

CORE 200: Liberal Arts Reading Salon

Dr. Andrew Hakim

Down the Rabbit Hole: Other Histories, Other Worlds

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.
—Albert Einstein

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said "one ca'n't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

This salon will examine the proliferation of “alternate” realities in contemporary texts, and the ways novels and films that use such backdrops speak to our own world and lives. Throughout the semester, we will consider several questions. What, for instance, is the value of exploring ordinary life in extraordinary settings? Are texts that present other histories and other worlds simply forms of escapism, or do they instead raise questions about the “reality” of reality? Why do these novels and films resonate so strongly with contemporary audiences, and what does their popularity say about our struggle to understand the human condition? Investigating discourses of the self and identity, the imaginary and the real, and epistemology and the limits of the knowable, we will look at a range of texts from dystopian near-futures to divergent histories to worlds where magic is real and the everyday is uncanny.

We will finalize a reading/viewing list once the semester begins, but possible texts include:

Texts

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. (1986) Anchor Books, 1998.

Chabon, Michael. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. Harper Perennial, 2008.

Moore, Alan. *Watchmen*. (1986) DC Comics, 1995.

Murakami, Haruki. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Vintage, 1993.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. Yearling, 1995.

Roth, Philip. *The Plot Against America*. Vintage, 2005.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Intuitionist*. Anchor Books, 1999.

Films

Coraline. Dir. Henry Selick, Focus Features, 2009.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Dir. Chris Columbus, Warner Home Video, 2002.

Pan's Labyrinth. Dir. Guillermo del Toro, New Line Home Video, 2006.

The Purple Rose of Cairo. Dir. Woody Allen, MGM, 1985.

Twelve Monkeys. Dir. Terry Gilliam, Universal Studios, 1996.