

# THE WORLD UPSIDE NMOD

*Absurdities, Inversions, and Alternate Realities*

Columbia University Ancient Mediterranean Graduate Student Conference  
**November 1-2, 2019.** Columbia University in the City of New York, USA

Keynote Speaker: **Patrick R. Crowley** (University of Chicago)

In an era of ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’ it can seem like no form of media should be entirely trusted. While these issues are a modern problem, exacerbated by the unprecedented rise of social media, evidence from the ancient world produces a similar ‘truthiness’: an upside-down world or alternate reality that is latent, barely below the surface of the present and just beyond the borders of civilization and norms. Unlike utopias, which are placeless or displaced, many of these imagined dystopic or feigned worlds are presented as dangerously close to their contemporaries.

We invite papers from graduate students working across disciplines related to the ancient world—and interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged—for a conference that will explore the relationships between fact and fiction, order and chaos. From representations of alternate realities in ancient drama, painting, and sculpture, to disparate histories and archaeological evidence, we hope to discuss the motivations behind, and effects of, the **absurd**, **inverted**, and **alternative**.

We will consider papers in any field pertaining to the ancient Mediterranean and its surrounding regions, including Egypt, the Near East, Anatolia, and the expanses of the Roman Empire, falling within the period spanning from the Bronze Age to Late Antiquity.

Potential topics could include:

- Parodies of social norms or myths; visions of dystopia in any media
- Humorous, didactic, or bleak exaggerations or distortions of reality
- Intrusion or inclusion of ‘outsiders’/‘others’ or inversions of gender roles
- Intentional falsehoods, perversions, or omissions of facts, events, truths, etc. (e.g. imperial art and architecture as propaganda; Plutarch’s *On the Malice of Herodotus*)
- Reuse, erasures, and/or destructions of media to support ‘alternative facts’
- Political or philosophical theory concerning the preconditions of civic disorder/chaos
- Religious or ritual interventions (e.g. curse tablets, incubation/healing cults, oracular questions, the Lydian confession stelai)
- Ancient reception that serves to either reveal inherent disparities in or alter its source material (e.g. Plutarch’s *Lives*, Pausanias’ consideration of alternative versions of the same narrative)
- The power of nonsensical/untrue performative utterances

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be emailed to **cuconference2019@gmail.com** no later than **May 4th, 2019**. In the body of your email, please include your name, institution, contact information, and the title of your abstract. The abstract should be anonymous and sent as an attachment. Papers should be no longer than 20 minutes in length in order to accommodate questions.

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