WRTG 3020: The Grotesque

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The Grotesque:
Modern contemporary art, film, TV, and literature embrace the bizarre in a way never before seen. Many might term what they see and read as “grotesque”—used either negatively or positively to mean that which is strange, unsightly, obscene, and in some cases, even funny.

Our course will investigate and analyze these “bizarre” and grotesque features through a scholarly lens. We will look at how authors have employed the genre to question the rhetoric that holds our society together. By looking at the grotesque’s persuasive qualities, we will come to a fuller understanding of how this aesthetic has become more rhetorically complex over time and how it affects our civic, academic, and personal lives.

In this course, you will be both critic and author. As a writing workshop, the course emphasizes the writing and revision process in addition to critical thinking and critical reading.

CCHE Criteria
This course addresses the key criteria for an upper-division core course as specified by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), as well as by the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) approved WRTG 3020 Curricular Goals:

Rhetorical Knowledge: The course takes a rhetorical perspective on the use of the grotesque in various media, including critical theory, literature, art, and film. Key texts that will help you understand the grotesque’s place in society include a number of theoretical and scholarly articles that range from Sigmund Freud to Julia Kristeva. Many of our readings also come from a compilation of essays about the grotesque entitled, fittingly, Grotesque. For the development of your own rhetorical strategies as writers, we will refer the Purdue OWL website as well as the Colorado State University Writing Center and WAC Clearinghouse.

Writing Process: Writing is an ongoing dialogue between writer and the reader. As such, students will write multiple drafts throughout the semester. This includes crafting an evolving thesis that truly allows exploration of an issue and reworking the thesis as new claims and evidence are discovered. Students are also part of a writing community, and as such, much of the participation grade will be based on student interaction within the peer review groups. As an integral component in helping one’s classmates become better writers through the workshop process, students will be asked to provide constructive, yet honest, feedback. Students will also
be expected to take the comments of their peers very seriously, and to implement their suggestions in each progressive draft.

**Writing Conventions:** In this class, we will review the fundamental rules of writing, including sentence structure, use of active voice, vibrant imagery, and discovery of your own writer’s voice. Writing is a dialogue, not a monologue, not a lecture.

**Effective Application:** Assignments in this course are geared toward real-world audiences, including members of your own discipline. Students will extend writing practice to special rhetorical situations even as they make their work accessible to secondary audiences in other disciplines.

**Availability:** I try to be as available as possible to address any questions or concerns about course assignments. I encourage students to visit my office hours to discuss assignments, drafts, or the course in general. While I am happy to answer questions over e-mail, in order to give all students equal time, I am only able to look at extra drafts during my office hours. I also encourage you to visit the Writing Center (located in the Norlin Commons, room E111). This is a valuable resource that provides one-on-one writing consultations.

**Attendance Policy:** Because of the workshop-seminar format of the course, your attendance and active participation are essential. You can miss up to three class meetings without it affecting your participation grade. There are no distinctions between “excused” and “unexcused” absences—if you’re not here, you can’t participate. Extreme situations can be accommodated on a case-by-case basis. For each absence beyond those three, your participation grade will drop by 10%.

* If you miss more than 8 classes, you will receive an F in the course

**Tardiness:** Occasional (one or two) instances of minor lateness are understandable and will not be penalized. But repeated or extreme tardiness (more than ten minutes) will result in a lowered participation grade. The deduction for repeated or extreme tardiness will be 5% for each instance. If you have a medical reason for being late, proper documentation can excuse an extreme tardiness.

**Technology:** NO use of cell phones in class. If your cell phone is out, whether you are actively using it or not, you will receive a 5% deduction off of your final participation grade. Laptops and tablets may be used, but if you are on any website (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) that is not appropriate to the course, you will receive a 5% deduction off your final participation grade.

**Late Paper Policy:** Rough drafts must be turned in on time, as your paper will not be workshopped if your peers haven’t read it. Late papers will affect your grade as follows:
Smaller writing assignments (paper proposals, outlines, summaries of readings, etc.): A late assignment will result in a 10% deduction for every day the assignment is late.

Major assignments (response papers, comparative paper, final paper): A late paper will result in a 3.3% reduction for every day the paper is late.

Extensions: You may request, if needed, one extension during the semester. This must be requested at least 24 hours in advance of the due date. This extension may only be used for a FINAL paper.

