The Fantastic Enlightenment!
GE 21CW (Spring 2014) • Covel 218, M 3:00-5:50pm

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Office Hours: Mondays, 1:00-3:00, Hum. A97

A malevolent demon whose trickery makes your knowledge impossible; a floating island where human knowledge thrives; a horrifying dream that contains the key to secret desires. Modern thought is born out of the imagination, made possible by an ability to envision that the world we inhabit is in fact, stranger than fiction. In this course, we will examine the presumed opposition between reason and fancy that often extends even to our own time, arguing that fantastic ways of thinking were crucial to the Enlightenment and its legacy, enabling the fanciful projection of philosophical and scientific ideas that would overturn accepted paradigms. In short—and drawing on recent work that argues for thinking of Enlightenment as an event in the “history of mediation”—fantasy is a tool for thinking that the world might be otherwise. We will therefore look to place philosophical treatises and movements in dialogue with the narratives and thought-experiments that made them possible, or indeed, resisted their insights. In the process, we’ll think about the nature of enchantment and disenchantment in the period, gain some facility with key theoretical concepts and add complexity to our account of the relation between fiction and non-fiction in the period.

Course Requirements and Grading

Weekly Précis/Web Responses (20%): You are required to post a short (400-word) response to each week’s readings on our course’s web-discussion board. Responses can be practical or theoretical, and may present your own argument or respond to another person’s post. The object of this is to initiate a running dialogue between the seminar’s participants, orient our weekly meetings, and begin laying the groundwork for final papers. Think of it as practice in thesis-writing, and think of each response as the possible kernel of a later paper. Towards this, and in order to help you all in this practice, I will provide a model by beginning the discussion during the first two weeks, after which I will comment as necessary or appropriate. This is strictly pass/fail; all responses must note the precise word count and be posted by 8pm on Sundays.

Movie Review Exercise (10%): All students will be required to write a movie review of a film that explores one or several of the key concepts discussed in class. This movie review will have a strict 800-word limit and adhere to the form’s standard conventions. Whereas the weekly précis are designed to get you formulating rapid-fire theses each week, we will be using this exercise as practice for writing the sort of descriptive, sharp prose expected in those close analytical readings that will feature in the final paper. We will discuss in class the options for films to be viewed, although students may suggest their own in consultation with me.

Paper Building Projects (20%): Beginning in week seven, we will work collaboratively on your final papers through a series of in-class workshops. These will be designed to tackle different skills for writing the short critical essay such as crafting the argument, researching and utilizing scholarly sources, and editing for style and content. Students will be given tasks to complete in anticipation of these projects and will be expected to share work-in-progress with others in the...
class. While these projects are pass/fail, they will culminate in the final draft of the essay (see below)

**Final Paper (30%):** You are required to write a final paper (approx. 10pp.) on a topic of your choice. While I give you broad discretion about the paper’s topic and/or scope, I do ask that you consult with me first once you have a sense of your thesis or interests. Students may, in consultation with me, write on an appropriate text other than those on the schedule. NB: papers should be correctly footnoted, references cited, and body proofread in 12-point font.

**Class Participation (20%):** Seminars depend on the participation of its members, so your participation is a key component of each week’s work. Expect to talk regularly in class, to ask questions, and to answer them when called upon.

*We will close all class sessions with “One-Minute-Papers.” These are half-sheet impromptu reflections on the day’s work that serve also as a record of your attendance. Typically, you will write a few sentences about what you learned that day, questions that remain or points of clarification or general class concerns you’d like me to address.

Repeated and/or unexcused absences necessarily affect your class participation so ensure that you are on-time and ready to contribute to each session.

**Suggestions and Academic Honesty**

**Conferences/Contact:** While all students are required to see me re: paper ideas, I also recommend you come see me at least once this quarter besides. If you need to speak to me, and you absolutely cannot come during my office hours, we will arrange another time to meet. Note that I will be unable to help you with a paper if you approach me less than 48 hours before it’s due. You are always welcome and encouraged to contact me via email. I will respond within 48 hours. Talking through paper ideas is an excellent way to start formulating a debatable thesis, so don’t hesitate to get in contact—that’s what I’m here for.

**Plagiarism:** Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate attribution is a serious offense. Do not do this. Those who plagiarize will be reported to the dean and may be subject to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assignment and/or course. If you are concerned that you may be plagiarizing another’s work, please talk to me.

**Required Texts**

More, Bacon, Neville, *Three Early Modern Utopias* (Penguin)  
Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings* (Penguin)  
Voltaire, *Candide, Zadig and Selected Stories* (Signet)  
Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (Avon/Psychology Today)  
Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (Penguin)  
PDFs of Primary and Secondary Material on Course Website
Schedule of Readings

Week One: The Fantasy of Modernity, or What Does it Mean to be Disenchanted?


Week Two: Waking Lives and Malevolent Demons


  * Waking Life (2001)

Week Three: Enlightened Utopias

- Bacon, The New Atlantis (1624); Neville, Isle of Pines (1668)

  * Lost Horizon (1937), Soylent Green (1973), Logan’s Run (1976)

Week Four: Me, Myself, and I-dentity


Week Five: Human Nature on a Floating Island

- Swift, Gulliver’s Travels, Books 1, 3, & 4, pp. 15-66, 129-250 (1726)

Week Six: Optimism and Irony in the Best of All Possible Worlds

- Leibniz, Monadology (1714), § 1-58; Voltaire, Candide, pp. 1-96 (1759), Zadig, pp. 164-73 (1747)


Movie Review Due in Class

Week Seven: The Malevolent Demon (Re)turns a Romantic

- Goethe, Faust: A Tragedy (1808), Part I, pp. 4-133

  * Faust (2011)

Workshop: Researching a Topic and its Secondary Sources
Week Eight: The Things Dreams Know


**Workshop: Pitching the Thesis Statement**

Week Nine: The Future Evolution of Class Struggle

- Wells, *The Time Machine*, pp. 5-71 (1895)


**Workshop: Editing the Draft and Upping your Style Game**

NB: Week 9 to be rescheduled due to Memorial Day; time and location TBD

Week Ten: Buggin’ Out over Existentialism, and a Brief Coda on All of Reality


  *The Matrix* (1999)