In 1848, Karl Marx announced that “A spectre is haunting Europe,” but far from merely mocking the anti-Communist propaganda of his day, he was declaring all of the modern world a ghost story. He was not alone. From the moment Charles Dickens began *A Tale of Two Cities* with the phrase “Recalled to life” or Mary Shelley re-animated the dead in *Frankenstein*, modernity has been looking over its shoulder, to see if the grave-diggers have caught up with us yet. And yet, as these same texts suggest, the modern world is everywhere in revolutionary excitement, calling out to begin again, from the French Revolution’s Year One to Pol Pot’s Year Zero. This class will intersperse ghost stories and wild-eyed revolutionaries with other stories of beginnings and ends: the marriage plot; the story of heroes and heroines making their way to the Capital of the World to find fame and fortune; and most movingly, mothers and daughters, imagining new stories of origin, as Virginia Woolf sets off in *To the Lighthouse*. From Giant Bugs to Tiny Tim, we will read the modern world, through the lenses of history, novels, poetry, psychoanalysis and film, but most of all through plucky individuals, trying to imagine a new world for themselves and others, in “the best of times, the worst of times,” and where we live, in the middle.

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Eugene Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830).