

English 261: British Literature 1

(a survey of monsters, marvels and mysteries)

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Office Hours T/TH 2:00-6:00

“The monster is born ... as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place.” —Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*

A survey course like this one covers a lot of ground – hundreds of years of literary production, in fact – so we will use the figure of the monster as the linchpin that holds together the course’s diverse elements. By investigating how medieval, early modern and eighteenth-century writers imagined monstrosity, we will learn things about the conflicts, preoccupations, belief systems, social movements and literary conventions of these time periods.

To further organize the course, we’ll adapt the “monster of the week” structure advanced by popular TV programs such as *The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Fringe*, *Supernatural*, *Dr. Who*, *Grimm*, *Agents of Shield*, etc. That means we will NOT be moving through the literature chronologically. My hope is that a non-teleological journey will allow us to consider more carefully questions about form. We will meet the devil, for example, in a 17th century epic poem, a 14th-century mystical revelation, and in paintings and illustrations spanning several centuries; we’ll consider how these very different genres, with their very different literary conventions, enable artists to create very different versions of the same monster type.

Near the end of the course, we’ll consider the extent to which our stand-alone monsters-of-the-week fit inside a larger story arc(s). TV writers often imagine a Big Bad who menaces the heroes more intensely than any monster-of-the-week; did early British writers similarly imagine a Big Bad, a dominant threat that menaced their particular cultural moment?

Learning Outcomes

- learn and analyze conventions of literary genres
- situate texts historically by recognizing their contextual markers
- write well-supported and persuasive interpretations of course texts
- contribute meaningfully to conversations about monstrosity as a cultural construct



The Blemmyes, from *Wonders of the East* (10th century)

Course Materials

Monsters: a Bedford Spotlight Reader ISBN-10: 1457690306
The Book of Beasts : Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century ISBN-10: 0486246094
Beowulf ISBN-10: 0393320979
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight ISBN-10: 0393334155
Spenser, The Faerie Queene, bk. 1 ISBN-10: 0872208079
Shakespeare, Macbeth ISBN-10: 0743482794
Milton, Paradise Lost ISBN-10: 0140424393
Behn, Oroonoko ISBN-10: 0140439889
Swift, Gulliver's Travels ISBN-10: 0141439491

Print copies of course texts are required; no e-texts. The exception is a few readings that will be posted on e-campus. **Buy, order, rent or check out your books now, not later.** Always come to class with your book; you may lose participation points if you don't.

Again, **no e-books for the materials listed to the left, and no random e-texts from sites like Luminarium or Project Gutenberg.** The texts have been chosen for a reason, plus it's important that, as a class, we all use the same book. If cost is an issue, remember Interlibrary Loan is an option.

Participation

150 participation points can be earned through in-class exercises, group discussion assignments, reading quizzes and other activities given during class. In addition, **I will keep track of your verbal participation**, awarding ~7 points every week (another 100 points) to students who contribute substantially to class discussion. Speak up every day, bring your book and stay engaged in the discussion (that means staying alert and off your phone), and you'll likely receive full credit.

Attendance & Make-Up Policies

I will keep track of your attendance; if you miss more than 6 class periods (i.e. more than 20% of the 15-week course), you will fail. I impose no additional penalties for missing class other than the participation points you'll lose for missing in-class work. I don't need to see any doctor's notes or other excuses; there are unfortunately always consequences for missing class, even when you have a good reason, even when it's something you can't control.

Exams can be made up/rescheduled in special circumstances (e.g. school-sponsored trips, Days of Special Concern), but quizzes and verbal participation can never be made up. Some in-class writing exercises may be made up; just ask (though avoid phrasing your request as, "did I miss anything when I was absent?" The answer to that question is always *Yes, you missed class.*

***Verbal Participation Alternative

If you don't get a chance to talk during class, but you want to earn the verbal participation points, you can write a 100-word response to the day's conversation and submit it to me, with the appropriate date written on it, by the next class period. This is always an option for verbal participation; I won't remind you of the option, so you will need to take initiative when it comes to writing and submitting your responses.

Coursework

Class Exercises	150
Verbal Participation	100
Monster PSA	200
Digital Bestiary Contributions (3)	150
Midterm	150
Response Paper	250

Grading Scale

Assignments add up to a total of 1000 points. Convert point totals into percentages, and the letter grade equivalents are:

A=90-100; B=80-89; C=70-79;
D=60-69; F=0-59

Assignment Descriptions

Monster PSA

Choose one of the monster-types from the literature discussed so far. Compose a propaganda piece for a general audience that exaggerates the most dangerous and anti-social aspects of your monster; or compose a PSA that enlightens a general audience on the misunderstood and potentially redeemable aspects of your monster. (more detailed guidelines TBA)

Response Paper – Brit Lit’s Biggest Bad

Compose an essay of at least 1500 words that addresses the question, Who or What is the Biggest Bad, the most monstrous monster of the British imagination from the Middle Ages to 1800? You may write about one monster-type encountered in the literature that you believe dominates, most preoccupies or plays the biggest role in shaping the British imagination; or you may play Frankenstein and discuss a blend of monster-types that you believe play equally important roles in shaping the British imagination. (more detailed guidelines TBA)

Digital Bestiary

3 times during the semester, you will contribute to our e-campus Bestiary. For each of these 500-750-word posts, you’ll put together a monster profile of one of the figures you’ve encountered in the course reading.

Teaching Philosophy and a Note about Sensitive Material

One of my main goals as a teacher is to present English studies as a dynamic, dramatic, social activity. I will encourage you to focus not on discovering THE truth in the literature we study, but on navigating the complex contexts that surround the literature. Often the most meaningful analysis comes out of conversations that, though they may not end in clear consensus, exercise our critical thinking and enhance our engagement with, and understanding of, how people actually communicate in the world. I will do my best to steer this class in the direction of relevant, engaging discussion.

That said, students should note that this course may contain some material that is sexually explicit, politically controversial, or religiously sensitive. In addition, there may be readings, videos and works of art that include sexual content, violence or graphic language, including references to sexism, racism or other disturbing

points of view. The purpose of the course is to engage intellectually with all these matters, in an academic framework of scholarly inquiry. While all are encouraged to respect the diverse sensibilities in the classroom, discussions may be frank. If such content is a concern for you, you may wish to consider registering for another course.

WVU English Department's Affirmation of Values:

Affirmation of Values

We, the members of WVU's Department of English, believe that critical and creative reading and writing constitute acts of radical love. We ally ourselves with a multitude of departments, student bodies, and dedicated individuals across the country and the world who refuse to remain silent within a climate of hatred and violence: be it from sexism, racism, classism, ableism, nativism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, or Islamophobia. We are committed to building communities, not dividing them. Colson Hall and our classrooms campus-wide are spaces where students, faculty, and staff may safely voice their concerns and where we may, together, foster futures more just. We aim to raise the status of those suppressed by the status quo; in assembly with human and nonhuman beings, we protest all types of environmental degradation, especially those prescribed at the expense of inhabitants' health. Our research and syllabi affirm the core values of compassion, inclusivity, and care that a diverse humanities program holds for everyone. By telling stories of those who suffer under oppression in any form, past and present, we honor the ability of language and other means of communication – in each area of study we offer – to redress these wrongs, urge unity, and pursue peace. To those who seek shelter or wish to expand its scope, we welcome you; we thank you; we are with you.

Academic Dishonesty

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Accommodations

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, see diversity.wvu.edu.

Course Schedule

When readings are listed, they are due on the day they appear; that means you should come to class having read all the pages listed under that class's date.

Here is [the link to view the course slides](#).

1/10

Introduction to the course

Introduction to Unit One: Beasts and Human Animal Hybrids

1/12

Readings

[Book of Beasts](#) (12th century), 230-250; also use the index to find and read the entries for Centaur, [Manticore](#), Minotaur, Sirens, Sphinx
Ted [Genoways](#), "Here Be Monsters," 128-133 in Bedford *Monsters* book
Jorge Luis Borges, "The Origins of Half-Human, Half-Animal Creatures," 72-79 in Bedford *Monsters* book

1/17

Readings

Marie de France, [prologue](#) to the [Lais](#), [Bisclavret](#) & [Yonec](#) (late 12th century)
Elizabeth Lawrence, "[Werewolves in Psyche and Cinema: Man-Beast Transformation and Paradox](#)," 108-126 in Bedford *Monsters*

1/19

Readings

Jeffrey Cohen, "Fear of the Monster is [Really](#) a Kind of Desire," 190-195 in Bedford *Monsters*
Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), part 1, chapters 1-6 (pages 21-63)

1/24

Readings

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), part 2, chapters 1-4 and chapters 6-7; part 4, chapters 1-2, 4-5, 7-8, 10

1/26

Work on Bestiary addition #1 in class

Introduction to Unit Two: Witches, Old Women and you know what basically just Women ([#yesallwomen](#))

Readings

Karen Hollinger, "The Monster as Woman: Two Generations of Cat People," 243-255 in Bedford *Monsters*
Begin William Baldwin's [Beware the Cat](#) (~1570)

1/31

Bestiary addition #1 due on ~~ecampus~~ before class

Readings

Finish William Baldwin's [Beware the Cat](#) (~1570)

Read chapter one of [Agnes Bowker's Cat](#) (about a pamphlet from 1569)

2/2

Readings

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1606) Acts 1-2

2/7

Readings

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1606) Acts 3-5

2/9

Readings

John Skelton, "[The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng](#)" (~1550)
[The most wonderfull and true storie, of a certaine witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapen hill](#) (1597)
View [pictures](#) of another witch pamphlet, from the British library _

2/14

Bestiary addition #2 due on ~~ecampus~~ before class

Introduction to Unit Three: Zombies, Mutations and Aberrations

2/16

Chuck [Klosterman](#), "My Zombie, Myself: Why Modern Life Feels Rather Undead," 40-45 in Bedford *Monsters*
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, parts 1 & 2

2/21

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, parts 3 & 4

2/23

Stephen King, "Why We Crave Horror Movies," 16-19 in Bedford *Monsters*
Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie ~~Queene~~*, book 1, cantos 1-4

2/28

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie ~~Queene~~*, book 1, cantos 5-8
Midterm review in class

3/2

Midterm in class

Discuss Monster PSAs|

Spring Break

3/14

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, book 1, 9-12
Books of Beasts, 165-167 (Dragon entry)

3/16

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*

3/21

3 copies of Monster PSA rough drafts due for peer review

Introduction to Unit Four: Devils, Demons and Heretics

3/23

Monster PSA presentations in class

3/28

Drawings of devils TBA

Book of Beasts pages 59, 82-84 136; and check the index for other pages where "the Devil" shows up

Julian of Norwich TBA

3/30

Richard Tithecott, "The Horror in the Mirror: Average Joe and the Mechanical Monster," 300-307 in *Bedford Monsters*

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books 1 and 2

4/4

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books 4 and 5

4/6

No class; Professor Hoffmann is at a conference; **Bestiary contribution #3 due**; read Response Paper Assignment and annotated bibliography assignment

4/11

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books 9-12

Introduction to Unit Five: The Monster is Society, Man!

4/13

Beowulf, first half

4/18

Beowulf, second half

4/20

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* TBA

4/25

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*

Response Paper annotated bibliography due in class

4/27

no class meeting; instead, show up for your individual Conference in Colson 329 with a rough draft of your response paper

Response papers due by final exam date