FRSEM-UA 644 Magic, Monsters, and Imaginary Worlds: The Meaning of the Fantastic

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Office Hours by appointment.

Seminar:
Mondays ............................................. 12:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. ..........Bobst Library, room LL143

Course description

Do modern-day depictions of magic and vampires (and other elements of fantasy) exist purely for entertainment? Or is there a deeper meaning in their prevalence in texts, on our television sets and movie screens? How have supernatural themes changed from a century ago or even two centuries ago, from Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915), or French writer Théophile Gautier’s *The Beautiful Vampire* (1836)? Working mainly with short fictions from the nineteenth century through to today, we examine how humans have imagined monsters and the supernatural, from fantastic tales to science fiction. How has the supernatural developed, and what does its appeal reveal about us and our approaches to reality? How has what they reveal about us as a society changed over time?

Overview

As a seminar designed for first-year students in the College of Arts and Science, this course has a number of complementary goals.

First, it is intended to be a formative social and intellectual introduction to your new life as an undergraduate student in the liberal arts. Together with your classmates and the others in your cohort, you will be learning what it means to join in the community of scholarship that is the University.

Second, we will pursue our studies in a liberal spirit, not for their practical utility, but for what they reveal about the human condition and how they help us to imagine the higher possibilities of our perceptions and representations of imagined realities.

Finally, the seminar is intended to introduce you to the methods of research in the humanities, and your major goal for the course will be to complete a substantial work of independent research. Together with the other reading and writing skills we will practice, the
The seminar should help hone the critical and analytic abilities you will need for success in your later studies and for your future lives.

**Course materials to purchase**


The above texts can be purchased at the NYU Bookstore. They are also available on Amazon for approximately $10 or less. Please buy hard copies, not Kindle editions.

- All other texts will be provided in the course packet (to be purchased at the University Copy Center, 27 Waverly Place) or in PDF format on NYU Classes.

**Course assessment**

In determining your grade, I will weigh your completion of the course requirements approximately as follows:

1. **Class participation (10%)**:
   You are expected to read the assigned texts closely and carefully, to attend all classes, to arrive at class promptly, and to contribute actively and in an informed manner to seminar discussions.

2. **Weekly homework assignments and in-class writing assignments (15%)**:
   These will assess your knowledge and understanding of the texts and themes we are exploring. Some assignments will require you to read and respond to your peers.

3. **Seminar presentation (15%)**:
   The seminar presentation is an opportunity to present a close reading or analysis on a selected reading or on his or her research project. After your presentation, you will be expected to answer questions from your fellow classmates.

4. **Paper 1 (10%)**:
   Your first paper will be 2-3 pages long, typed and double-spaced. You will be expected to analyze one or more of the assigned texts in response to a prompt that I will give you.

5. **Paper 2 (15%)**:
   This paper will be 4-6 pages long, typed and double-spaced. You will be expected to analyze one or more of the assigned texts in response to a prompt that I will give you.

6. **Final Research Paper (35%)**:
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The final paper will be a substantial work of independent research, 10-12 pages. All work will be graded as submitted, with no opportunity for revision, and credit will be withheld for poor grammar and spelling.

Classroom policies

- Absences will adversely affect your grade. If you cannot make it to class for any reason, you are expected to contact me by email to explain your absence.
- Please arrive promptly and be prepared to remain in the classroom for the duration of the session (there will be a break part of the way through!)
- The use of cellphones and laptops is not permitted.
- Please refrain from eating in class.
- Make sure to read the assigned texts before coming to class and bring your books with you.

Note well that a failing grade may be assigned to any student with one or more absence from this class. Incompletes will be considered only in cases of documented medical emergency or other, comparably grave circumstances.

Additional information

- Please take the time to read the NYU Honor Code and information on Academic Integrity: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity. Students who do not abide by these principles will be penalized. We will discuss in class how best to integrate critical sources into final papers, so there is no excuse for plagiarism.
- Students with a disability or learning difficulty must be registered at the Moses Center and show their letter of registration to the instructor. More information on the Moses Center is available here: http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities.html
- You may find the NYU Writing Center to be a valuable resource. Information about hours and how to set up an appointment is available here: http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html

Schedule of Classes


M 1/30: Representations of Desire

M 2/6: The Invisible
   Maupassant, Guy de. The Horla.

M 2/13: Monsters?

M 2/20: [No class]

**PAPER 1 due via email by midnight Tuesday 2/21.**

**M 2/27: The Self**
Dostoevsky. *The Double.*

**M 3/6: Dostoevsky. The Double.*
Jackson, Rosemary, Chapter 3 “Psychoanalytical Perspectives.” pp.61-91

**M 3/13: [Spring Recess.]**

**M 3/20: Kafkaesque**
---. “The Penal Colony.”
Sartre. “Aminadab,” *Situations I.* (pp. 185-218)

**M 3/27: New Perspectives**
---. “The Two Kings and Their Labyrinths.” 89-93
---. “The Man on the Threshold.” 129-139
Cortazar, Julio. “House Taken Over”; “Axolotl.”

**PAPER 2 due in class 3/27**

**M 4/3: Magical Realism**
Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.”
---. “The Other Side of Death.”
---. “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World.”

**M 4/10: Imagined Realities**
Jackson, Chapter 7 “From Kafka to Pynchon.” 157-170.
---. “t zero.” 243-58.

**M 4/17: Alternate Worlds**
Le Guin, Ursala K. “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” *Blackwater: The Anthology of*

M 4/24: [Holiday.]

M 5/1: **The Fantastic Redefined?**
Link, Kelly. *Stone Animals.* pp. 579-623
Oates, Joyce Carol. *Family.* pp. 335-351

M 5/8: **Conclusion.**

**Final paper due by 5 p.m. 5/15**
Bibliography

- Selections from *Fantastic Tales: Visionary and Everyday*:


Listed below is information for texts excerpted in the course pack and other relevant works.


---. “The Two Kings and Their Labyrinths.” pp. 89-93
---. “The Man on the Threshold.” pp. 129-139
Cortazár, Julio. “House Taken Over”, “Axolotl.”


Mücke, Doretthea E. von, *The Seduction of the Occult and the Rise of the Fantastic Tale,*


Straub, Peter, editor. American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from the 1940s to Now. ---. Link, Kelly. “Stone Animals.” pp. 579-623
---. Oates, Joyce Carol. “Family.” pp. 335-351