Participation: A good portion of your grade is based on your contribution to class discussions and workshops. This also means coming to class prepared. Many of the assignments will ask you to answer specific questions about a story or article—I strongly advise writing these questions out on a piece of paper and bringing your answers with you to class.

Conferences: During the course of the semester, we will meet for two individual 10-minute conferences to discuss your writing. You will schedule the first conferences at a time of your choosing. The second conference will be during your final paper. I sincerely want to know how I can best help you as a writer, how I can help you achieve what is most important to you. You can help me be a better reader of your work if you prepare questions and concerns about a piece of writing ahead of our conference.

Required Texts/Materials

1. Franz Kafka *Metamorphosis*
2. Randy Shilts *And the Band Played On*
3. Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love*
4. Additional reading assignments. These will typically be posted to Desire2Learn
5. Copies of your work when needed for class discussion
6. Word or Word-compatible software

Strongly Suggested
MLA Handbook, 7th edition

Writing Assignments
You will be asked to complete informal in-class writings, formal essays, and a research or creative project.

Major Assignments

- **Response Papers** (3 pages, double spaced). For two units of your choosing, you will write a response paper on one or more works within that unit. The paper will look at a particular element discussed in class and further the analysis of that element.

- **Comparative Essay** (5–6 pages, double spaced). In this essay, you will compare the rhetoric used in two different versions of a fairy tale, looking closely at how the messages
and rhetorical techniques change from one version to the other and how this affects our interpretation of the tales.

- **Final project.** You may choose between a research essay and a creative piece.

  For the creative piece, you will write a story, shoot a short film, create a photographic essay, etc. that uses elements of the grotesque. You will research, through library and other materials, information about the element(s) you plan to include (e.g., the grotesque body, the carnivalesque, etc.) and then write a 3–4 page paper on how you incorporated these elements and the rhetorical choices you made in doing so.

  For the research paper, you will explore an aspect of the grotesque, and, through the use of outside sources gained from library and other materials, formulate and support an argument. You might explore the use of an element of the grotesque through a text or texts or you might trace how the aspect is employed differently across cultures or time periods.

**Grades**

Assignments will count as follows:

- Response Papers: 5% each (total of 10%)
- Comparative Paper: 20%
- Research or Creative Project: 25%
- Annotated bibliography: 10%
- Presentations: 5%
- All other assignments (proposals, outlines, etc.): 15%
- Participation, including attendance and workshops: 15%

**Grading Scale**

C- 70–73,  D+ 67–69,  D  64–66,  D- 60–63,  F  59 --

“A” work is not only thought provoking and structurally polished but also completed with a high level of critical independence, fresh thinking, logical organization, and excellent mechanics and style.

“B” work is well above average; it explores difficult questions in a way that is creative, critical, and thought provoking. It is critically and organizationally sound, stylistically competent, and contains few errors.

“C” work is adequate and meets minimum requirements. The work is functional at a college
level and all aspects of the assignment have been addressed. However, it may lack sufficient critical inquiry, organizational clarity, and control over mechanics and style.

“D” work is substandard at the college level. It is usually completed in haste and reflects little thought or attention to detail. A “D” indicates that major portions of the assignment are completed poorly.

“F” work is incomplete or inadequate. An “F” will also be given if plagiarism has occurred.

**Course Schedule**

*Most assignments are to be submitted to D2L. However, some assignments will be brought to class in hard copy form while others will be submitted via e-mail. The schedule below indicates the method of submission for each assignment. Please check it before turning your homework in.*

**We will be meeting in a computer lab on many days to conduct in-class work. On such days, you will need to have any notes, research, and drafts available for use during the class period. Failure to come equipped for such classes will result in a lowered participation grade. And you’ll miss out on valuable research time!**

**Week 1: Ab/Normal and Power**

Aug 25
- Introduction to the course—Syllabus review, getting to know each other, sharing our own preliminary concepts of the grotesque

  **Assignment—Due Aug 27**

  1. Read “History of the Grotesque,” “Defining the Grotesque,” and “Grotesque First Principles, available on D2L.
     - Annotate the readings. In particular, I want you to compare and contrast the definitions. Where do the authors agree and where do they disagree? Which of the definitions is most persuasive to you and why?

