

Monsters & Monstrosity

Time TBA, Room TBA

Instructor: Emily Sun

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Office Hours: TBA



British Library Cotton Tiberius B V/1, f. 82r.

Tutorial Description:

In this tutorial, students will engage with texts about monsters and the monstrous, from the middle ages to the 21st century. In particular, we will examine the ways in which the monstrous is, in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's words, "a category that is itself a kind of limit case, an extreme version of marginalization" ("Monster Theses", ix). Taking a page from Cohen's book, we will consider the ways in which the monster evades categorization and interacts with margins, limits, and borders. How, we will ask, do monsters variously threaten, transgress, represent, and invent bodies and communities? What exactly defines the "monstrous"? Where does the monster come from, and how does it reproduce? Can the human exist without the monstrous, and is the monstrous other capable of generating sympathy? How does the monstrous construct and/or disrupt narratives of community formation and nation-building? What does it mean for writers to describe others—or even themselves—as monstrous?

In order to trace the genealogies and legacies of the enduring figure of the monster, we will engage with a transhistorical constellation of texts, from *Beowulf* to William Shakespeare's

Tempest to Octavia Butler's *Bloodchild*. Our investigations will also cross geographical boundaries, ranging from the British Isles of Gerald of Wales, to the India of Salman Rushdie, to the Latin America of Gabriel García Márquez. To better investigate the ways in which monstrous bodies come to be represented, othered, marginalized, and circulated, we will also be introduced to reception studies; postcolonial approaches; and scholarship on nation, empire, and race.

Tutorial Goals: Over the course of the tutorial, students will engage in a transhistorical survey of literature about monsters and the monstrous and familiarize themselves with postcolonial approaches and scholarship on nation, empire, and race. They will also learn how to conduct scholarly research at an upper-division level, culminating in a 20-25 page research paper in preparation for an honors thesis. Students will gain experience working with a variety of sources and putting critical and theoretical approaches in conversation with their own ideas. Students will work closely with the instructor to hone integral scholarly research skills, such as designing a research question, developing a critical bibliography around that question, and writing with greater clarity and precision.

Assignments:

- **Short Essay** (due Week 5, 10%): A 5-7 page paper, an extended close reading of a primary text.
- **Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography** (due Week 8, 15%): Two-page prospectus of the project submitted before students begin working on it. An annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources should accompany the prospectus. The bibliography should reproduce in a few sentences the main argument of the work you intend to make use of. It should also include, in a few sentences, how you plan on engaging with the thesis of the work you have summarized.
- **Draft of Final Paper** (due Week 11, 15%): A full draft will be due on 4/11 and then circulated among classmates the following week in preparation for a final paper workshop during the final tutorial meeting. **An ungraded but required 10-page draft of the paper will be due Week 10.**
- **Final Paper** (due Reading Period/Week 12, 40%): 20-25 page paper on a major literary work read in this class. You may write about a similar text discussed with the instructor beforehand.
- **Participation and Preparation** (20%): A small seminar thrives when students participate actively and offer thoughtful contributions to class discussion. Participation includes coming to class (on time), asking questions, coming prepared with passages you'd like to discuss, peer-reviewing others' work when applicable, etc.
- **Conference Presentation** (TBA, ungraded but required): a 5-minute paper on your research

Required Texts: (*other texts will be provided electronically*)

Beowulf (trans. Seamus Heaney)
Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Buried Giant*
Ling Ma, *Severance*
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*
Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Schedule:

**Due dates in red*

**Additional meetings/events outside of regular course time in blue*

**Introductory Week:
Monster Theory**

Week 1:

Primary Readings–

- Liber monstrorum*
- [The Hereford Map](#)
- Lewis Carroll, “Jabberwocky”

Secondary Readings–

- Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Theses” from *Monster Theory*

Unit 1:

The Boundary-Steppers: Crossing the Borders of History, Memory, and Community

Week 2:

Primary Readings –

- Beowulf* (trans. Seamus Heaney)

Secondary Readings–

- Kathryn Powell, “Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the Beowulf Manuscript”
- J.R.R. Tolkien “*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*”

Week 3

Primary Readings –

- Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Buried Giant*

Secondary Readings–

- Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Introduction” from *Of Giants*
- Jonathan Brent, “Violence, Memory, and History: Geoffrey of Monmouth and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*”

Week 4:

Primary Readings –

- Ling Ma, *Severance*

Secondary Readings–

- Claire Gullander-Drolet, “Imperialist Nostalgia and Untranslatable Affect in Ling Ma's Severance”
- Burcu Kayisci Akkoyun, “Urban Apocalypse, Global Precarity, and Uncanny Liminality in Colson Whitehead's Zone One and Ling Ma's Severance”

