

**CSLC 503: Speculations of the Unthinkable**  
**Spring 2021**  
**Wednesday, 2:00 - 4:50 pm**  
**Professor Natalie L. Belisle**



“The Crow and the Carnival Queen”, Paul Lewin

**Overview**

This CSLC Introduction to Comparative Studies in Culture seminar will focus on the relationship between speculative thought and the supernatural in order to develop a broader critical conversation on the meaning of “theory” and “thought”. “Speculations of the Unthinkable” will examine how cultural representations of the supernatural and otherworldly inform, shape, and define social, political, and legal practices. Placing narratives of the supernatural in conversation speculative thought, the course will interrogate how Western modernity has attempted to make sense of that which the late Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot has described as “unthinkable histories”—expressions of anticolonial and decolonial sovereignty, agency, and reason that do not inhere within discursive and cognitive tools of Western thought. The seminar will situate the supernatural within the context of the Caribbean, a region that has borne some of the most consequential and enduring mythologies of the otherworld to account for the history of dispossession, violence, and displacement from which it originated. In doing so, we will trace the critical and philosophical trajectory of the Caribbean as an Other world through which Europe crafted speculative knowledge in order to assert itself as the subject of history. Likewise, as we read fictions, histories, and theories of the supernatural/otherworldly, the course will hold in tension the disciplinary demand to read these narratives as allegory against a Caribbean epistemology of belief that evades capture by West’s will to universal knowledge.