Aug 27
- Discussion of readings—the difficulty of definition
- Introduction to concepts of the ab/normal

  **Assignment—Due Aug 29**

  1. “Discipline and Punish Excerpt 1” and “Discipline and Punish Excerpt 2,” available on D2L. Annotate the reading and consider the following.
     - How would you summarize Foucault’s argument?
     - In what ways are distinctions between the abnormal and the normal created and enforced?
c. Do you agree with Foucault? Why or why not?
d. How do you see Foucault’s argument applying to the modern day? Where do you see surveillance and what effect does it have?

2. Suggested but not required, “Moral Distinctions Not Derived from Reason,” available on D2L

Aug 29
- Discussion of “Discipline and Punish”
- Discussion of how institutions (schools, prisons, governments, etc.) establish and uphold distinctions between normality and abnormality

Assignment—Due Sept 3
1. Read “History of Apartheid”
2. Watch District 9 and answer the reading questions.
   **The movie is available at the library course reserves (at the circulation desk).**

Sept 1
- Labor Day, no class

Sept 3
- Discussion of District 9
- Representing the Other
- The allegorical film—its effectiveness as a rhetorical tool

Assignment—Due Sept 5
1. Read “The Yellow Wallpaper,” available on D2L. Annotate the reading by considering the following
   a. Why is the wife considered “abnormal”?
   b. Who and what exercises power in this situation?
   c. What is the result of that power?

Sept 5
- Gender and power—discussion of “Yellow Wallpaper”

Assignment—Due Sept 8
1. Read selections from *And the Band Played On* and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

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**Sept 8**
- Discussion of *And the Band Played On*
- Rhetoric of the diseased body

**Assignment—Due Sept 10**
1. Read selections from *And the Band Played On* and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

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**Sept 10**
- Continued discussion of *And the Band Played On*
- The body invisible: taboos and silence

**Assignment—Due Sept 12**
1. Read selections from *And the Band Played On* and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

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**Sept 12**
- Continued discussion of *And the Band Played On*
- AIDS activism: making voices heard
- Response papers—expectations, argument, and writing conventions

**Assignment—Due Sept 15**
1. Read “Fairy Tale Façade” and “The Lure of the Fairy Tale”
2. Take notes on what you read, looking specifically at the following questions (a) In “Fairy Tale Façade,” what is meant by “wish fulfillment”? How do fairy tales enact this and what is the result? (b) How are we “lured” by fairy tales? What is the author’s main assertion?

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**Unit 2: Fairy Tales**

**Sept 15**
- Introduction to fairy tales and the grotesque—how fairy tales “teach”
- The case of “The Girl with No Hands”
Assignment—Due Sept 17  
1. Read “Cinderella” and “Rapunzel” and consider the following  
   a. What sort of social norms are established each tale the tale?  
   b. In what way does each fairy tale instruct us? What is the lesson or moral?  
   c. What is the role of the grotesque in establishing norms or imparting the moral?  
   d. Consider as well the differences between the tales—who is the audience and what is the purpose for each one?

Sept 17  
• Discussion of “Cinderella” and “Rapunzel”  
• The progression of fairy tales: the role and function of retellings  
• “Cinderella” and “Rapunzel” reconsidered

Assignment—Due Sept 19  
1. Read, in the following order, “Little Red Cap [Grimm],” “Little Red Riding Hood [Perrault],” and “The Werewolf” and consider the following  
   a. What do the earlier versions teach us? What differences are there between those two versions and what is the effect of those differences?  
   b. How does the later version address and/or subvert the earlier ones?  
   c. What message is the later version trying to get across and is it successful in doing so?

Sept 19  
• Discussion of Red Riding Hood stories  
• The rhetoric of femininity and masculinity, and the function of role reversals

Assignment—Due Sept 22  
1. Read “A Visit from St. Nicholas” and watch Rare Exports and consider the following  
   a. What tropes regarding Christmas or Santa does the film play with? To what purpose?  
   b. How does the film address gender? (think back to what we deemed as masculine and feminine in fairy tales)  
   c. What themes does the film address? If fairy and folk tales teach us, what does this film? And what is the function of the grotesque in both the themes and the “lesson”?
Sept 22
• Discussion of Rare Exports
• When dreams become nightmares

Assignment—Due Sept 24
1. Decide on a fairy tale you’d like to write on—remember that you need two versions of the same tale
2. Draft a 1–2 page (double-spaced) paper proposal that includes the following:
   a. The versions of the fairy tale you have chosen to write about
   b. What aspect of the tales you will focus on
   c. Why you chose these fairy tales—why this is of interest to you

