This class meets with JSTU-J 203. Well known as historical figures, both Hitler and Anne Frank long ago began to take on symbolic dimensions—he as the twentieth century’s leading personification of evil, and she as girlhood innocence despoiled by unspeakable anguish and condemned to an early death. In novels, stories, poems, plays, films, and other media, their images have evolved in interesting ways over time and in different cultures. This course encourages students to critically examine these changes and, in so doing, to learn how history is penetrated by the shaping powers of imagination and transfigured into something like a modern mythology. Students in this course will learn how to become critically engaged with a range of literary and other artistic genres and to see how complex a phenomenon the representation of the past can be. Given the two figures we will be focusing on—the first, a major perpetrator of genocidal crimes, the second, the most celebrated and cherished of teenage victims—students will be encouraged to think hard about questions of good and evil.

Readings for the course will include historical materials on Hitler and Anne Frank; fictional treatments of both figures, such as George Steiner’s novel about Hitler, THE PORTAGE TO SAN CRISTOBAL OF A.H., and Philip Roth’s novel about Anne Frank, THE GHOST WRITER; Anne Frank’s famous diary, THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL, as well as dramatic and cinematic versions of the same; at least one movie about Hitler; and more.

Writing assignments will include a mix of medium-length papers written outside of class and in-class examinations.