



9 I want! I want!

Inventing Modernity

Fall 2009 - K20.1097.001

Silver 721 - TR 4:55 - 6:10

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office hours: W 1 - 5 and by appointment

Apart from some earlier attempts, it has been reserved in the main for our epoch to vindicate, at least in theory, the human ownership of treasures formerly squandered on heaven; but what age will have the strength to validate this right in practice and make itself the possessor? (Hegel)

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (Marx and Engels)

He who has **not** lived in the years **before** the revolution [of 1789] cannot know what the sweetness of living is. (Talleyrand)

This seminar surveys major European texts written between the mid-1700's and the mid-1800's, each of them representing key issues associated with the period called "modernity." All of these writings may not explicitly address the question of modernity and our discussions will consider what they do address explicitly before asking how they fit the theme of the course. We are not, furthermore, primarily concerned with the *causes* of modernity. Rather, we will always return to such questions as the following: What was new in modernity? Is modernity over or are we still living within it? Who has been served by the invention of modernity? What does studying this period tell us about the present day? Major themes will include the association with modernity of a new understanding of the human, the rise of new social and political powers neither inherited nor religious, the concepts of "culture" and "society" (especially in opposition to the needs and interests of the individual), the emergence of new arguments for and against morality and responsibility, and the meaning of art and the role of artists. Most—but not all—of our readings are novels, the novel being the principle and fundamentally new genre of the period and one that is most profoundly implicated in the history of the defining ideology of modernity—individualism.

Course Format and Expectations: This is a seminar, minds gathered to share views and insights about a common experience (in our case, usually, a reading). Your attendance is vital, both to your own progress and to our existence as a group. Missing more than two classes may jeopardize your grade, so please let me know immediately if that's unavoidable for you. For the same reasons, do come to class on time and avoid leaving early unless absolutely necessary. Class preparation and participation seriously affect your final grade.

Writing Assignments: Two papers and a take-home examination for a total of approximately 25 pages over the course of the semester.

Required Texts: These editions are on order at the NYU Bookstore and probably easy to find at used book outlets. Other editions may be used if necessary. Other readings will be photocopied and distributed.

Rousseau	<i>Discourse on Inequality</i> , Penguin
Diderot	<i>Rameau's Nephew</i> , Penguin
Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , Penguin
Shelley	<i>Frankenstein</i> , Penguin
Balzac	<i>Eugenie Grandet</i> , Penguin
Goethe	<i>The Sorrows of Young Werthe,r</i> Vintage

Supplementary readings and links will be posted on our Blackboard site and/or be distributed in class.

September 8	First class
September 10	Modernity Sourcebook handout Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"
September 15 - 17	Rousseau, <i>Discourse on Inequality</i>
September 22 -24	Diderot, <i>Rameau's Nephew</i>
September 30 – October 6	Goethe, <i>The Sorrows of Young Werther</i>
October 8 - 15	Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
October 20 - 29	Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i>
November 3 - 12	Balzac, <i>Eugenie Grandet</i>
November 17 - 19	Marx and Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>
November 24	Dickens, <i>Great Expectations</i>
November 26	Thanksgiving holiday
December 1 - 3	Dickens, <i>Great Expectations continued</i>