

Instructors: Jolene Mathieson, M.A, Marius Henderson, M.A.

Title: Writing the (Un-)Real

Course: Seminar Ib

Number: 53-558

Time: Wednesdays, 12-14

Room: Phil 1250

Starts: 15.10.2014



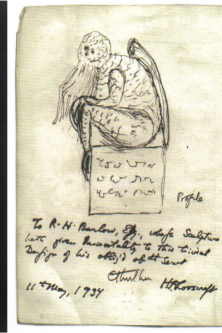
Portrait of George Eliot
by Samuel Laurence (c. 1860)



Portrait of Henry
James by John Singer
Sargent (1913)



Bela Lugosi as *Dracula*
(1931)



Sketch of *Cthulhu*
by H.P. Lovecraft
(1934)



Michael K. Williams
as Omar Little in
The Wire
(2002-2008)

The starting question for this seminar is: What is the relation between ‘the real’ (or ‘reality’) and ‘the unreal’ (or ‘the fantastic’) in literary and other artistic texts? In order to approach this question, our seminar will begin with a discussion of key philosophical texts (e.g. by Plato and Roland Barthes) that address questions concerning how human perception constitutes ‘reality’ and which role literature and other arts may play in this process. Here we will be introduced to the concept of *mimesis* and we will discuss why and how texts attempt to create ‘reality effects’. Because we will try to determine which narrative strategies might lead to a text’s reception as ‘realistic’, fundamental epistemological and semiological concerns are of imminent importance for the trajectory of our course. However, we will also examine to which extent texts that involve instances of the ‘unreal’ like H.P. Lovecraft’s horror stories for instance, strive to touch upon allegedly ‘deeper’ or ‘metaphysical’ aspects of ‘reality’. In this context, we will take contemporary ‘speculative realist’ philosophy into consideration.

This course will engage you in a *tour de force* through the history of ‘realisms’ in British and North American literature – from 19th century ‘realist literature proper’ via ‘weird realism’ and ‘kitchen sink realism’ to contemporary ‘meta-realism’. We will mainly analyze shorter prose texts, but also excerpts from novels, theater plays, film, and television series. Hence, we will take up recent media theoretical discussions on the supposedly higher degree of ‘realistic authenticity’ of televisual texts like *The Wire*. And we will scrutinize how TV series like *True Blood* utilize representations of the ‘supernatural unreal’ in order to address issues of ‘real world’ cultural politics. As we will often discuss the artistic texts in conjunction with theoretical texts, you should be willing to delve into a vast array of textual artifacts.

Texts: A reader with all the required reading material is available for purchase at Print and Copyhaus (Grindelallee 32). Each of you must purchase a copy and bring it to the first session.

Credit requirements: Thorough preparation of all reading material, active participation, 2 academic essays, and a research paper.