The concept of artistic genius, which came to prominence in the late eighteenth century, has drawn searching revisions in musicology and the wider academic and popular culture over the last decades. The main articles of such critiques are as follows: Genius encourages idolatry and scorns the needs of daily life. Genius is unreliable because it is a concept. Genius is fed by an outdated view of art-works and authorship. Genius acts as a screen over ruder impulses like vanity or avarice. Genius pertains only to physical or social cause and not immaterial reason, in which case its questions must be referred to the scientist quantifying the brain’s mechanisms or the sociologist recording culture’s processes, and not the humanist contemplating the mind’s activity.

This seminar will test these claims from various perspectives—conceptual, historiographical, exegetical, biographical, analytical—against the record of early Mozart reception and eighteenth-century and Romantic thought more widely. At the same time, participants are encouraged to explore any related item, from any number of eras or viewpoints, especially from the area of art history.

Texts: Most texts will be available online, but you should consider purchasing the following:


Requirements

1. Leading discussion on a reading: 10%
2. Presentation and commentary (ca. 1,000 wds)
   - on primary text: 20%
3. Report on term paper: 10%
4. Term paper: 60%

The term paper will have the following components: 1) an in-class oral presentation based on your research; 2) a provisional thesis, and bibliography, due February 28th; and 3) the finished paper, due the last day of the semester. I will then return your essays, within three days, with comments and then accept a finale, revised paper by the last day of the semester.

Schedule

9 Jan. Introduction. (Please do the reading in advance of the first class.)

16 Jan. Presentation from Professor John Hatch, Visual Arts. Readings TBD

30 Jan. Genius in older ephemeral literature
For this session, please present on a passage on genius from a non-English source, ideally prior to 1900.
Your presentation should discuss how the concept is used. You may also want to discuss challenges of translation (or even transcription) and, as much as possible, the nature of the source you chose: who wrote it, for what audience, and with what kind of authority or reputation.

6 Feb. Genius during the Goethezeit

13 Feb. The genius at work

20 Feb. Reading week

27 Feb. Genius, the exclusion of subjectivity, and the dispersal of agency
Listen to Mozart, String Quintet in G minor, K. 516:1 and Boccherini Quintet in E-flat, Op. 27 no. 4, G. 304.

5 March. Kant. Guest presentation by Corey Dyck, Department of Philosophy.

12 March. Genius and history

19 March. Genius, experience, and evil

26 March. Presentations or TBD

2 April. Presentations.