

Honors 2810  
Prof. Christopher Mead  
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Office hours: 12:05-1:05 pm, Tuesday/Thursday – MHC 1203

### **The Network: Interconnection from the *corpus mysticum* to the blockchain.**

This course in Intellectual Traditions considers network imagery from antiquity to the twenty-first century. “The network” may feel synonymous with the internet, but fantasies of interconnection over distance are far older than Facebook. We will begin by turning our collective eye to Christianity, whose notion of the *corpus mysticum* (“mystical body”) describes both Christ’s miraculous body and the group of believers constituted by that body. We will proceed to trace what many have understood as the modern secularization of the network through technologies such as the printing press, the railway, and the computer. We will also turn our attention to the foundational role that textiles and women have played in our understanding. In taking up the digital and contemporary, we will consider not just the rise of social media (both generally and in specific iterations such as “Black Twitter”), but also of decentralized ledgers such as Bitcoin and Ethereum.

Our work will be interdisciplinary by nature: over the semester, we will analyze a variety of objects, including Latin poetry, medieval illuminations, seventeenth-century texts on telepathy, epistolary novels, and cryptocurrency white papers. Reading historical expressions of the network alongside the theoretical attempts that were made to understand them, we will seek to describe our increasingly interconnected present through the past that produced it. A sign of spiritual connection and dystopian surveillance, of meaningful contact and signal lost amongst the noise, the network remains a singular figure for our hopes and fears about what it means to communicate.

#### **Course Objectives:**

- To strengthen your ability to engage with and appreciate ideas that may initially seem difficult and unfamiliar.
- To give you practice in identifying and responding to intellectual problems that are not defined for you in advance.
- To improve your skills as close readers, critical discussants, and writers.
- To broaden your historical awareness.
- To begin to prepare you for the type of work that will be required in upper-level courses and, especially, in writing the Honors thesis.

#### **Required Texts:**

Montesquieu – *Persian Letters* (Penguin) 978-0140442816  
Zadie Smith – *White Teeth* (Vintage) 978-0375703867  
Colson Whitehead – *The Underground Railroad* (Anchor) 978-0345804327  
John Wyndham – *The Chrysalids* (NYRB Classics) 978-1590172926

You must buy these specific editions, all of which should be available at the Campus Store. Needless to say, they can also be purchased online; if you search by ISBN, you can rest assured that you are buying the correct editions.

You must also print the course reader, which is available on our Canvas site under “Files.” The wise will do this at Staples, Costco, or some other print center, making the task easy and cheap. The less wise will print individual readings on personal printers, incurring much greater labor, expense, and stress.

**Course requirements:**

Diligent attendance and thoughtful participation – 10%

(Please come see me if you have difficulties speaking in class—I can help)

Reading and content quizzes – 20%

Exploratory writing assignments – 10%

“UMFA” assignment: 20%

“Translation” assignment: 20%

Final Exam (5-6 pages) – 20%

**Reading quizzes:** Over the course of the semester, there will be a series of short unscheduled (i.e., “pop”) quizzes based on the day’s assigned reading and previous course content. Each quiz will be given at the beginning of class and cannot be made up if you are absent or late.

**Exploratory writing exercises:** These short writing exercises will be assigned on a rolling basis and will help you reflect on the assigned reading and prepare for upcoming assignments. You will usually complete them over email.

We will discuss the following major assignments in greater depth closer to their respective due dates:

**“UMFA” assignment:** This assignment will begin with a visit to the Utah Museum of Fine Arts. Having chosen a piece that is currently on display, you will apply the close reading skills you have been practicing in class to visual art, offering an argument about what your chosen artwork means and how it constructs that meaning. In the second part of the assignment, you will describe how the piece speaks to our theme (either directly or indirectly).

***Persian Letters* “Translation” assignment:** This assignment invites you to envision a selection from Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* as a modern text. You will translate one (or more) of Montesquieu’s letters from the past into the present, transforming its content and form to reflect twenty-first century culture and concerns.

**Take-home final:** This synthesizing exam will ask you to take up a number of the semester’s texts in relationship to one another.