Unit 2:

Bodies Politic: Constructing and Representing the Nation

Week 5:

Primary Readings –

- Táin Bó Cúailnge (Cattle Raid of Cooley)*
- excerpts from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain)*

Secondary Readings–

- Geraldine Heng, “Cannibalism, the First Crusade, and the Genesis of Medieval Romance: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*” from *Empire of Magic*
- from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

WEEK 5: SHORT ESSAY DUE

Week 6:

Primary Readings –

- Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, Part 1

Secondary Readings–

- Edward Said, “Introduction” from *Orientalism*
- Salman Rushdie, “Introduction” and “In Good Faith” from *Imaginary Homelands*

DATE/TIME TBA: Separate library/research visit (including a visit to the Harvard Map Collection) during Week 6

DATE/TIME TBA: One-on-one conference to discuss your short essay

Week 7:

Primary Readings –

- Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* Part II

Secondary Readings–

- Aarthi Vadde, “Introduction” from *Chimeras of Form*
- Wendy W. Walters, "Monstrosity and Representation in the Postcolonial Diaspora: *The Satanic Verses, Ulysses, and Frankenstein*" from *Borders, Exiles, Diasporas* (ed. Elezar Barkan and Marie-Denise Shelton)

Unit 3:
Meeting One's Maker: Genealogy, Race, and Embodiment

WEEK 8: PAPER PROSPECTUS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

Week 8:

Primary Readings –

-Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Secondary Readings–

-David A. Hedrich Hirsch, “Liberty, Equality, Monstrosity: Revolutionizing the Family in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*” from *Monster Theory* (ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen)

-Anne K. Mellor, “*Frankenstein*, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril”

Week 9:

Primary Readings –

-Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*

Secondary Readings –

-Maria Holmgren Troy, ““Strange Matings” and Cultural Encounters: Octavia Butler’s Fiction as “Companion Species” to Theory”. *An Eclectic Bestiary: Encounters in a More-than-Human World* (ed. Birgit Spengler and Babette B. Tischleder)

-from Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*

Week 10:

Primary Readings –

-*King of Tars*

-Richard Coer de Lyon

Secondary Readings –

-Shyama Rajendran, “Blob Child” Revisited: Conflations of Monstrosity, Disability, and Race in *King of Tars*” from *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World* (ed. Richard H Godden and Asa Simon Mittman)

-from Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*

WEEK 10:10 PAGES OF FINAL DRAFT DUE

Unit 4:
Brave New Worlds: Colonization, Exploration, and Hybridization

Week 11:

Primary Readings –

- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- Robert Browning “Caliban upon Setebos”

Secondary Readings–

- Gesa Mackenthun, *A Monstrous Race for Possession: Discourses of Monstrosity in The Tempest and Early British America* from *Writing and Race*
- from Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*

WEEK 11: FULL DRAFT OF PAPER DUE**Week 12:**

Primary Readings –

- Gerald of Wales, *Topography of Ireland and Description of Wales*

Secondary Readings–

- Gerald in the Middle: Hybridity and Historical Narratives in *History and Topography of Ireland and The Conquest of Ireland*
- from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles*

Week 13 (Final Discussion and Paper Workshop in Class):

Primary Readings –

- Gabriel García Márquez, “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings”, “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World”, “Blacamán the Good, Vendor of Miracles”, “The Solitude of Latin America”

Secondary Readings–

- Mary Lusk Friedman, “Monstrous Innocence and Its Expression in García Márquez’s Tales” from *The Oxford Handbook of Gabriel García Márquez*
- Salman Rushdie, “Magic in Service of Truth”

READING WEEK: FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER DUE DURING READING PERIOD**READING WEEK, TBA:**

Junior Tutorial Conference

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS’s Honor Code: “*Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data,*

and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. I will allow each student a "free" tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being late really disrupts the work we're doing together, so repeated late arrivals without an excuse will also decrease your participation grade. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

Email:

I'll distribute important info through either email or Canvas Announcements throughout the semester—from sending you handouts and readings to adjusting assignments and deadlines. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 24 hours, or you may not get a response until it's too late. I will respond to emails as quickly as possible-- expect a response within 24 hours on the weekdays, and by the following Monday on weekends.

Classroom Conduct:

Always be considerate to your classmates during discussion. Listen actively and attentively, ask for clarification if you're confused, and feel free to challenge one another's ideas—but always do so respectfully.

Laptops/Electronics:

You may use an electronic device to refer to e-books and access any links circulated for the purposes of the course—please refrain from checking your email or engaging in any other personal business.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should reach out to the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. All discussions

will remain confidential, although faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.