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ENG 4300-4390-003-097: The Monstrous in Literature

Ruth Hoberman
Eastern Illinois University

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English 4300
Spring 2006
Office hours: MWF 2-3; Tu 10-11
e-mail: rhoverman@eiu.edu

The Monstrous in Literature
Ruth Hoberman
phone: 581-6981


Goals: As a senior seminar, this class is designed to challenge and polish all the skills you’ve acquired as an English major. Each student will be expected to do independent research and reading and to report on it to the class orally, and in a formal research paper. By the end of the semester, I hope everyone will feel more confident analyzing texts, presenting ideas to a class, and doing literary research.

From a theoretical standpoint, we’ll be doing “cultural criticism”: this means looking at both “high” and “low” art for the ways in which it reinforces and/or challenges its culture’s dominant values. Describing monstrous beings has long been a way for people to clarify their own cultural identity: all that seems most foreign to them is attributed to some self-evidently horrible monster. We’ll look at the role literary texts have played in this process of cultural self-definition.

Within individual cultures, the “monstrous” is often equated with the “abnormal” and set up in opposition to the “normal”: looking at the ways in which literature can reinforce or challenge those notions of the “normal” (by opposing it to the “monstrous” or “freakish”) should give us a good sense of how literature, culture, and individual identity shape and respond to each other, as well as a deeper understanding of just how tyrannical unexamined assumptions about “normality” can be.

This is a writing-intensive class. You may submit a paper written for this class as part of your EWP.

Policies: English Department statement on plagiarism:
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of NC for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Plan to hand in papers on time. If you’re having problems, let me know. Responses must be done for the assigned class to be acceptable. Essays a week or more late will not be accepted.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Attendance: Given that this is a seminar, your presence and participation are especially important. Note that a portion of the grade is based on class participation and reading responses—both of which require keeping up with the reading and (obviously) being in class. Excessive absences will result in a 0 for the participation portion of your grade.

Requirements/grades
One brief essay (2-4 pp., typed) 10%
One research paper (8-10 pages, typed, revised at least once): 25%
Ten responses to reading, other at-home and in-class writing: 20%
Midterm and final 25% (10/15)
Presentations/Involvement/Participation 20%

Essay grades will be based on Guidelines for Evaluating Writing Assignments in EIU’s English Department. I plan to use number rather than letter grades; this will convert into your final grade as follows: 91-100=A; 81-90=B; 71-80=C; 65-70=D; below 65=F. Because I grade on a 100-point scale, missing assignments affect the grade tremendously.

Responses: Almost every week, I’d like each of you to write a response to the reading. Focus on some aspect of the reading that intrigues you and develop your ideas about it into a page-long response. Feel free to include questions, personal opinions, and connections to other works read. At some point in the course of your response, include a direct quotation from the reading. The only other requirement: this must reflect your ideas before class discussion and thus must be handed in IN CLASS on the day the reading under discussion is due. I will evaluate the responses on a 10-point scale for thoughtfulness, depth, and precision.

Group presentation: In groups of 2-3: I’d like you to choose a kind of “other” and watch as many movies as possible (3-4) about that particular kind of “other.” As you watch, take notes on any of the following that seem relevant:

- What does the “other” look like? Describe his/her body, features, speech. Does s/he have a particular ethnic, racial, or gender identity? What actor plays him/her? With what makeup?
- Is he/she treated positively or negatively? If negatively: is s/he demonized in moral terms (as evil)? In medical terms (as diseased)? In legal terms (as criminal)? In anthropological terms (as scapegoat or outcast)? Or does he/she work in more complex ways, serving as double or foil to another character?
- If treated in positive ways, what does the movie do to help the audience identify with the other? Are contradictions or problems in the other’s life directly addressed or glossed over?
- How does the character’s otherness relate to the movie’s central conflict? What do other characters in the movie most fear will happen? Most hope for? Is there sexual tension?
- What traits characterize the hero/heroine? To what extent are these the opposite of the other’s traits? To what extent do they mirror them?
- What conflicts were going on at the time these movies were made? What kinds of enemies or ways of thinking might the “other’s” depiction echo? What cultural problems or anxieties might the depiction allay? Who directed the movie? How might the director’s experiences or values be revealed by the movie?
- Possible choices:
  Mad scientists, mummies, vampires, criminals (Disney villains, for ex., or the criminals in old Sherlock Holmes movies, or in gangster movies, or cowboy movies), oversized animals (Godzilla, Rodan, Them, King Kong), witches, aliens, people with nontypical bodies.

Group presentations will be evaluated on the basis of how clearly you present the material, how informative it is, how interesting you make it, and the extent to which you make interesting connections to issues and works raised by the class. All group members will receive the same grade unless obvious differences in effort are evident. PLEASE help each other, cooperate, and work hard so that this is a fun and educational experience for everyone—those presenting AND those listening.

Individual Presentation: This is to be a 10-minute report on your research paper as part of a panel at
the English Education Conference on April 15 (SAVE THIS DATE NOW). Tell your audience what your thesis is and how you are supporting it. Consider using visual aids or hand-outs to make your discoveries clear and interesting.

