The Imaginary and the Actual: Possible Worlds and Fictional Worlds

7.5 hp Fall 2016

On the next page you will find the course description and a preliminary reading list and seminar plan (listing all the primary works, but some critical essays will be added for the MA course. "The Imaginary and the Actual: Possible Worlds and Fictional Worlds.

You will receive the detailed seminar plan later. Please do not let this stop you from getting the books on the list and start reading. We will cover a lot of ground in this course, and I want you to have prepared for the first seminar by reading excerpts from Beowulf and John Gardner’s short novel Grendel. You may have read Robinson Crusoe in some form or another, but we will want to re-read it and make sure it is the unadulterated original version, which is quite long, so you may want to start reading it before the semester starts.

The course begins on Tuesday 1 November at 10 a.m. in room E890. You can find your schedule on our website.

On-line registration for the course will be open between 10 and 22 August (see instructions on our website).

See you in the fall,

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will consider a number of narratives from different periods with a focus on the relations between the fictional and the actual, what exists and what may exist, with the help of theories of possible worlds and of fictionality. To analyze literature in terms of fictional worlds implies a different approach than the conventional one characterized by close reading and interpretation. It leads to different questions: instead of asking, what does this novel mean? we will ask, what kind of world is built by this text? That sort of questioning will force us to consider what we mean by a “world” in the first place. We will read a number of literary works whose distinctive fictional worlds claim a reality at least in our ability to imagine what is not the case.

Central concepts: Possible worlds; fictionality; referentiality; spatiality; utopia/dystopia

COURSE LITERATURE

Primary works
Beowulf (in Seamus Heaney’s translation, available in many anthologies or as a paperback). We will focus on the first part, lines 1-1250.

Secondary material (a preliminary list):


Suvin, Darko. “Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies.” *Utopian Studies* 1.2 (1990): 69-83. (Excerpt: Sections 3-4, 76-83, also available through SUB subscription)

Additional material according to the teacher’s instructions.