

Note: this is a preliminary syllabus. There might be small changes made between now and the first day of the quarter, but the course requirements and workload will stay the same.

### Theories of the Imagination (Hum/En 26)

Professor: Jocelyn Holland (she/her/hers)

Spring Quarter 2021

T/Th 9-10:30 a.m.

Zoom office hour (time to be determined)

email: [jholland@caltech.edu](mailto:jholland@caltech.edu) (feel free to email me any time with questions about the course)

Long before the science of neurology and the technologically-informed concept of “neuroimaging,” humans have wondered about mental images: what their origin is, what part of the body makes them visible to us, and what their use might be. This course surveys the diverse (and, from our present-day perspective, often bizarre) approaches to conceptualizing images of the mind and, eventually, that thing commonly known as the “imagination.” You will have a chance to think through many of the most pressing questions that troubled early theorists of mental images and the imagination, such as: what is the connection of imagination to memory? Can one distinguish between a “male” and “female” imagination? Is the imagination dangerous? And last, but not least: can the imagination actually create something new, or does it just reproduce and rearrange things we have already seen? Along the way, in addition to acquiring historical and literary knowledge, you will have the opportunity to work on your writing, reading, and general analytical skills with plenty of support and feedback from me and your classmates.

You will find most of the readings on Canvas as pdf files, sorted by modules. There is only one reading required for purchase: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. This is not a long book, but because it is scheduled for the very end of the quarter, it would be really great to get a head start with it over spring break, if you can. In order to help out anyone who chooses to take that route, I have created a series of reading guides to help you break down the reading and focus on the key points. They will be available in the “Frankenstein” module on Canvas before the beginning of spring break.

#### Readings and assignments:

March 30	Hello & introduction
April 1	Image-making in antiquity (1): Plato and the mirror of your liver ( <i>Timaeus</i> ); <i>Republic</i>
April 6	Image-making in antiquity (2): Aristotle’s <i>phantasmata</i>
April 8	Build your own memory palace: Cicero, <i>Ad Herennium</i> (with handout examples)
April 13	Images earthly and divine: St. Augustine’s <i>Confessions</i> [supplement with handout on the question of religious images: in the <i>Bible</i> vs. prohibition against images in the Koran]
April 15	Let pregnant women beware! (Paracelsus on the dangers of the imagination)
	<u>Short essay 1: due Friday, April 16th</u>
April 20	A reader’s imagination: Cervantes, <i>Don Quixote</i> (1605) Nicholas Malebranche, “Two bad effects of reading on the imagination” (pp. 140-2)
April 22	Descartes meditates on the imagination, <i>Meditations</i> 2 and 6 (1641)
April 27	The “enlightened” imagination, discussion #1): Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chapters 1-3
April 29	The “enlightened” imagination, discussion # 2): Kant, <i>Pragmatic Anthropology</i> (excerpt)
May 4	The British Romantic imagination (1): Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Frost at Midnight” and <i>Biographia Literaria</i> (excerpt)
May 6	The (British) Romantic imagination (2): William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abby”

Short essay 2: due Friday, May 7

May 11	When you get to exercise <i>your</i> poetic imagination
May 13	The (German) Romantic imagination (1): E. T. A. Hoffmann's, "The Sandman"
May 18	The (German) Romantic imagination (2): Hoffmann, "The Sandman"
May 20	Back to the British Context: Mary Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i> (ch. 1-3)
May 25	<i>Frankenstein</i> (chapters 4-14)
May 27	<i>Frankenstein</i> (chapters 15-18)
June 1	<i>Frankenstein</i> (through to the end)
June 3	Final discussion: What is an imagination? And: getting ready for the final paper.

Final paper: due Tuesday, June 8<sup>th</sup>**Grading breakdown:**

Two short essay assignments (around 1000-1500 words): 2 x 15%: 30%

Online attendance and participation during class time: 15%

Annotations on assignments using Perusall: 15%

Final paper (1500-2000 words): 40%

[more info on the next page...]

About the discussions and the writing assignments:

The attendance/participation component of the grade is weighted at 15% because literature courses rely heavily on contributions to the discussion: the more perspectives, the better. The Zoom format can be awkward – even though we all have had a lot of practice with it by now – so don't hesitate to let me know if you are finding it difficult to add your point of view to our class time together, and we will work something out. Also, during this quarter, you will frequently be working with small groups to focus on different aspects of the readings and provide extra input into the discussions.

In addition, we will spend part of our face-to-face time working on short writing exercises that will help you target specific analytical and writing skills. You will have a choice to complete optional short homework assignments before each paper is due to build credit towards your paper grade and receive extra feedback from me about specific areas where you think you need practice. I am always available through email or individual Zoom sessions if there is anything you would like to discuss. I can also pre-read drafts of your papers (given enough time before the due date) to provide preliminary feedback before a grade is assigned.

For help with your essays: The Hixon Writing Center (<http://www.writing.caltech.edu/>)

In my experience, students who use this resource even once during a quarter receive substantially better grades on their written work.

For help with feelings of stress: Student Wellness Services (<http://wellness.caltech.edu/>) is the place to go. They can help with all sorts of problems, from feelings of stress and isolation to basic workload issues. They understand the needs of Caltech students and have a lot of experience handling all sorts of problems, small and large.

A word about plagiarism: Plagiarism is when you take the ideas, thought process, or words (spoken or written) of another individual and use them as your own. Because we will not be writing the kind of research papers in this course that rely on many sources, the ideas you present in writing should be entirely your own. Any cases of plagiarism will

be referred directly to the Dean of Undergraduates. I will work with you to show you how to quote from primary texts correctly, and the Hixon writing center is also there to help make sure you get this right. Accidental plagiarism is still plagiarism, so it is really important to know the rules ahead of time!