Angels and Aliens

“It is very easy to claim a theory of everything if you get to decide what that everything is. It is very easy to explain everything on the table if you have put everything you cannot explain underneath it in the wastebasket.” ~ Jeffrey J. Kripal

“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.” Gen 6:4

Course Description

Throughout recorded history, human beings have claimed to make contact with supernatural powers from beyond this world. In the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions these beings are known as angels. Angels play an enormously important role in these traditions. They help create the first human beings. They reveal sacred scriptures and help found religions. They procreate with women. They transport prophets and seers, like Muhammad or Enoch, through the heavens to receive secret wisdom. And these angels become warriors in the apocalypse, battling demons and helping to create a new earth.

Since 1947, a new extra-terrestrial power has appeared in literature, film, comics and religious scripture: the alien. Abductees, artists, and religious visionaries claim that aliens perform all of the same actions historically attributed to angels. Aliens today found religions, transport humans to distant worlds, conduct genetic experiments, and, in films such as Independence Day, attempt to destroy human civilization.

How do we make sense of these uncanny parallels? In this writing-intensive course, we will use the tools of comparative religions to understand the puzzling parallels between angels and aliens. Students will conduct close readings of scriptures from the ancient world and compare them with contemporary depictions of aliens in film, literature, and abductee reports. We will utilize historical, philosophical, and sociological methods to analyze this material.

Course objectives:

- Introduce students to a range of theories and methods employed in interdisciplinary humanities
- Learn to apply multiple techniques of analysis to a range of material (e.g., scripture, literature, film, first-person reports)
- Provide a historical and thematic overview of the topics of angels (antiquity to present) and aliens (1947 to present).
- Practice and refine skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond (e.g., close reading, analysis, interpretation, comparison).

First year seminar writing objectives:

- Discuss and apply a range of strategies to improve the student’s academic writing.
- Produce a range of informal (e.g., reading responses, biography assignment) and formal (booknote, encyclopedia entry, final paper, presentation) writing.
• Learn and practice effective habits for producing high quality academic writing (e.g. pre-writing, revision, outlining)
• Recognize and approach writing, reading and thinking as three manifestations of a single process.

Required texts:
• Kripal, Jeffrey and Strieber, Whitley, The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained.
• Graff, Gerald and Birkenstein, Cathy, They Say, I Say 4th Ed.
• Hacker, Diana and Sommers, Nancy, A Pocket Style Manual 8th Ed.
• All other texts will be provided as pdfs, links, or uploads.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

I. Assignments
The student is expected to come to class with the reading assigned for the day completed and ready to be discussed. Class participation is a significant part of the grade. Reading responses will be assigned which allow you to practice writing techniques and deep reading. The first assignment will be a booknote. The second major assignment will be an encyclopedia entry. The third major assignment is a research and comparative paper. Finally, you will deliver an oral presentation in the last week of class.

II. Grading:

Attendance/Participation: 16%
Biography assignment: 3%
Reading responses: 16%
Comparative paper: 10%
Encyclopedia entry: 20%
Final paper: 25%
Oral presentation: 10%

Grading Scale (%)
100-94 (A); 93.9-90 (A-); 89.9-87 (B+); 86.9-84 (B); 83.9-80 (B-); 79.9-77 (C+); 76.9-74 (C); 73.9-70 (C-); 69.9-67 (D+); 66.9-64(D); 63.9-60 (D-); 59.9-(F).

III. Attendance and Absences:

Students are expected to attend all scheduled activities for all of the classes for which they are registered during the entire course of the academic semester for which they are enrolled. Please notify me as soon as possible if you will have any excused absences (athletics, debate team, etc.) in the semester. If you fall ill, please let me know before class. Finally, if more than one class is missed for illness then I request you turn in a note from your doctor.

Any more than 3 absences will result in a penalty of 1 point deducted from your final grade for each subsequent absence. This deduction is separate from any impact the absences have on your pop quiz grade.

IV. Deadlines and Late Work

To verify illness or justify another absence (primarily due to medical or family emergency), please send me an email in advance if possible. If not, please send the email as soon as possible thereafter. Extensions will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.
Otherwise all deadlines in this course are final. Late work will not be accepted.

V. Policy on Electronic Devices
It is highly recommended that students avoid the use of electronic equipment, but I will not prohibit its use. Many of the texts we will read this semester are available in electronic formats. I also understand many young students have taken notes on their laptop since childhood and cannot imagine doing so by another method. As such, electronic equipment will be allowed unless it becomes apparent it is being used to distract the student and those around them.

Please note that research by neurologists and cognitive-scientists has proven the old-fashioned pen-and-paper strategy of notation produces higher levels of retention, comprehension, and understanding. See for example: http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/take-notes-by-hand-for-better-long-term-comprehension.html. The reason is quite simple: these devices are engineered to be distracting! Entire libraries of books, images, websites, videos, and games are at our fingertips waiting to be clicked.