Sept 24
• Writing a comparative paper
• Paper proposals and outlining

Assignment—Due Sept 26
1. Complete an outline (1-2 pages, double spaced) of your paper. Post a copy to D2L

Sept 26
***We will be meeting in the computer lab, location TBA. Bring any materials you need for in-class work***
• In-class work
• Online writing resources

Assignment—Due Sept 29
1. Complete a draft of your paper. Post an electronic copy to D2L and bring a paper copy to class

Sept 29
• Small-group workshops of papers

Assignment—Due Oct 1
1. Read “Monstrous and Grotesque” and consider the following
   a. What do we deem monstrous and why?
   b. What does the genre of the grotesque reveal in its presentation of the monstrous?

Unit 3 The Monstrous Grotesque
Oct 1
• Introduction to the monstrous grotesque

Assignment—Due Oct 3
1. Read the excerpt from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and consider the following
   a. What sort of monster is Mr. Hyde? Where do we see his monstrosities?
   b. What effect does the story have on us as the reader? What do we take away from it?

Oct 3
• Discussion of *Dr. Jekyll*
• The human monster

Assignment—Due Oct 6
1. Read *The Metamorphosis* and answer the reading questions

Oct 6
• Discussion of *The Metamorphosis*
• The hybrid monster

Assignment—Due Oct 8
1. Watch *The Thing*, available on D2L, and answer the reading questions

Oct 8
• Discussion of *The Thing*
• Monster versus human

Assignment—Due Oct 10
1. Read Kristeva, Bakhtin, and “Grotesque Bodies” and consider the following
   a. How does a celebration of the body differ from the idea of the monstrous? And yet, how is it similar?
   b. What do we consider taboo and why?
   c. How does the taboo affect the way we view our bodies?

Unit 4: Carnivalesque and the Grotesque Body

Oct 10
• Introduction to the Carnivalesque—Celebration of the body

Assignment—Due Oct 13
1. Read “In the Penal Colony” and consider the following
   a. What is the role of the body in this story?
b. How do various characters view the body (the narrator, the Commandant, the officer)? How do these various viewpoints affect our own reading?

Oct 13
• Discussion of “The Penal Colony”

Assignment—Due Oct 15
1. Read *Geek Love*, chapters 1–7 and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

Oct 15
• Discussion of *Geek Love*
• Embracing the “abnormal” body

Assignment—Due Oct 17
1. Read *Geek Love*, chapters 8–14 and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

Oct 17
• Discussion of *Geek Love*
• The “normal” become Other—changing our perceptions and remedying misconceptions

Assignment—Due Oct 19
1. Read *Geek Love*, chapters 15–21 and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

Oct 20
• Discussion of *Geek Love*
• Comparison to real-life “freaks”—Barnum and Bailey and reclamation of the term

Assignment—Due Oct 22
1. Finish *Geek Love* and answer the reading questions, available on D2L
2. You will be assigned a group and a topic on which you will present. See D2L for presentation criteria

Oct 22
• Discussion of *Geek Love*
• Presentations

Assignment—Due Oct 24
1. Read Freud’s “The Uncanny” and consider the following
Unit 5: The Uncanny Grotesque

Oct 24
- Introduction to the uncanny grotesque
- The term unheimlich and the problem of definition (for Freud and for us)

Assignment—Due Oct 27
1. Read “The Sandman” and consider the following
   a. Do you agree with Freud’s assertion that the story is uncanny? Why or why not? Consider not just the story as a whole but the individual aspects of the uncanny Freud says it embodies
   b. Do you think the uncanniness in the story is grotesque or just uncanny? Why?

Oct 27
- Discussion of “The Sandman”
- Comparing Freud’s reading to our own

Assignment—Due Oct 29
1. Read “The Doll” and consider the following
   a. One of Freud’s assertions is that dolls are not uncanny. Do you agree? Why or why not?
   b. If you found the story uncanny, in what way was it so?
   c. Dolls are an integral part of our childhoods, whether baby dolls or GI Joe. How does this story change our view of these symbols of childhood?

Oct 29
- Discussion of “The Doll”

Assignment—Due Oct 31
1. Watch The Shining and answer the reading questions on D2L

Oct 31
- Discussion of The Shining
- Horror and the uncanny—do they mesh?

Assignment—Due Nov 3
1. Read “Laughter and Grotesque” and “Attraction/Repulsion” and consider the following
a. Which of our readings/viewings thus far have elicited the reactions discussed in Graulund’s essays? Why have they done so?
b. Why do you think we’re both attracted to and repulsed by the grotesque? How can the grotesque function to do both?

**Unit 6: Our Reactions**

**Nov 3**
- Introduction to reader reaction, from laughter to horror to attraction

  **Assignment—Due Nov 5**
  1. Watch *Shaun of the Dead* and answer the reading questions, both available on D2L

**Nov 5**
- Discussion of *Shaun of the Dead*
- The role of the comic

  **Assignment—Due Nov 7**
  1. Read “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” and consider the following
     a. How do you interpret this story? What does it all mean?
     b. What is Connie’s reaction to Arnold?
     c. What is yours? Does it match Connie’s or is it different?

**Nov 7**
- Discussion of “Where Are You Going”
- The role of horror/repulsion

  **Assignment—Due Nov 10**
  1. Read “A Haunted House” and consider the following
     a. What role does attraction play in the story?
     b. What personal experiences do you have with haunted houses? Why are we attracted to them?

**Nov 10**
- Discussion of “A Haunted House”
- The role of attraction

  **Assignment—Due Nov 12**
  1. Read “Postcolonial Grotesque” and “Global Grotesque” and consider the following
     a. How do conceptions of the grotesque differ across cultures? What similarities and differences are there?
Unit 7: Grotesque around the World

Nov 12
- Introduction to the global grotesque
  
  **Assignment—Due Nov 14:**
  1. Read “East/West” and answer the reading questions, available on D2L

Nov 14
- Discussion of “East/West”
  
  **Assignment—Due Nov 17**
  1. Read Levi-Strauss and The Inkanyamba and consider the following
     a. In what ways do the myth and the creature differ from myths or creatures in
        our own society?
     b. What “mythemes” from Levi-Strauss do you see at work in this tale? What is
        the function of those mythemes?

Nov 17
- Discussion of Inkanyamba
  
  **Assignment—Due Nov 19**
  1. Consider what you’d like to do for your final paper. Come prepared to share your idea
     with the class

Nov 19
- Introduction to final paper
- Full-class workshop of ideas
  
  **Assignment—Due Nov 21:**
  1. Draft a paper proposal, 1-2 pages, double spaced that explains whether you will be
     doing the creative or formal paper, the reason you’ve chosen one over the other, the
     concepts with which you’ll be working, and how you plan to present those concepts.
     **Post your proposal to D2L**

Nov 21
- Researching and paper conventions
  
  **Assignment—Due Dec 1**
  1. Perform research on your topic. Find three of your five sources and annotate
     them by including the following:
     a. Write a brief summary (four or five sentences) that explains the main
        arguments and evidence used.
b. Assess the source by explaining whether it’s valid (is it biased or objective, is the information reliable, etc.).
c. Explain how this source will be of use to you

Dec 1
***We will be meeting in the computer lab, location TBA. Bring any materials needed to do in-class work***
  Assignment—Due Dec 3
  1. Create an outline of your paper and post it to D2L

Dec 3
  • Conferences

Dec 5
  • Conferences
  Assignment—Due Dec 8
  1. Complete a rough draft of your final paper. Post a copy to D2L and bring a paper copy to class

Dec 8
  • Small-group workshop of drafts
  • Presentation sign-up
  Assignment—Due Dec 10/12
  1. Prepare your final presentations. See D2L for specifics (but Don’t Panic! Your papers need not be finalized for you to present. You’re presenting your ideas, not the finished product)

Dec 10
  • Presentations

Dec 12
  • Presentations

***Final Papers due Dec 17***

Enjoy your semester break!
University Policies

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is defined as the use of another’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment. Examples of plagiarism include failing to use quotation marks when directly quoting from a source; failing to document distinctive ideas from a source; fabricating or inventing a source; turning in someone else’s work as your own; and copying information from electronic sources. In this course, if you hand in a piece of writing that is plagiarized in full or in part, you will receive a failing grade on that assignment and the F will be factored into your final course grade.

The Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.

Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

Religious Observances: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. In this class, I ask that you contact me at least one week ahead of the date(s) that you will be absent so that we can discuss any assignments/class material that you will miss.

Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and
the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh.