ENG 4300-4390-002-098: The Monstrous in Literature

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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 present material to the class in two oral presentations as well as write 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. Cultural productions sometimes reinforce this kind of simple binary between the “human” and the “monstrous,” between “us” and the “other.” Or, works may challenge or complicate this binary. 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.

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 (3-4 pp., typed) 10%
One research paper (8-10 pages, typed; will only be accepted if all stages are handed in: proposal/bibliography; annotated bib/discussion of conversation; draft in conference; final version): 25%
Ten responses to reading/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, you'll be asked to write a response to the reading and post it to WebCT. Begin by responding to an earlier posting, if there is one; then focus on some aspect of the reading that intrigues you and develop your ideas about it into a response of 1-2 paragraphs. Feel free to include questions, personal opinions, and connections to other works read. To get credit for your posting, there are 3 absolute requirements:

1. Quote a passage directly (and supply page number) at some point in the course of your response.
2. Post at least 60 minutes before class on the reading due for that class.
3. Attend the class for which you posted and be prepared to talk about what you said (don't assume that just because you posted, everyone knows what you said).

I will evaluate the responses on a 10-point scale for thoughtfulness, depth, and precision. For EVERY class I expect you to prepare the reading and come with notes and questions.

Group projects:

#1: In groups of 2-3, I'd like you to choose a set of 2-3 movies made around the same time and focusing on similar kinds of monsters. As a group, watch these movies, taking notes on these questions (among whatever else occurs to you):

Physical appearance: describe his/her body, features, speech. Is s/he linked to a particular ethnic, racial, sexual, or gender identity?

How is the monstrosity explained? In moral terms (as evil, possessed by the devil)? In medical terms (as diseased)? In psychological terms (as a product of damaged personal relationships)? In sociological terms (as a product of social injustice)? In anthropological terms (as scapegoat or outcast)?

Does the monster serve as double or foil to another character or as morally ambiguous?

If the monster is treated sympathetically, what does the movie do to help the audience identify with the monster? What character or entity (a corporation for ex) is demonized in its place?

What traits characterize the hero/heroine? The “bad guy”? What inconsistencies do you see in the values the movie reinforces?

What conflicts were going on at the time these movies were made? What cultural problems or anxieties might the depiction allay or dramatize? Who directed the movie? How might the director's experiences or values be revealed by the movie?

Examples of suitable clusters: 1920s monster movies (Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Nosferatu, London after Midnight); 1931-3 monster movies (Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Monster Walks, Vampyr, The Mummy); 1980s vampire movies, etc.


OR Disney villains from the 1950s-60s. OR oversized animal monsters from the 1950s (Godzilla[1954],
Rodan [1956], Them! [1954]). Or movies with witches, people with nontypical bodies, sexually dangerous women, crazed killers, gangsters: just make sure you have a cluster of thematically related movies from a limited time period.

Group presentations will be evaluated on the basis of how clearly you present the material, 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. You’ll need to provide us with some plot summary, but keep it minimal: just enough so we understand your overall points. If possible, include 1-2 brief film clips in your presentation, but no more than two. Plan your presentation as a group so that you are able to synthesize your findings. Do not, in other words, give 3 separate reports on 3 separate movies. Time your presentation carefully: it should last 20 minutes.

Tell us what you learned as a group about what values your movies reinforce, what traits get demonized, what cultural issues/anxieties they might be responding to, and how your monster works to dramatize or obfuscate these concerns.

Individual Oral Presentation: This will be a 10-minute report on your research paper presented to the class. Tell us 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 outsider or monster or that comments on “normality” in some way.

Tentative Syllabus
Mon Aug 24: Intro to course; the Cyclops in the *Odyssey* (hand-out); Jeffrey Cohen, “Monster Theory” (ho); Greenblatt, “Cultural Criticism” (ho)

I. Historicizing Monsters
for Wed 26: Shakespeare, *Tempest* Act I. Response #1 due W or F
Fri 28: *Tempest* Act II.

Mon. 31: *Tempest*, Act III. Response #2 due M or W
Wed Sept2: *Tempest*, Acts IV-V
Select group project. *The Mummy* (film excerpts), Presentation rubric (ho).

Mon 7: no class
Wed 9: LeFanu, *Carmilla*. Response #3 due W or F.
Fri 11: *Carmilla*

Mon 14: Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*. Response #4 due MW or F.
Wed 16: Wilde
Fri 18: Wilde

Mon 21: Doyle, *Hound of the Baskervilles*. Response #5 due M or W
Wed 23: Doyle
Fri 25: Group 1,2

Mon 28: Group 3,4

Fri Oct 2: Midterm

II. Destabilizing “Normality”
Mon 5: Morrison, *Sula*. Response #6 due M or W
Wed 7: *Sula*.
Fri 9: no class

Mon 12: *Sula*. Response #7 due M, W or F
Wed 14: *Sula*

M 19: Weldon. Response #8 due M, W or F
W 21: Weldon

M 26: Dunn. Response #9 due M, W or F
W 28: Dunn
F 30: Dunn

Mon Nov 2: Dunn. Hand in 1-paragraph topic proposal and 10-item bibliography
W 4: Dunn.
Fri 6: No class

Mon. 9: Carter
Wed. 11: Carter. Hand in 5-item annotated bibliography and 2-3 pp. describing the ongoing critical discussion about your topic and place yourself in relation to it.
Fri. 13: Carter

Mon. 16: Carter. Response #10 due M, W or F
Wed 18: Carter
Fri 20: Carter.

Thanksgiving

Mon 30: presentations
Wed 19: presentations
Fri 21: presentations

Mon 24: Research papers due in conferences
W26: conferences
F28: review. Hand in final version, research paper.

There will be a noncumulative final exam during exam week.

An Incomplete Bibliography
Andriano, Joseph. Immortal Monster: The Mythological Evolution of the Fantastic Beast in Modern Fiction and Film.
Baldwin, James, “Freaks, and the American Ideal of Manhood.” In his Collected Essays.
Bann, Stephen. Frankenstein, Creation, and Monstrosity
Banta, Martha, and Curtis Hinsley, From Site to Sight.
Bellin, Framing Monsters
Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment
Bogdan, Robert. Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit.
Booker, Keith. Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism
Bottig, Fred. Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory
Burnett, Mark. Constructing Monsters in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture.
Clover, Carol. Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film.
Cohen, Jeffrey, ed. Monster Theory.
Creed, Barbara. The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis.
Davis, Lennard. Enforcing Normalcy
Fiedler, Leslie. Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self.
Friedman, Jonathan. Performing Difference: Representations of the Other in Film and Theatre
Flusser, George and Eric S. Rabkin. Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction
Friedman, John B. The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought...
Gilmore, David. Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors
Graham, Peter and Fritza Oehlshlaeger. Articulating the Elephant Man.
Halberstam, Judith. Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters
Hartzman, American Sideshow.
Huet, Marie. The Monstrous Imagination.
Jefferson, Margo. On Michael Jackson
Luciano, Patrick. Them or Us: Archetypical Interpretations of the Fifties Alien Invasion Films.
Mannix, Daniel. Freaks: We Who Are Not As Others.
Russo, Mary. The Female Grotesque.
Sheehan, James and Morton Sosna. The Boundaries of Humanity
Slusser, George, ed. Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction.
Thompson, C. J. S. The Mystery and Lore of Monsters.
Twichell, James. Carnival Culture.
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotos, never 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.

5 In the next land we found were Kyklopes, 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. Kyklopes 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:

Well, then:
good ships like ours with cheekpaint at the bows
are far beyond the Kyklopes. No shipwright toils 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 hawsers out 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, nobody 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 on meat galore, and wine—wine from the ship, for our supply held out, so many jars were filled at Ismaros from stores of the Kikones that we plundered. We gazed, too, at Kyklopes Land, so near, we saw their smoke, heard bleating from their flocks.