

# Beauty, a troublesome transcendental

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Centre for Thought of John Paul II (Warsaw)  
Instituto de Filosofía "Edith Stein" - International Academy of Philosophy (Granada)  
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Course offered in the framework of the  
International Summer School (1-7. 09. 2014):

*Beyond secular faith*  
*The Body*

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## I. DESCRIPTION

Beauty is the most ambiguous and troublesome of all transcendentals. It is rooted in matter and visible in material things, thus appealing not only to the human mind and soul but also to carnal appetites. That is why it can both exalt, transforming the human soul, or debase, sinking it into depths of sin and despair. Such dialectics has been noticed by many artists and thinkers throughout European history.

Different solutions to "the beauty problem" can be traced in literature and the way it describes a man's love for a woman. If Dante was describing his pure love towards Beatrice as a theological figure, Thomas Mann was lamenting that art and transgression are tragically intertwined. Dostoyevsky pointed out that a man in pursuit of a woman balances somewhere between the ideal of the Madonna and the ideal of Sodom. Is pure, divine love between man and woman possible at all? Are artists condemned to transgression? Will beauty save the world, as Dostoyevsky insisted?

## II. OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the variety of problems related to the tension between ethics and aesthetics
2. To be able to recognise crucial philosophical ideas in literature

## II. CONTENTS

- Love that exalts. Dante and Beatrice. T.S. Eliot.
- Petrarchism. Love becomes incarnate.
- Dostoyevsky. Beauty that saves the world.
- Thomas Mann and the problem of artistic transgression.
- Witold Gombrowicz. Pornography as an anthropological project.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

Seminar discussion  
Commentary of texts

## V. EVALUATION

Participation in the discussion

## VI. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Random House, 1995; also available online)

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (multiple editions)

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (multiple editions)

Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World* (Crestwood, New York: SVS Press, 1994)

Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Ash Wednesday* (available online)

Witold Gombrowicz, *Pornografia. A Novel*, trans. Danuta Borchartd (New York: Grove Press, 2010)

Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, trans. Lillian Vallee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012)

Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (multiple editions)

Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice* (multiple editions)

The Essential Petrarch, trans. Peter Hainsworth (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010)

Barbara Reynolds, *Dante. The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dante and His Circle* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1892)