**Schedule:**

Date	Reading or viewing due	Major Assignment (due at the beginning of class)
	Unless otherwise noted, read the entire text prior to the first class in which it makes an appearance.	Exploratory Writing Exercises are not listed and will be assigned on a rolling basis.
January 8	Welcome	
January 10	Sylvia Plath - "The Arrival of the Bee Box"	
January 15	John Wyndham – <i>The Chrysalids</i> (p. 5-65)	
January 17	No class	
January 22	<i>The Chrysalids</i> (p. 65-200)	
January 24	Saint Luke – from <i>Luke</i> 22 Saint Paul – from <i>1 Corinthians</i> 11  from <i>The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</i> [...]  Video: " <a href="#">Families Can Be Together Forever</a> " Video: " <a href="#">Putting 'The Family' Back into Family History</a> "	
January 29	"Satoshi Nakamoto" – from "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System"  from "Ethereum Homestead Documentation 0.1"  Gavin Wood – from "Ethereum: A Secure Decentralized Generalised Transaction Ledger"  "Etherscan: Transaction 0x2d6a7b0f6adef38423d4c62cd8b6ccb708ddad85da5d3d06756ad4d8a04a6a2"  Kimberly Ellis – "Why 'They' Don't Understand What Black People Do on Twitter"  Katie Roiphe – "The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter Feminism is Bad for Women"	

January 31	Frederick Douglass – <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (Chapter 11)  Colson Whitehead – <i>The Underground Railroad</i> (p. 1-84)	
February 5	Utah Museum of Fine Arts visit – Meet in UMFA lobby (410 Campus Center Drive)	
February 7	<i>The Underground Railroad</i> (p. 84-201)	
February 12	<i>The Underground Railroad</i> (p. 202-313)	
February 14	Alfred Lord Tennyson – “The Lady of Shalott” (1842)  from <i>Grimm’s Fairytales</i> – The Spindle, the Shuttle, and the Needle”	UMFA Assignment
February 19	Ovid – from <i>The Metamorphoses</i> – Book 6, “Arachne”  from <i>The Fourth World of the Hopis</i>	
February 21	“A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE EXCELLENT VERTUES OF THAT Sober and wholesome Drink, CALLED COFFEE [...]” & “The RULES and ORDERS of the COFFEE-HOUSE” (Single file/document in the course reader)	
February 26	Montesquieu – <i>Persian Letters</i> (p. 39-101)	
February 28	<i>Persian Letters</i> (p. 102-168)  Film and Pizza night – 5:30-9 pm – Meet in the Student Union Theater	
March 5	<i>Persian Letters</i> (p. 169-233)	
March 7	<i>Persian Letters</i> (p. 233-284)	
March 12	No Class – Spring Break	
March 14	No Class – Spring Break	
March 19	Aesop – “The Belly and the Members”  Saint Paul – from <i>1 Corinthians</i> 12  Christine de Pizan – from <i>The Book of the Body Politic</i>	

March 21	Bernard Mandeville - "The Grumbling Hive"	
March 26	Library Session – Meet in the Marriott Library’s Special Collections	Translation Assignment
March 28	Michael de Montaigne – from <i>The Essays</i> – “One Man’s Profit is Another’s Harm”  Adam Smith – from <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> (Ch. 1-4)	
April 2	Homer – from <i>The Illiad</i>  Virgil – from <i>The Aeneid</i>  Sylvia Plath – “Stings”	
April 4	Beehive visit – location TBA	

April 9	Zadie Smith – <i>White Teeth</i> – “Archie 1974, 1945”	
April 11	<i>White Teeth</i> – “Irie 1990, 1907”	
April 16	<i>White Teeth</i> – “Samad 1984,1857	
April 18	<i>White Teeth</i> – “Magid, Millat, and Marcus 1992, 1999”	
April 23	Last day of classes	Final Exam handed out

**Participation and attendance:**

I expect students to come to class prepared to participate actively in that day’s discussion and activities. There will be many ways for you to participate in class over the course of the semester, including speaking up during discussion, doing group work inside and outside of class, posting comments to the discussion board on the course website, attending office hours, and emailing me with thoughtful questions and comments. We’ll discuss all of these methods more thoroughly over the semester, and I may assign some of them specifically. For now, remember that the best way to prepare to participate is to come to class having completed the assigned reading and writing assignments.

Class attendance is mandatory, and I will take roll each class. You are permitted two absences for any reason; each additional absence will reduce your final participation score by a full letter grade. **A large number of unexcused absences will cause you to fail the course.** If you arrive to class late or leave class early, your attendance and participation score for that class will be reduced by half. The same reduction will apply if you show up to class without bringing a hard copy of the assigned reading.

As a member of this class, you have the responsibility to engage respectfully with your peers and help create a collegial atmosphere in which we engage thoughtfully and rigorously with one another’s ideas.

