First-Year Seminar: Making Sense of Doubles and Masks

Professor Judith Miller judith.miller@nyu.edu
Tuesdays: 2:00-4:30
Classroom: TBD

from Frankenstein at the National Theatre of London

office in Language and Literature Building 19 University Place Room 619
office hours: Wednesday 3:00-6:00 and by appointment

The mask hides; the mask exposes; the mask denaturalizes; the mask approaches the truth. Masking is a complex phenomenon. The double reveals and conceals, distorts, and foregrounds. Doubling allows us to see our multiple selves.

Description: Among the more significant activities of human beings is that of giving shape to fears and desires through art. All cultures participate in this form of emotional exteriorization, including creating through myths and literature “doubles” and sculpting in textures and words various types of “masks.” In this seminar, we will concentrate on doubles and masks in several different cultures. We will thus chart the meaning and impact of the archetypal masked figures of the commedia dell’arte in French and Italian theatre; the obsessive concern with the grotesque (the monstrous mask) in French romanticism and in Victorian fantasy; and we will look at excessive doubling in South American magical realism; and think about zombification, carnival figures, and ghostly doubles in Latin American, North American, and African cultural forms. We will build a repertory of approaches to interpreting and uncovering the many layers of masking and doubling by reading in anthropology, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and literary theory. As interesting as the masks and doubles “peopling” culture are, we will be especially alert to the different ways in which human beings at various points in time have attempted to understand what making masks and creating doubles means.
Learning Outcomes:
-To create a community of thinkers who enjoy sharing their insights about some fundamental forms of human expression
-To delve, in particular, into both Western and non-Western approaches to doubles and masks in order to see similarities and differences in “instrumentalizing” these forms
-To advance skills in oral expression and presentation, in analytical writing, and in research

Work required:
-Active participation in classroom discussion (coming prepared to every class)
-Three response papers to the readings (2-3 pp typed; double-spaced)
-One short oral presentation on a particular question/aspect of the course (5-7 minutes)
-One mid-term exam (in class, questions distributed beforehand)
-A final paper on a research topic chosen in consultation with the professor (12-15 pages)

Some clarifications of work:
-Questions for in-class discussion will be distributed at the beginning of each class for the following class.
-Response papers are your personal responses to a specific question that will be posed by the professor (cf. “weekly program”) and that will ask you to think deeply about a primary text and often an essay connected to this text. (You will have a 24-hour “lateness window” to hand/send in your response.)
-The final project is a research paper on a topic concerning a double or a mask. You will be expected to read and cite several books and/or articles pertinent to your topic and include notes and bibliography with your paper. You will also submit a preliminary outline and bibliography to your professor mid-way through the semester and consult on a draft of the written project. You will bring to bear on your research what you have learned in class and what other scholars and cultural commentators have to tell us about, for example, (from the mostly Western sphere):

King Kong
Godzilla
The Devil
The Golem
The Leviathan
The “Terrorist”
The Medusa
Spiderman
Superman
James Bond
or
Metamorphosis (the cockroach) Kafka
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Robert Louis Stevenson
The Phantom of the Opera (Gaston Leroux)
The Wizard of Oz (the lion, the tin man, the scarecrow, the wizard) L. Frank Baum
The Portrait of Dorian Gray (Oscar Wilde)
The Man Who Laughs (Victor Hugo)
The Oval Portrait (Edgar Allen Poe)

Or a “double” or “mask” of your own choice (can be film, BD, a cultural phenomenon as well as literature)

What is most important is that this figure, however it presents, means something special to you.

Grading:
- Participation in class, including short oral presentation 10%
- Response papers 30%
- Mid-Term Exam 20%
- Final paper 40%

N.B. Your participation grade will suffer (lowered by a grade) if you cut class more than 2 times. It will be lowered more, if you keep on cutting.

Required films (can be viewed in Bobst library or on the Internet):
Charlie Chaplin: Modern Times
Disney: The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Jean Cocteau: Beauty and the Beast
Disney: Beauty and the Beast
Jean Rouche: Les Maîtres Fous

Required Texts:

There will also be postings on nyu classes: Called “secondary readings” on the weekly schedule.

Weekly Schedule:

Psychosocial Reasons for Masking:
Sept. 4 : Introduction (presentation of course, of participants)
Why do we create doubles and masks? What do they do for us? What might be their danger? Presentation of *commedia dell’arte* masks.

**Sept. 11:** *Short student presentations of *commedia* figures: 1) The valet Harlequin; 2) The valets and their evolution: Pulchinella – Punch and Pedrolina- Pierrot; 3) The “masters”: il Capitano (Matamore), Pantalone (Pantaloon), il Dottore (The Doctor); 4) The soubrettes/female servants: Smeraldina, Columbina; and the Inamorati (or Lovers)


Goldoni, *The Servant of Two Masters* + questions

**Making the World Work for the Underclass:**

**Sept 18:** *Short student presentation: Molière and the *commedia dell’arte* in his theatre*

*Reading:* Molière, *The Imaginary Invalid* + questions

*Secondary reading:* Lewis Hyde, excerpts from *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1998), pp. 4-14,+ questions

Charlie Chaplin, *Modern Times* + questions

**All is Carnival:**

**Sept. 25:** Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (pp. 1-101 + questions)


**1st response paper:** How have the commedia types evolved from what we see in Goldoni to those in Molière’s *The Imaginary Invalid*? What might be said, then, about the masks in this play?

**Oct. 2:** Marquez, read pp.103-313 + questions

*Short student presentation: What is magical realism? Presentation of “how to do/think about research”

**Oct. 16:** Marquez, read pp.313-417 + questions

*Short student presentation: On the history of Colombia

[This week: Individual meetings with professor to discuss final research paper.]

**Romanticism: The Grotesque and the Sublime Self Emerges:**

**Oct. 23:** *Short student presentation: The Cathedral of Notre Dame*

Reading: Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris* (Books 1-4) + questions

**Oct. 30:** Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris* (Books 5-8) + questions
*Short student presentation: Gypsies in the European Imagination*

**Mid-Term Exam (in class) (one hour)**

**Nov. 6:** Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris* (Books 9-11) + questions
Film: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Disney + questions

[This week: Meetings with professor to report on research for the final project: preliminary outline and bibliography]

**The Animal Double and the Monster Double:**


**2nd response paper:** How does doubling function in Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris* and in Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Compare and Contrast. Be careful to select specific examples.)

**Nov. 20:**
Film: *Beauty and the Beast*, Jean Cocteau; Film: *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney
*Short student presentation: Disney’s transformation of the tale of *Beauty and the Beast* v. Cocteau’s imaginative leap.
Film: *Les Maîtres Fous*, Jean Rouche + questions

**Ghosts and Doubles Collide in Consciousness:**

**Nov. 27:** *Shelley, Frankenstein* + questions
*Short student presentation: What is monstrous, what is not monstrous about the character Frankenstein?


**First draft of research paper due**

**Dec. 11:** Morrison, pp. 100-end + questions
3rd Response Paper: Who or What is Beloved?

[Final draft of research paper due Dec. 17]

Selected Bibliography:


