

Professor Richard Burt

ENG 4936 section 6454 Honors Seminar

Un/Reading Disaster

Spring 2014

Course Description: In this course, we will think of disaster in relation to the word's meaning as it concerns stars ("Astre" is the French word for stars). Disaster is a problem of signing, of reading the stars. This problem of reading will be focused on the relation between the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment as a problem of political theology, focusing indirectly on two world historical revolutions, or crises, the French Revolution and the Holocaust. Does the Enlightenment shine only when stars fall to earth? Is there a revolution without a counter-revolution? Is there a dialectic of Twilighenment? Some attention will be paid to a prior theological debate between Saint Augustine (man is depraved) and Pelagius (man is perfectible) over original sin, with some attention to Saint Paul's *Epistles to the Romans* and to Luther's commentaries on them. We will begin with representative yet highly eccentric essays by both Immanuel Kant and Joseph de Maistre concerning human evil and extraterrestrials, then turn to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. From there we will turn to Wagner's *Parisfal*, Lars van Trier's *Melancholia*, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Motmtømespecially opening chapter, the Claudia chapters (written in French); the X-ray, the gramophone recordings chapters; the Hans Castorp gets lost in the snow chapter; and the last chapter. We will then turn to Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus in order to think various kinds of man made or chance ecodestruction through a contract resists reading (In Marlowe's play, Faustus signs the pact with Mephistopheles in blood that turns invisible; at the end of hte play he sees "Christ's blood streaming in the firmament"). We will end by turning to Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* and Theodor Adorno's *The Stars Fall Down to Earth*. Although we will not be considering directly geopolitical disasters (earthquakes, typhoons, hurricanes, and the like), we will see Darren Aronofsky's pre-post-apocalyptic film *Noah* (it opens in March 2014) and Roland Emmerich's *2012*.*

Requirements: Co-lead class discussion twice, once on a Tuesday and once on a Thursday; two discussion questions and three or more "BIG WORDS" for each class; student formulated quizzes each class; and three 500 word papers (due Feburary 7, March 21, and April 22); a willingness to reflect, think, respond, by paying very, VERY, VERY close formal attention to texts and films.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

January 7: Introduction: Alienology or Un/reading the (not geopolitical but political-theological) Disaster in the Age of

Twilightenment, [Enlightenment](#) (wikipedia link to the left, in blue) and [Counter-Enlightenment](#) (wikipedia link to the left, in blue): Film trailers for [Signs \(1\) \(2\)](#) and [\(3\)](#), [The Sixth Sense](#), (trailer here): [2012](#), [When Worlds Collide](#); [Armageddon](#); [G-d's Big Bang](#); [Cosmological Constant](#); [The Universe](#); [Big Bang to Now in 10 Easy Steps](#); [Isaac Newton](#); [Blaise Pascal](#); [Edge of Tomorrow](#) (2014) vs. [Source Code](#) (2011); [Has Capitalism Failed the World?](#): neoliberalism: "the earth is flat."

Recommended Reading: [The Culture of Disaster](#) by Marie-Helene Huet (2012)

Due January 8 by 5 p.m: Two [discussion questions](#) (DQs) on David L. Clark, "[Kant's Aliens: The Anthropology and Its Others](#)", numbered 1 and 2 and two [discussion questions](#) (DQs) on Peter Szendy, [Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials: Cosmopolitical Philosophictions](#) (pages 1-30), numbered 1 and 2, with your name at the bottom of the document, due by 5 p.m. Email your questions in one word document (as an attachment) to me at richardburt33@gmail.com.

