Location-Specific Course Proposal

English 381 (3): Popular Literature: French Enlightenment and Its Others (Writing Intensive)

Course Description

Popular culture has many different and contradictory articulations. Primarily though, we can agree on two facets: it is used by a broad scope of people 1. as a source of real and symbolic opposition to and accommodation of the established power structure, 2. it captures or taps into some kind collective unconscious, revealing aspects of what is banished from everyday consciousness. The French expression of the popular is significant in so far as it posits the two definitions not in a binary relationship, but as unfolding dialectically. Thus, the French revolution, the first great upsurge of working people is both the radical ground on which the “universal rights of man” is drafted as well as a site of the terrifying Jacobin reaction. Similarly, the ideals of Republicanism enshrined in the French state are accompanied by a brutal history of war and colonization in Algeria and Indochina among other places. This course will use a range of pop-cultural texts such as folktales, manifestoes, bandes dessinées (comics), novels and films, as well as nonfiction pieces and theoretical essays to mediate these contradictory alignments of the popular to Enlightenment principles—both their entrenchment in the language of equality and freedom, as well as the reality of racism and violence it underscores.

Required Readings and Viewings:
Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1848). The Communist Manifesto. Excerpts
Georges Remi or Hergé (1930-31). The Adventures of Tintin: Tintin in Congo
Ernest Hemingway (1964). A Moveable Feast
René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo (1967). Asterix the Legionary
Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin (1972). Tout va Bien, 95 mins.
Mathieu Kassovitz (1995). La Haine. 98 mins

Our readings and activities will thus be directed towards fulfilling the Study Abroad Student Learning Outcomes to:

1. Demonstrate awareness of our own cultural values and biases by studying the French humanist tradition in which happy co-existence between cultures is predicated on a model of assimilation of differences;
2. Demonstrate knowledge of diversity through examining the presence of immigrants and “refugees” in Paris as a symptom of France’s own violent history of colonialism;
3. Demonstrate an increased capacity to navigate the opposing accounts of modern travel as 1. expression of universal human goodwill, and 2. extractive colonial enterprise.
4. Demonstrate an appreciation of the capacity for pleasure and beautiful things evinced in French culture, historically manifested in a militant rejection of the policies of scarcity and austerity.

Course Requirements:
1. One oral presentation in which a group of two or more students leads the class discussion after brainstorming together: **10 percent**. The presentation includes a 20 minutes review of the readings for the week, forwarding your own collective understanding of the matter, substantiated by pulling quotes or scenes from the text/film, raising a couple of discussion points for the class, and supervising the discussion for the next 20 minutes.

2. A **one-page** written “rethink” on the group discussion and your consolidated views based on the in-class discussion: **10 percent**. To be submitted no later than a week after your presentation.

3. Reading a scenario from one of the books or films with an attention to the tropes of Enlightenment as well as its opposite. **Four pages: 20 percent**

4. An Abstract Proposal **Two Pages: 15 percent**

Note: The proposal should have 1. a tentative title, 2. an opening line that clearly indicates the field (e.g., “Public Art Works in Paris”, “Against the Culture of Scarcity” etc.), 3. a list of three primary sources (at least one of them sourced from your excursions in Paris), 4. the specific problematic within which you ask your question (e.g., “travel as cultural imperialism”, “the perpetuation of stereotypes in counter-culture”) and 5. An argument that is provocative and based on your own perception of what is really going on in the materials as opposed to what might be commonly and safely assumed by everyone. An argument must identify what it is arguing against, as well as possible objections and alternatives to itself. Your draft proposal will get critical feedback from both your peers as well as your instructor. You should use this feedback to develop it into the first paragraph of your final essay. The final outcome of this process of brainstorming the abstract proposal should be a version qualitatively different from the original draft.

5. An Argument-Based Essay [will serve as final exam **Ten Pages]: 25 percent**

You will develop a sustained argument about a topic of your choice that integrates the class discussions with an analysis of three primary readings/viewings from the class as well as outside. The draft proposal outlined in the assignment above should provide a roadmap for writing the essay. The essay should be a means of exploring a question or problem for which you do not as yet have an answer; something which truly raises your curiosity, or which puzzles or troubles you. Ideally the answers you arrive at should
surprise and reward you as much as they surprise and reward the reader.

6. Attendance encompasses 20 percent of the grade. Mere attendance, however, is not adequate and students are expected to actively participate in class-discussions, engaging with the course material, the instructor, and classmates in critical but respectful ways. This means being prepared to discuss the material, ask questions, and respond to your classmates.

Feedback
Students will receive written comments on all their written assignments.

ATTENDANCE:
Students are allowed three absences throughout the course of the semester. For every absence after your first three you will lose one point off your final grade. Exceptions may be made in special circumstances.

GRADING:
All assignments will be graded on the 100-point scale:
100 – 96 = A+
95 – 93 = A
92 – 90 = A-
89 – 87 = B+
86 – 84 = B
83 – 80 = B-
79 – 77 = C+
76 – 74 = C
73 – 70 = C-
69 – 67 = D+
66 – 64 = D
63 – 60 = D-
59 and below = F

RELATION TO OVERSEAS SETTING:
Our class-discussions will be heavily influenced by our location in Paris. Paris is a world-historical city which has shaped a global understanding of what a city is or should be, along with all that is desirable in modernity. The course both celebrates as well as challenges the freedom supposedly inherent to the experience of the city. Class readings and assignments are designed to allow students to immerse themselves in these contradictory pathways. Students are encouraged to look around themselves, at both the monumental magnificence, as well as the waste and ghetto-life that make up the neoliberal city. But above all, students are expected to immerse themselves in the experience of Paris, to enjoy its gardens, cafes, and museums; and to practice the art of flânerie. Having the mixed pop-culture reading list as template will allow students to be more easily drawn into foreign worlds. The critical approach to images built into the
course will also teach students to be critical of the images they use to negotiate a different culture. Students will thus make full use of Paris through viewings, readings, assignments, and outside activities. To assist with their assignments and experiential learning, I will provide students with lists of museums, neighborhoods, and suggested activities, some of which we will undertake as a class and some of which they will pursue independently.