Speculative Beasts

A Philosophical Approach to Alien and Supra-Human Life in Science Fiction Literature and Film

Literature and Other Arts
English 118B
Professor Brian Kim Stefans

When do works of horror and science fiction transition from being products of heightened, feverish imaginations — mere fancies — to compelling speculations about the nature of being? In this course, we will examine several short stories, novels and films that feature alien or supra-human — i.e. “human” at the next stage of evolution — beings through the lens of cognitive science, linguistics, biological theory and philosophy. Films include The Thing, Under the Skin, Arrival, Alien and Tetsuo: Iron Man, and others. Fiction writers include H.P. Lovecraft, Nnedi Okorafor, Theodore Sturgeon, Ted Chiang and China Miéville. We will ask questions like “what is it like to be a bat?” and “what, exactly, is a zombie?” through short philosophical works by Quentin Meillassoux, David Chalmers, Thomas Nagel, Vilém Flusser and others.

Monday/Wednesday, 1 - 3:05 pm
Summer Session C - August 6 to September 14, 2018