January 9: David L. Clark, "[Kant's Aliens: The Anthropology and Its Others](#)" and Peter Szendy, [Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials: Cosmopolitical Philosophictions](#) (pages 1 -30)

Due January 13 by 5 p.m: Two [discussion questions](#) (DQs) and BIG WORDS (three or more) on numbered 1 and 2 on Immanuel Kant, "Toward a Perpetual Peace"; two [discussion questions](#) (DQs) and BIG WORDS (three or more) numbered 1 and 2 on Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"; two [discussion questions](#) (DQs) and BIG WORDS (three or more) numbered 1 and 2 on Immanuel Kant, "[What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?](#)" Please email me your send your six questions and nine BIG WORDS in one word document, with your name at the bottom of the document, (as an attachment) atrichardburt33@gmail.com.

January 14: [Immanuel Kant, "Toward a Perpetual Peace"](#); [Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?"](#); [Immanuel Kant, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?"](#)

Recommended Reading: [Immanuel Kant, Imaginary Disorientation](#); [Immanuel Kant, "Anthropological Characteristic," in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, pp. 213-38](#); [Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties"](#); [Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose"](#); [Immanuel Kant, Contest of the Faculties](#); [Immanuel Kant, "The End of All Things"](#); [Immanuel Kant, "Religion and Rational Theology"](#); ["Kant's Dog"](#); [Late Kant](#)

Due January 15 by 5 p.m: Two [discussion questions](#) (DQs) and BIG WORDS (three or more) numbered 1 and 2 on Immanuel [Kant](#).

"Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History," in *Political Writings* ed. H.S. Reiss; two discussion questions (DQs) and **BIG WORDS** (three or more) numbered 1 and 2 on *Book of Genesis 2-6*. Please email me your four questions and six **BIG WORDS** in one word document, with your name at the bottom of the document (as an attachment) at richardburt33@gmail.com

January 16: (No) Disaster Relief: Immanuel Kant, "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History," in *Political Writings* ed. H.S. Reiss; *Book of Genesis 2-6* (you are required to read the introduction or the footnotes)

Recommended Reading: Peter Szendy, *Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials: Cosmopolitical Philosophical Fictions* (pages 30-44); Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" and "Phenomenology and Theology"

DUE JANUARY 20 by 5 p.m: Now that you know that two DQs and three big words on each assigned reading are due by 5 p.m.the day before each class, I will no longer list the DQ due dates.

January 21: Required Reading: Joseph de Maistre (wikipedia link to the left, in blue), *St. Peterberg's Dialogues*, (click on the link in blue on these pages numbers for the pdf: Ed. Lively, pp. 195-210 (2nd dialogue): 237-252 (6th and 7th dialogues) 195-211 (2nd dialogue: cf. 199 "man...is nothing but a malady"; something Plato was onto when entertaining the thought of himself as Typhon 200, "man is evil horribly evil"; 202-4ff, Rousseau an idiot, the savage as a waste of space; 207, reason as a broken-backed serpent dragging its filthy length along, etc. 237-252 (7th dialogue: cf. 252-3, wonderful proleptically ecocritical passage on man as slaughterer of all creatures, punishable only by man as slaughterer of himself)

or

St. Peterberg's Dialogues, Gerald Le Brun trans. (of parts of Dialogues 2 and 7, on the divinity of war with notes). Maistre on books not being read.

Recommended Reading: Michel de Montaigne, "Of Cannibals" trans. Donald Frame

January 23: Required Reading: Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, (click on these page numbers for the pdf: pages 69-80: 134-45: 300: 319)

For a contemporary argument in Harpers that is the opposite of Edmund Burke's (it supports the French Constitution and criticizes the U.S. Constitution) click here.

January 28: Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Oxford World's Classics edition) pp. 7-124 (Book 1, chapter I, "The Period"--Book 2, chapter IX, "The Gorgon's Head")

January 30: Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* pp. 125-201 (Book 2, chapter X, "Two Promises"--Book 2, chapter XX, "A Plea")

February 4: Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* pp. 202-305 (Book 2, chapter XXI "Echoing Footsteps"--Book 3, chapter IX, "A Game Made")

February 6: Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* pp. 306-361 (Book 3, chapter X "The Substance of the Shadow"--the end of the novel)

First Paper Topics here: First Paper (500 words) due Saturday, February 7, by 11:59 p.m. See Paper Guideline. (IMPORTANT!!!! READ THIS!!!!
NOW!!!!: Make sure you have a title with the name of the text or film you are discussing in that title; and make sure you have a thesis and that you state it in one sentence at the end of your first paragraph.) Please email your paper to me at at richardburt33@gmail.com.

