

Spring 2008

WS II: Writing Beyond Language: The Surreal, the Monstrous, the Mystical

Tuesday, Thursday: 2:00-3:15

Office hour: Thursday 3:15-4:00; #429 @715 Broadway (other times by appt.)

Instructor: Dr. Gregory Erickson

gte1@nyu.edu or Profgregerickson@aol.com

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 writing about these texts, addressing the task of producing clear, logical prose about experiences that challenge this possibility. 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. Writing projects will focus on description, explication, comparison, and analysis, and will culminate in a research essay. The class may also include a visit to the library, a class field trip, and one or two film screenings.

Evaluation and Course Requirements

Essays and papers: In the first half of the semester you will write two essays as part of our initial exploration of the different aspects of these topics. The following three papers are intended to facilitate the process of writing the final research papers. You are required to complete all writing assignments on time, and papers must be legibly typed and printed in order to receive a grade. For each project you will be expected to work out your own topic, to write multiple drafts, and to work with other students on their papers. We will work on the drafts in class so it is just as important to be on time with your drafts as with your final product. Please proofread your papers carefully for spelling errors, grammar, etc.

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. Keep these writings together in a folder or a notebook as I may ask you to read from them in class and I will also occasionally collect them. Although I will assign a grade to your informal writings, they should be free and uncorrected. I am only looking for effort and thought and not for organization, mechanics, or “correctness.”

The final research paper will be on a topic of your choice, approved by me, that focuses on a primary text and that also addresses the critical literature on that text. The last five or six weeks of the semester will be primarily about working on this paper. I will divide the class up into groups that will work together on each stage of the process.

The course will be graded on the following basis:

Two essays (4-5 pages):	30% (15% each)
Three shorter papers (2-3 pages):	30% (10% each)
Final research paper (8-10 pages):	25%
Informal writing:	10%
Participation/Attendance:	5%

Course Schedule

Week one: Jan. 22, 24

Introduction: Impossible Language

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

Week two: Jan. 29, 31

Surrealism

Reading: Breton, Shattuck

Week three: Feb. 5, 7

Biblical Monsters

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

Week four: Feb. 12, 14

Modern Monsters

Reading: Strieber, Lovecraft

Week five: Feb. 19, 21

Mysticism

Reading: Hildegard of Bingham, John of the Cross

Comparison Essay—rough draft due (2/21)

Week six: Feb. 26, 28

Poetry and Art

Reading: Duchamp, Tzara, Rumi

Comparison Essay #1 due (2/28)

Part II: Theorizing the Inexpressible

Week seven: March 4, 6

Psychology

Reading: Freud, Barbeito

Week eight: March 11, 13

Monster theory

Reading: Kearney, Beale, Cohen

Week nine: March 25, 27

Theorizing mysticism:

Reading: Scholem, Zohar

Theoretical Essay—rough draft due (3/27)

Week ten: April 1, 3

Science

Reading: Sagan, Masterpasqua and Perna

Theoretical essay due (4/3)

[choosing a research paper topic and organizing working groups]

Part III: Steps to the Research Paper

Week eleven: April 8, 10

Due: paper 1: description of your selected text (4/10)

Group work: outline or sketch of your final project

Week twelve: April 15, 17

Due: paper 2: literature review of your topic (4/17)

Group work: annotated bibliography

Week thirteen: April 22, 24

Due: paper 3: position paper (4/24)

Group work: presentations and discussion

Week fourteen: April 4/29, 5/1

Due: rough draft of final research paper (5/1)

Group work: exchange and respond to drafts

May 5: final research paper due

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 two Lovecraft stories separately (a collection is available in bookstores or I will put them on Blackboard).

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.” *The Journal of American Culture*, June 2005, 28:2: 201-215.

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)” (3-25).

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.

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

Tzara, Tristan. “Approximate Man”

Zohar or Book of Splendor. 27-41