VI. What to bring to class
To facilitate and ground our discussion of the reading, bring all of the texts for the day to class. Electronic editions are permitted, although it is recommended students print pdfs. Also bring a pad of paper and writing device so that you can take notes. For class sessions where you will comment on one another’s work it is necessary to bring a laptop to track comments.

VII. Class preparation
The discussion of every class meeting will center on the assigned text(s). As such, it is imperative that the reading been completed prior to class. When everyone is prepared, seminars can become dynamic, intellectually ambitious forums for discussion. Each student benefits by sharing his or her insights, queries, and concerns with others, and hearing alike in turn. In addition to large class discussions there will be opportunities for small group work throughout the semester. In both instances it will be unfair to your classmates if you fail to prepare.

VIII. Honor code
The DePauw University Code of Conduct is available here: http://www.depauw.edu/studentacademiclife/home/community-standards/2/

IX. ADA statement
It is the policy and practice of DePauw University to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Written notification from Student Disability Services is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please contact Student Disability Services. Allow one week advance notice to ensure enough time for reasonable accommodations to be made. Otherwise, it is not guaranteed that the accommodation can be provided on a timely basis. Accommodations are not retroactive. Students who have questions about Student Disability Services or who have, or think they may have, a disability (psychiatric, attentional, learning, vision, hearing, physical, medical, etc.) are invited to contact Student Disability Services for a confidential discussion in Union Building Suite 200 or by phone at 658-6267.

If you have a documented disability and will be seeking academic adjustments or accommodations, please let me know during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible.

X. Religious Observances
DePauw accommodates students who are adherents of a religious tradition and wish to fulfill obligations of that religious tradition on holy days. Students are expected to notify their instructors of their intent to
fulfill the obligations of their religious tradition well in advance of these days. For the sake of this policy, “holy days” are defined as periods of time in which either: activities required by normal class participation are prohibited by a religious tradition, or a special worship obligation is required by a religious tradition. For this class I ask that you notify me by e-mail at least 10 days in advance of the date in question.

XI. Syllabus Agreement
I reserve the right to change any of the reading assignments or the ordering of the readings. The assignments, policies, course goals, and grading, however, will not change.

Course Schedule


Thu., Aug. 23: before class: make sure to turn in your biography assignment (1-1.5 pages) to me instructor via email (matthewdillon@depauw.edu).
In class: Introducing your FYS. Overview of expectations and assignments. Discuss biography assignment.

In class: Reading-Thinking-Writing as 3 dimensions of a single process. Lecture and discussion on “The Already World” and how to do comparison.

Thu., Aug. 30: before class: read “The Art of Summarizing” in They Say, I Say (hereafter TSIS) and “Into the Woods” in SN. Write a 1-2 paragraph summary of what Whitley Strieber is saying.
In class: They say and the art of good summary. Discussion of the Strieber piece. Introducing the booknote assignment.
After class: begin researching book chapters and/or databases for your booknote article.

Apocalypse Then and Now

Tue., Sep. 4: before class: for primary texts, read selections from Genesis, 1 Enoch and Daniel. For writing, read “The Art of Quoting” in TSIS.
In class: Lecture/overview of Judaism from its origins to the intertestamental/apocalyptic period. Interpret and compare the primary texts.

Thu., Sep. 6: before class: Read “A Context in the Sky.”
In class: Framing UFOs as a new apocalyptic myth. Lecture and discussion on key terms: myth and apocalypse.

Tue., Sep. 11: NO CLASS: attend library Scavenger hunt.

In class: analyze Revelation as myth. Lecture on early Christianity as an apocalyptic movement. Jesus as angel.

Tue., Sep. 18: before class: read Bullard, “Secret Worlds and Promised Lands” as well as the section on “Comparative Eschatologies” (both pdfs).
In class: Discuss context and zombies.
Thu., Sep. 20: before class: read selections from *Intelligent Design* by Rael.
_In class:_ Watch “Invasion of the Body Snatchers.”

Tue., Sep. 25: before class: read selections from *Intelligent Design* by Claude Räel.
_In class:_ Discuss “Invasion of the Body Snatchers” as an apocalyptic myth. Lecture on the UFO in context. Analyze Räelians as our first UFO religion.

Wed., Sept. 26: **DEPAUW DAY OF DIALOGUE**

**Revelations**

Thu., Sep. 27: before class: read “Channeling and the New Age” and watch short video of Jane Roberts channeling Seth.
_In class:_ Continue discussion of the Räelians and revelation/apocalyptic thought. Lecture on millennialism. Discuss/introduce the New Age and channeling.

Fri., Sep. 28: **First draft of comparative paper due to professor (matthewdillon@depauw.edu) by 11:59pm.**
*Over the weekend:_ begin thinking of what topic, group, religion, or figure you want to write your encyclopedia entry on.

**Heaven’s Gate: a Case Study**

_In class:_ begin case study on Heaven’s Gate. Issues raised by the group include religious violence/suicide, transgression/deviance, NRM vs. cult vs. religion, charisma, freedom of religion in the Constitution, embodiment and much else.

Thu., Oct. 4: before class: begin research project. Identify and provide bibliography for at least six secondary sources from individuals associated with Heaven’s Gate. Read “Planet about to be Recycled” (link: [https://bit.ly/2QQvSa7](https://bit.ly/2QQvSa7))
_In class:_ discuss research strategies, how to find sources, and what separates a good source from a mediocre or bad one. Close reading of “Planet” and discussion of apocalypticism in UFO movements.

Sat., Oct 6: **final draft of comparative paper due to professor by 12pm noon.**

Tue., Oct. 9: before class: continue research project. Read one of the articles on Heaven’s Gate identified by the class and summarize its evidence, argument, and perspective.
_In class:_ Present your summary of the article to classmates. This should take no more than 5 minutes. The goal here is to offer an opportunity to see what a real, upper-level seminar looks like.
_After class:_ begin thinking what subject you would like to write your encyclopedia article on.

Thu., Oct. 11: before class: Read *Hypostasis of the Archons* and selections from *The Gospel of Thomas* from the Nag Hammadi Library.
_In class:_ Lecture on Gnostic Christianity and point of comparison with Heaven’s Gate. Finish discussion of Heaven’s Gate: what happened here? How do we think about this critically?

Tue., Oct. 16: **FALL BREAK – NO CLASS MEETING.**

Thu., Oct. 18: **FALL BREAK – NO CLASS MEETING.**
Mon., Oct. 22 – Fri., Oct 26: **Spring semester advising week. Schedule meetings with professor.**

Tue., Oct. 23: **Individual meetings.**

**Super Sex and Myth**

Thu., Oct. 25: **before class:** read “Pain” and “Super Sexualities” in SN and entry on “Incubi/Succubi.”

**In class:** Discuss the sexual dimensions of angelic and abductee experiences and how to relate sexuality (biologically, physiologically, psychologically) to religious experiences.

Tue., Oct. 30: **before class:** read “ET-Human Hybridization and a New Daemonology” and “Religious Dimensions of the UFO Phenomena.”

**In class:** Discuss religious dimensions of UFO phenomena. Start Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

Thu., Nov. 1: **before class:** Read “As a result: connecting the parts” in TSIS.

**In class:** Watch Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

**Thu, Nov 1: first draft of encyclopedia article due to professor by 11:59pm.**

**Deification**

Tue., Nov. 6: **before class:** read the encyclopedia articles from your group members BEFORE CLASS. Also read “Trauma and Transformation” from Passport to the Cosmos

**In class:** group-work and feedback on encyclopedia articles. Discussion of the religious themes in Close Encounters. Importance of trauma in understanding religious experiences.

Thu., Nov. 8: **before class:** read “The Deification of Enoch.”

**In class:** Close reading of Deification of Enoch. Comparing deification in Enoch to categories in “trauma and transformation.”

**Sun, Nov 11: final draft encyclopedia entry due by 11:59pm.**

**Anthropogony and Conspiracy**

Tue., Nov. 13: **before class:** dark visions of human creation today. Creation of the human by nefarious demons in the works of David Icke (selections). Read Icke and Dillon, “The Afterlives of the Archons.”

**In class:** conspiracy literature and alien speculation discussion.

Thu., Nov. 15: **before class:** dark visions of human creation in the past. Creation of the human by demons in The Secret Book of John.

**In class:** lecture on Gnostic forms of Christianity. From angels to nephilim to demons. Close reading of The Secret Book of John.

Tue., Nov. 20: **TBD**

Thu., Nov. 22: **HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

Tue., Nov. 27: **before class:** read “Mythmaking” and “The Mythical Object” in SN.

**In class:** Group discussion pulling it all together.
Assembling the Pieces

Thu., Nov. 29: before class: Selections from Jacques Vallee. What the hell is happening here? pt 2. In class: Hints and tips for successful oral presentations. Discuss “what the hell is happening with all this alien stuff, anyway?”

Tue., Dec. 4 and Thu., Dec 6: Oral presentations. You may choose to present research you did for your encyclopedia article or final paper.

Thu., Dec 13th: Final draft of paper due.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

Reading responses (1/2-1 page):
- Reading responses of ½-1 page will be due each week a major assignment or draft is not due.
- 2-4 questions will be distributed. Respond to one of them.
- The purposes of reading responses are to encourage deep, thoughtful readings and to offer a venue for the student to practice writing techniques in a low-risk assignment.
- Grading is simple. You will receive full credit if you: a) answer the prompt; b) meet the minimum length requirement; and c) show engagement with the reading. You will receive half-credit if you fail to meet any of these 3 criteria. You will receive no credit if you do not turn the assignment in.
- Keep in mind responses are meant to be carefree, even fun. Try out new strategies and techniques here. Feel what it’s like to engage a text deeply in writing. Enjoy the intoxication that comes with interpretation.

Comparative Paper (2 pages)
- The purpose of this comparative paper is to put the academic tools (comparison, historical-criticism) and writing techniques (description, quotation, evidence) to use in a formal assignment.
- Choose one comparanda from the ancient world (1 Enoch, Paul, Revelation) and one from the modern world (Strieber, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Rael/the Raelians).
- It is okay to go over the word limit in your draft. However, you will need to edit down to 270 words for the final version.
- Peer review (in class).
- My comments (via email. Individual consultations are available by appointment).

Encyclopedia Article (3 pages):
- The purposes of this assignment are to develop effective research strategies and to synthesize complex sources. Choose a topic, individual, religion, or theme that interests you. Sample topics for these articles will be distributed in early September, although you are welcome to produce a unique topic. All students are required to confirm article topics with the instructor no later than 8 days before the first draft is due.
- Using the library catalogue, find six sources that pertain to the topic of your encyclopedia article. At least one of these sources must be from the library stacks (hard copy), while another must be accessed electronically via JSTOR or another journal database.
- Read these sources. In the case of a book, read a single chapter.
- At a minimum you need 2 primary sources and 2 secondary sources.
- Read at least 2 sample encyclopedia articles to get a feel for the style.
After you have read these sources, begin **pre-writing**. First, draft some ideas you feel might be included in your article. Next, consider what **topics** need to be summarized. Craft your opening paragraph accordingly. Third, outline your article, including evidence and quotations that can be included section by section.

To cite the publication, use footnote citation, according to the Chicago Manual of Style (ch.14), which can be accessed electronically. See http://library.rice.edu/collections/eresources/chicago-manual-of-style

At the end of your document, include a bibliographic entry for all publications, according to the Chicago Manual of Style.

Using your pre-writing outline, produce a draft in time for the first draft due date. Be sure that your draft includes proper citation in Chicago Style and a bibliography of all sources used. **Although you will not be graded, email me this draft to confirm it has been completed.**

Leave the paper alone for at least one week. Reread it. What do you see needs work? Is your argument clear? Is the writing crisp and easily understood? Revise where needed.

**Peer review (in class)**

**My review (via email). Individual consultations can be scheduled after peer review and before the final due date).**

**Final paper (4-5 pages):**

- The purpose of this paper is to take all aspects of writing we have explored (research, argument and evidence, pre-writing, style, writing, and revision) and bring them together.
- Each paper must utilize a comparative-historical model. In terms of comparison, choose **two** examples for comparison, preferably (but not necessarily) from different time-periods. You are free to use your encyclopedia topic as one of these comparanda.
- After you have chosen your topic (no later than 2 weeks before the first draft is due), begin researching immediately. Locate at least eight sources (combined) relevant to your examples and read them. A minimum of one source per comparanda must be primary. Take notes.
- You are encouraged to meet with the instructor to discuss your research trajectory the week before the first draft is due.
- Begin pre-writing. First, draft some ideas you feel might be included in your paper. Next, consider what argument it is you desire to make and craft your opening paragraph and thesis statement. Third, outline your argument, including evidence and quotations that can be included section by section.
- Using your outline, produce a draft of your final paper. **Although it will not be graded, send this draft to me to ensure it has been completed.** Let it sit.
- Let the paper sit one week. Reread your paper. What do you see needs work? Is your argument clear? Is the writing crisp and easily understood? Revise where needed.
- **Peer review (in class)**
- **My review (via email). Individual consultations can be scheduled after peer review and before the final due date).**

After receiving feedback on your oral presentation, consider what further revisions you need to make to your paper. Did your fellow students notice an area of your paper that needs work? Is your argument muddier than you’d thought? Do you need to do further research on your topic? Address these issues.

**Final papers due Dec 13th by 11:59pm.**

**Oral presentations (8-10 minutes)**

- This oral presentation will be your opportunity to present your final paper or encyclopedia research to the class.
• The presentation is meant to give all students public speaking practice in a low stakes environment.
• The presentation will also serve as an opportunity for you to get feedback on your final paper.
• We will go over public speaking tips and strategies, powerpoint vs. blackboard vs. no notes, and much else.
• Converting a formal paper into a presentation is one of the most important and commonly used skills you will learn over your time as a student.