

21L.003 Reading Fiction: Imaginary Journeys

Topics for essay #2

Essay length: 2500 words

Choose one of the following:

1. In the Prologue to *Don Quixote*, Cervantes' friend declares that "this work of yours is only concerned to destroy the authority and influence that books of chivalry enjoy in the world and among the general public." In the sections that we read for class, are there signs that this may not be the only purpose of the book? Can you identify any scenes or passages in which Don Quixote, rather than being mocked for believing in books of chivalry, actually appears rather noble because of that belief? Similarly, in Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift presents the Houyhnhnms' society as a rational and natural one and uses it to launch satirical critique against the societies of Europe. Gulliver is so won over by the Houyhnhnms' superior ways that he can hardly fit in once he's back home and prefers the company of his horses to that of other people (or Yahoos). But are there signs that the Houyhnhnms' way of life may not be all that perfect? For each book, show how there may be an unacknowledged other side of the story from the ostensible one.

NOTE: for question #1, if you find you have enough material from either one of the books to fill up the word count for this assignment, you may write about that one book alone if you wish.

2. Compare the kind of satire mainly used in Part I of *Gulliver's Travels* with that mainly used in Part IV. What important differences do you see between the two approaches taken toward satire in these two parts? Provide plenty of examples to make your case.
3. *Don Quixote* is about a man who lives a life out of medieval romance literature in a society that is on the path toward modernity. What contrasts arise from this juxtaposition? Consider such things as: what different institutions or activities are central to medieval and modern societies? What is the relationship between author and audience in both periods? How does the change from medieval to modern manifest itself in terms of literary style? (You may think of additional questions to address as well.)

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