

# EXOTIC SCENTS: CROSS-CULTURAL AESTHETICS OF SMELL

SHUM 4952, ASIAN 4495

Spring 2011. 4 credits.

Instructor: James McHugh (jmchugh@usc.edu)

Tues 10:10 - 12:00



This course is a cross-cultural exploration of the aesthetics of smell, the technologies of affecting smell (i.e. perfumery), and the demand for exotic aromatics. We will consider the theory of the aesthetics of smell in a variety of regions and periods including, for example, the work of Kant, early South Asian sources, as well as more recent studies by perfumers, philosophers, and anthropologists. We also explore the long-globalized art of perfumery and the important international demand for exotic aromatics such as musk and sandalwood. Students will pursue individual research projects, and they are *highly* encouraged to bring their own area-expertise to this exploratory seminar. Not only does the seminar take a cross-cultural perspective on the aesthetics of smell, but we will also focus on the importance of exotic aromatics and perfumes in global olfactory material culture. From the writings of Theophrastus to Jacques Guerlain's perfume Shalimar, European olfactory aesthetics has long gained prestige from acknowledging the Eastern origins and exotic Oriental aura of key materials, such as spikenard and sandalwood. Medieval South Asians, on the other hand, celebrated the Western regions as the fragrant lands of frankincense and coral. We will consider discourses and practices involving exotic perfumes in several areas, including Medieval Europe, China, as well as the history of musk in Islam. What is the connection between the exotic and the aesthetic in perfumery? How do such non-Western discourses of luxurious foreign lands complicate our notions of a Western Orientalist point of view? As the study of many of these questions is still quite neglected, this course provides students in a number of disciplines opportunities to make original and important contributions to their fields.

**Required Texts:**

Freeman, Paul. Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination. Yale University Press. 2009.

Corbin, Alain. The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination. Harvard University Press. 1988.

Drobnick, Jim. The Smell Culture Reader. Berg Publishers. 2006.

*All other readings will be provided to the class as .pdf documents, or are available through the Cornell library catalog.*

**Requirements and Grading:**

Class Participation and <b>three short</b> presentations based on reading:	30%
<b>One longer</b> final class presentation on research project:	30%
<b>One</b> final research paper, 20 pages:	40%

**Office Hours:**

Mondays 10:00-12:00.  
Office, A.D. White House, Room 216.

**Week 1**

Tues 25 Jan

Introduction to Course**Week 2**

Tues 1 Feb

Studying Smell and Aromatics: Overview

Reading:

The Foul and the Fragrant: Introduction.

The Smell Culture Reader: Ch. 11, 18, 20.

Out of the East: Introduction.

**Week 3**

Tues 8 Feb

Smelling class and lecture by perfumer Christophe Laudamiel.

Reading: TBA

**Week 4**

Tues Feb 15

The Perfumes of the Ancient World

Reading:

Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Scenting Salvation, selections.Beatrice Caseau, Euodia, selections.

Jean-Pierre Brun, "The Production of Perfumes in Antiquity: The Cases of Delos and Paestum"

*American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), pp. 277-308.**Week 5**

Tues Feb 22

The Perfumes of Paradise in Medieval EuropeReading: Out of the East**Week 6**

Tues March 1

Smell and Perfumery in France

Reading:

Corbin, The Foul and the Fragrant,Selections from Huysmans, Against Nature.Stamelman, Perfume: Joy, Obsession, Scandal, Sin, selections.

**Week 7**

Tues March 8

Perfumery in India

Reading:

James McHugh, book ms. selections,  
Selected translations from Sanskrit Indian poetry.**Week 8**

Tues March 15

Exotic Aromatics in India

Reading:

James McHugh, book ms. selections.  
Asiatick Researches, selections.**NO CLASS TUES MARCH 22: SPRING BREAK****Week 9**

Tues March 29

Musk and Islamic Perfumery

Reading:

Anya King, selected writings on musk and Islamic perfumery.

**Week 10**

Tues April 5

Aromatics in China and Japan

Reading:

Needham, Science and Civilization in China, on perfumery.  
Schafer, The Golden Peaches of Samarkand, selections.  
Smell Culture Reader: Ch. 28.  
Bedini, Trail of Time, selections.

**Week 11**

Tues April 12

Aromatics Today, Synthetic and Natural

Reading: TBA

**Week 12**

Tues April 19

Student Presentations

**Week 13**

Tues April 26

Student Presentations

**Week 14**

Tues May 3

Student Presentations

**LAST DAY OF CLASSES: SAT MAY 7.****FINAL PAPER DUE: WEDS 11 MAY.**