February 11: Required Reading: The Disaster to Come, Seen Inside Out: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, (Hans Castorp's arrival) (The deepest ring of Dante's *Inferno* is ice.)

February 13: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, Kretschmar's lecture on Beethoven's last piano sonata in C-minor, II Arietta, Op. 111. Listen to Maurizio Pollini's performance, if you can.

February 18: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, 157: 242-85 (Hans Castoro "X-raying" Clavdia [Madame Chauchat] in the waiting room and later seeing an X-Ray of his own hand)

February 20: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* and Immanuel Kant, *A Theory of the Heavens*

February 26: Required Reading: Born Under a Bad Sign: Theodor Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth*: Walter Benjamin, "On Astrology"

February 28: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*,

Spring Break March 1-8

March 11: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, 555-89 (snow); 757-78 (records playing on the gramophone); 842-54, no man's land in WWI.

March 13: Required Reading Theodor W. Adorno, Thomas Y. Levin, "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," *October*, Vol. 55, (Winter, 1990), pp. 62-66; Theodor W. Adorno, Thomas Y. Levin, "The Curves of the Needle," *October*, Vol. 55, (Winter, 1990), pp. 48-55

March 18: "Die Wunde!": Richard Wagner, *Parsifal* Act 1, the open wound, and the never ending Last Supper

March 20: Richard Wagner, *Parsifal* Act 2, hidden wounds and Kundry's screams (the wound technologized and channeled from eye to ear, from music to noise, from laughter to scream); Parsifal as "Ewige Jude"

Second Paper Topics here: First Paper (500 words) due Saturday. March 21, by 11:59 p.m. See Paper Guidelines. (IMPORTANT!!!! READ THIS!!!!: Please email your paper to me at at nchardburt33@gmail.com.

DUE MARCH 24: DQS on this film Marlowe: Dr Faustus (Globe August 2011) (Charlotte Broom/ Michael Camp/ Matthew Punster/ Jules Maxwell) (Opus Arte : OA1083D) [DVD1 [2013 **AND** two discussion questions and Big Words on Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* "A" Text (Norton Critical Edition)

March 25 Required Reading: Blood writing: Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (Norton Critical Edition). Bring a copy of the book in print or a print out on paper to class (Kindles, iPhones, lap top computers, etc will not be allowed).

DUE MARCH 26: Two discussion questions and Big Words on Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* B Text (Norton Critical Edition) **AND** two discussion questions on the essay by Lowell Gallagher, "FAUSTUS'S BLOOD AND THE (MESSIANIC) QUESTION OF ETHICS" in *ELH* 73 (2006), 1-29

March 27" Blood streaming: Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, "B" text and essay by Lowell Gallagher in *ELH*. Bring a copy of the book and the essay printed out on paper to class (Kindles, iPhones, lap top computers, etc will not be allowed).

April 1: *Doktor Faustus* as a posthumous publication: Excerpts from Thomas Mann, *The Story of a Novel: The Genesis of Doktor Faustus*

April 3: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*

April 8: Required Reading: Required Reading: Correspondence between Theodor Adorno and Thomas Mann (pdf) about Mann's debt to Arnold Schoenberg

April 10: Required Reading: Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*

April 15: Required Reading: The Disaster Returns: selections from Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

April 17: Required Reading: selections from Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

April 22 Noah's Ark: *Genesis Chapter 6: Paradise Lost* and other texts: Darren Aronofsky, *Noah*

The Third and Final Paper (topics t.b.a.) (500 words) is due in class, April 22. Please bring a hard copy of your paper to class and email an electronic copy of your paper to me.