i> [Spotify] • Richard Strauss, <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> [Met Opera on Demand] • Isak Dinesen, “The Dreamers” from <i>Seven Gothic Tales</i> [URL] • Adriana Cavarero, <i>For More than One Voice</i> (excerpt) [PDF] 	
Week 10 November 3 November 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dante, <i>Vita nuova</i> (excerpt) [URL] • Petrarch, <i>Il canzoniere</i> (selections) [PDF] • Gaspara Stampa, <i>Rime</i> (selections) [PDF] • Veronica Franco, <i>Terze Rime</i> (selections) [PDF] • Barbara Johnson, “Muteness Envy” [PDF] 	Writing Center appointment (due November 7) Essay #2 (due November 9)
Week 11 November 10 November 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anna Banti, <i>Artemisia</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Natalia Ginzburg, “Speech on Women” and “Silence” [PDF] • Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” [PDF] 	Prepare for the video workshop

Week	Texts	Assignments
Week 12 November 17 (video workshop) November 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> 10 (Orpheus and Eurydice) [URL] • Alda Merini, selected poems and “Translator’s Introduction” from <i>Love Lessons</i> [PDF] • George Steiner, <i>Language and Silence</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Luchino Visconti, <i>Death in Venice</i> [Blackboard] 	Final project proposal (due November 21)
	THANKSGIVING RECESS	
Week 13 December 1 December 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Franz Kafka, “The Bucket Rider” [PDF] • Italo Calvino, “Lightness” from <i>Six Memos for the next Millennium</i> [PDF] • Eugenio Montale, selected poems [PDF] • Mary Jacobus, <i>Reading Cy Twombly</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Daniel Albright, “Comparative Arts” from <i>Panaesthetics</i> [PDF] • Corinna Beltz, <i>Peter Handke: In the Woods, Might be Late</i> [online] 	Final project (due December 7) Essay 3 (due December 10)
Week 14 December 8 December 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giacomo Leopardi, “The Infinite” [URL] • Luciano Berio, <i>Remembering the Future</i> (selections) [PDF] • John Cage, <i>Silence: Lectures and Writings</i> (excerpt) [PDF] • Italo Calvino, <i>Mr. Palomar</i> (selections) & “Exactitude” from <i>Six Memos for the Next Millennium</i> [PDF] • Susan Sontag, “The Aesthetics of Silence” [URL] • Luigi Nono, <i>Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima</i> [Spotify] 	Final project presentation (in class on December 10)

***subject to change**