**Extensions and late assignments:**

For conflicts between this schedule and extracurricular university activities such as varsity athletics, notify me in writing by the second week of the semester. To request an extension, you should have a truly substantive reason for doing so (i.e., a serious illness or a family emergency). Assignments handed in late will have their grades reduced by half a letter grade per day. Exploratory Writing Exercises must be submitted on time in order to receive credit.

**Technology in the classroom:**

To avoid distraction and disruption, no electronics are permitted in the classroom, except for the accommodation of disability. Please do not bring your laptop to class, and make sure your phone is turned off and put away before class begins. If I have to ask you to put your phone or computer away, you will receive a zero for that day's attendance/participation grade.

**Canvas:**

I have created a Canvas page where you will be able to access copies of materials from class, resources that will be of use to you when writing your papers, the course reader, and this syllabus.

**Contacting me:**

If possible, bring questions to my office hours or catch me after class. Otherwise, the best way to reach me is by email. Do not assume that I can read and respond to your message immediately; allow a reasonable amount of time (24 hours) before you need an answer. That said, I will always do my best to respond to you promptly. Two days before a major assignment is due, I will stop answering emailed questions.

For a number of reasons, I do not give substantive feedback on written work via email. If you would like to discuss a draft of a paper, a possible thesis, or other written work, I am always happy to meet with you in person, either during office hours or by appointment.

I will regularly contact the class by email or the Canvas messaging system. You are responsible for checking your UMail regularly and for making sure that you receive Canvas alerts in a timely fashion.

I will not respond to emails asking questions whose answers are contained in this syllabus.

**Honors grading rubric:**

- A Outstanding achievement. Student performance demonstrates full command of the course material and evinces exceptional levels of originality and sophistication that far surpass course expectations.
- A- Excellent achievement. Student performance demonstrates thorough knowledge of the course material and exceeds course expectations by completing all requirements in a superior manner.
- B+ Very good work. Student performance demonstrates above-average comprehension of the course material and exceeds course expectations on all tasks as defined in the course syllabus.

- B Student performance meets designated course expectations and demonstrates understanding of the course materials at an acceptable level.
- B- Marginal work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete understanding of course materials.
- C Unsatisfactory work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete and inadequate understanding of course materials.
- D Unacceptable work. Coursework performed at this level will not count toward the honors bachelor's degree. For the course to count toward the degree, the student must repeat the course with a passing grade.
- F Failing

**Important University of Utah policies that apply to this course:**

**Academic misconduct:**

It is both my hope and my expectation that your experience as a student at the University of Utah will be fueled by your passion for learning. I also appreciate that being a student can be stressful. There may be times when you feel tempted to engage in some kind of cheating in order to improve your grade or advance your career. This behavior could be as blatant as having someone else sit for you in an exam, or submitting a written assignment that has been copied from another source. It could also be as subtle as glancing at another student's quiz when you are unsure about an answer. It is possible that one might do any of these things and not get caught. However, if you cheat, no matter how much you may have otherwise learned in this class, you have failed to learn what is perhaps the most important lesson of all.

In accordance with University of Utah policy, any instances of cheating or plagiarism will result in failure of the course, along with other possible sanctions. For more information and a number of important definitions, including that of plagiarism, see the [University of Utah's Student Code of Conduct](#). To help promote academic integrity, your written work in this course may be checked for originality using [Turnitin](#), a web appliance that compares submitted assignments to a database of books, journal articles, websites, and other student papers.

**Disability accommodations:**

"The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the [Center for Disability Services](#), 162 Union Building, 801-581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations."

If you have emergency medical information you wish to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me as soon as possible by seeing me after class or making an appointment to visit during office hours.

**Addressing sexual misconduct:**

“Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#), 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the [Center for Student Wellness](#), 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the [Department of Public Safety](#), 801-585-2677.”

**Content accommodation policy:**

“Students are expected to take courses that will challenge them intellectually and personally. Students must understand and be able to articulate the ideas and theories that are important to the discourse within and among academic disciplines. Personal disagreement with these ideas and theories or their implications is not sufficient grounds for requesting an accommodation. Accommodations requested on such grounds will not be granted. The University recognizes that students’ sincerely-held core beliefs may make it difficult for students to fulfill some requirements of some courses or majors. The University assumes no obligation to ensure that all students are able to complete any major.” No content accommodations will be made for this course.