**Research paper:** start thinking right away about what you might like to write about. Possible topics include any text on the syllabus, other books about monsters or outcasts, or ANY cultural production that deals with an “other” or outsider or monster or that comments on “normality” in some way.

**Tentative Syllabus**
Mon January 9: Intro to course; the Cyclops in the *Odyssey* (hand-out)  
Fri. 13:  Shakespeare, *Tempest* (response #1 due W or F). Let me know with whom you’re working and topic for group project.

Mon. 16: No class  
Wed 18: *Tempest*  
Fri 20: *Tempest* (response #2 due W or F)

Mon 23: *Tempest*  
Wed 25: *Tempest*  
Fri 27: Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (response #3 M, W or F)

Mon 30: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde  
Wed Feb 1: Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde  
Fri 3: Kafka, Metamorphosis (response #4 due M, W or F).

Mon 6: Group presentations #1, 2  
Wed 8: #3, 4  
Fri 10: #5, 6  

Mon 13: Hand in essay #1. Begin Dracula  
Wed 15: *Dracula*  
Fri 17: no class

Mon 20: *Dracula*  
Wed 22: *Dracula*  
Fri 24: *Dracula* (Response #5 due M, W or F)

Mon 27: Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*  
Wed March 1: Woolf  
Fri 3: Woolf (Response #6 due M, W or F)

M6: Woolf  
W8: Woolf.  
F10: Midterm

Spring Break
W22: Morrison
F24: Morrison (Response #7 due M, W or F)

Mon 27: Morrison
W29: Weldon
Fri. 31: Weldon. Hand in 1-paragraph topic proposal and 10-item bibliography (Response #8 due M, W or F)

Mon. April 3: Weldon. Euripides, Medea
Wed. 5: Medea (response #9 due M or W)
Fri. 7: No class. Work on research paper.

Mon. 10: Hand in first version, research paper. Keep copy for yourself and begin preparing conference presentation. conferences
Wed. 12: conferences
Fri 14: Prepare for English Studies conference Saturday April 15.

Mon. 17: movie
Wed. 19: movie
Fri. 21: movie

Mon 24: Hawthorne or Doyle
W26: Poe or Doyle (Response #10 due M or W)
F28: review. Hand in final version, research paper.

There will be a noncumulative final exam during exam week.
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotos,
ever cared to report, nor to return:
they longed to stay forever, browsing on
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.
I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,
tied them down under their rowing benches,
and called the rest: 'All hands aboard;
come, clear the beach and no one taste
the Lotos, or you lose your hope of home.'
Filing in to their places by the rowlocks
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,
and we moved out again on our sea faring.

In the next land we found were Kyklopês,
giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery
to the immortal gods, they neither plow
nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and
wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rain.
Kyklopês have no muster and no meeting,
no consultation or old tribal ways,
but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
indifferent to what the others do.

across the wide bay from the mainland
there lies a desert island, not far out,
but still not close inshore. Wild goats in hundreds
breed there; and no human being comes
upon the isle to startle them—no hunter
of all who ever tracked with hounds through forests
or had rough going over mountain trails.
The isle, unplanted and untilled, a wilderness,
 pastures goats alone. And this is why:
good ships like ours with cheekpaint at the bows
are far beyond the Kyklopês. No shipwright
tolls among them, shaping and building up
symmetrical trim hulls to cross the sea
and visit all the seaboard towns, as men do

who go and come in commerce over water.
This isle—seagoing folk would have annexed it
and built their homesteads on it: all good land,
fertile for every crop in season: lush
well-watered meads along the shore, vines in profusion,
prairie, clear for the plow, where grain would grow
chin high by harvest time, and rich sub-soil.
The island cove is landlocked, so you need
no hawser stout astern, bow-stones or mooring:
run in and ride there till the day your crews
chafe to be under sail, and a fair wind blows.
You'll find good water flowing from a cavern
through dusky poplars into the upper bay.
Here we made harbor. Some god guided us
that night, for we could barely see our bows
in the dense fog around us, and no moonlight
filtered through the overcast. No look-out,
obody saw the island dead ahead,
nor even the great landward rolling billow
that took us in: we found ourselves in shallows,
keels grazing shore: so furled our sails
and disembarked where the low ripples broke.
There on the beach we lay, and slept till morning.

When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose
we turned out marveling, to tour the isle,
while Zeus's shy nymph daughters flushed wild goats
down from the heights—a breakfast for my men.
We ran to fetch our hunting bows and long-shanked
lances from the ships, and in three companies
we took our shots. Heaven gave us game a-plenty:
for every one of twelve ships in my squadron
nine goats fell to be shared; my lot was ten.
So there all day, until the sun went down,
we made our feast upon meat galore, and wine—
wine from the ship, for our supply held out,
so many jars were filled at Smaros
from stores of the Kikonês that we plundered.
We gazed, too, at Kyklopês Land, so near,
we saw their smoke, heard bleating from their flocks.