

**Fall 2009**

**Beyond Language: The Surreal, the Monstrous, and the Mystical K10.0065**

**715 Broadway, #601**

**Tuesday, Thursday: 9:30-10:15**

**Office: #417; (212) 992-7767**

**Office hour: Tuesday, Thursday 11-12, 4-5; (other times by appt.)**

**Instructor: Gregory Erickson**

**gte1@nyu.edu**

## **Syllabus**

### **Course Description**

Texts of the surreal, the monstrous, and the mystical are portrayals of experiences that, while they may be outside traditional logic, are clearly central to the human imagination. Students of these texts are presented with the fascinating but difficult project of researching, interpreting, and describing irrational mental states often said to be “beyond language.” This course will focus on reading, thinking, writing about, and working with these texts. The act of writing itself traverses the area between reality and imagination, fact and fiction, and art and life, and we will explore through writing how language describes and creates experiences in these ambiguous in-between areas. Through discussion, informal writing, and a series of essays we will take various approaches to understanding depictions of these experiences as well as the surrounding discourse. The class will include outside visits to museums and/or installations.

### **Evaluation and Course Requirements**

The course will be graded on the following basis:

Essay #1	20%
Essay #2	20%
Presentation	10%
Participation	20%
Final project	30%

### **Formal Assignments**

#1: descriptive/comparative essay

#2: Theoretical essay

#3: Final presentation and project

**Informal writing** will be short writings done both in and outside of class and on the course Blackboard site. These are intended to allow you to work out some of your thoughts to class readings and discussion on paper, and to allow your classmates and I to see what you are thinking about. Although I will assign a grade to your informal writings, they should be free and unpolished. I am only looking for effort and thought and not for organization, mechanics, or “correctness.”

**The final project** will be on a topic of your choice, approved by me, that explores some of the themes and issues of the course. It can be a traditional research paper or another format. You will give a presentation on this project a week or so before it is due.

## **Course Schedule**

**Week one:** 9/8, 9/10

Introduction: Beyond Language and Writing

### **Part I: The Surreal, the Mystical, and the Monstrous: Definitions**

**Week two:** 9/15, 9/17

Surrealism

Reading: Breton, Shattuck

**Week three:** 9/22, 9/24

Biblical Monsters

Reading: Bible: Book of Daniel 7-9; Book of Revelation 12-14

**Week four:** 9/29, 10/1

Two models for the modern Monster

Reading: Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker: *Dracula* (sections)

**Week five:** 10/6, 10/8

20<sup>th</sup> century Monsters

Reading: Strieber, Lovecraft

**Week six:** 10/13, 10/15

Mysticism: the Christian model

Reading: Hildegard of Bingham, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila

**Week seven:** 10/20, 10/22

Mysticism: the Jewish and Eastern models

Reading: Zohar

**Week eight:** 10/27, 10/29

Poetry and art

Reading: Duchamp, Tzara, Rumi

### **Part II: Theorizing the Inexpressible**

**Week nine:** 11/3, [11/5 no class]

Psychology

Reading: Freud, Barbeito

**Week ten:** 11/10, 11/12

Monster theory

Reading: Kearney, Beale, Cohen

**Week eleven:** 11/17, 11/19

Theorizing mysticism:

Reading: Scholem,

**Week twelve:** 11/24

Science I

Reading: Sagan, Hawking

**Week thirteen:** 12/1, 12/3

Science II: Complexity and Chaos

Taylor, Hayles,

Presentations

**Week fourteen:** 12/8, 12/10

Finishing up

Presentations

**Week fifteen:** 12/15

Presentations

Final project due 12/17

## Bibliography

Readings for the course will be taken from a course packet that you will be required to purchase. They will include the following selections. You will need to get the Lovecraft short story separately, as well as any edition of Frankenstein and Dracula. You will also need some version of the Bible (King James or New Revised is preferable). Depending on the directions we go, I will be adding several readings, but I will make these available in class.

Barbeito, Patricia Felisa. “‘He’s Making Me Feel Things in My Body That I Don’t Feel’: The Body as Battleground in Accounts of Alien Abduction.”

Beal, Timothy. *Religion and its Monsters*. 13-33.

Bible. Daniel 7-9; Book of Revelation 12-14

Breton, Andre. selected writings

Cohen, Jerome Jeffrey. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”

Freud, Sigmund. “The Uncanny”

Hildegard of Bingen. Selected writings

John of the Cross. *Dark Night of the Soul*

Kearney, Richard. *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*. 109-137

Lovecraft, H.P. “The Call of Cthulhu”

Masterpasqua, Frank and Phyllis Perna. “The History, Meaning, and Implications of Chaos and Complexity.” from *The Psychological Meaning of Chaos*

Rumi. selected poems from *The Essential Rumi*

Sagan, Carl. *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*. 61-77

Scholem, Gershem. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. 1-39

Shattuck, Roger. Introduction to *The History of Surrealism*, 11-34.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*

Strieber, Whitney. *Communion: A True Story*. Prelude, 3-5; chapter two, 87-105.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*

Taylor, Mark. from *The Moment of Complexity*

Teresa of Avila. Selections

Tzara, Tristan. "Approximate Man"

*Zohar* or *Book of Splendor*. 27-41