

ENG 181-002: Writing about Literature
Monsters in Literature

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Course Description and Objectives: Monsters. Grotesque, scary, seductive, fierce, fascinating, or just plain weird, monsters occupy a significant place in the literary imagination. Monsters live on the borders — of cultural, racial, political, economic, religious, and sexual difference. In this course, we will encounter many different kinds of literary monster, keeping a number of questions in mind. Where are the borders between human and monster? How and when does the monster return, and under what new guise? What can monsters tell us about the desires, hopes, and fears of the cultures from which they emerge? Through an exploration of the monstrous in various genres and literary periods — from the classical era to the 20th century — students will develop their skills in summarizing, close reading, literary analysis, critical thinking, argumentation, and research.

Required texts:

- Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber*.
- Gardner, John. *Grendel*.
- Liuzza, Roy, ed. *Beowulf*.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Oxford edition.
- Hacker, Diana. *Pocket Style Manual* 5th ed., with 2009 MLA Update.
- Other assigned readings will be available through e-Reserve and/or the course website.

Reading: Students are expected to bring printed copies of the assigned reading for each day to class; printing material during the class period is not acceptable, nor is reliance on memory. Failure to bring a hardcopy to class will harm your participation grade.

Attendance and Participation: Regular attendance and active participation are vital. [standard copy]

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices: [standard copy]

Response Papers: Content-wise, your short, 1-2 pp papers should focus tightly on ONE point—find the single most salient, interesting, befuddling, frustrating, provocative thread in the text(s) we are reading and analyze it. Propose a thesis and follow through on your ideas, or pose a question and posit some possible answers. Argue something. Do not simply say “I liked / didn’t like it because X, Y, and Z.” Despite their brevity, these should be polished, focused essays requiring time and revision; do not wait until the last minute to begin them. They must be posted to the Learnlink conference prior to the next class meeting and will often form the basis of some of the next day’s discussion. At the start of the semester, I will provide prompts and options that you may choose from for your response papers, if you wish; as the semester progresses and you get the hang of response papers, you will increasingly be responsible for choosing and articulating your own topics.

Formal Papers: Formal papers are longer (generally 4-6 pp), thesis-driven assignments. I encourage you to develop ideas and arguments from earlier response papers if you want to further pursue those topics in longer, formal essays. Papers must be typed, printed, and accompanied by all evidence of the writing process – prewriting, rough drafts, peer reviews, etc. I will not accept or grade incomplete assignments. Students who must miss class on a due date are responsible for making arrangements with me ahead of time for early submission of assignments. Formal papers must be submitted in hardcopy; I do not accept electronic submissions of major papers.

Late Papers: [standard copy]

Homework: You will have homework assignments in addition to the major writing assignments listed here. You will be expected to complete all homework assignments on time, as they will often be the basis for the next period's class discussion or activities.

LearnLink and Course Website: A LearnLink conference for this class will appear on your LearnLink desktop. In this conference, you will be able to post responses, ask questions, respond to your peers' postings, and read class announcements. It will contain a link to the course website, which I will maintain as a resource if you lose your syllabus or a paper prompt.

Conferences, Grading, and Feedback: You may visit me during my office hours if you have questions or problems with an assignment or want to discuss a draft. I am also available to meet with you by appointment outside of my office hours. Writing assignments will generally be graded and returned within a week. Your final paper will be due with your portfolio at the end of the semester; you may arrange to collect this work after final grades are submitted.

Honor Code: [standard copy]

Assignments:

Response Papers (8 @ 5 pts each)	40%
Paper One:	10%
Paper Two	10%
Paper Three:	10%
Homework	10%
Final Research Paper	15%
Participation	5%

Further details on all assignments, including instructions and deadlines for homework, response papers, and formal papers, will be made available on the course website and handouts.

Disability Accommodation: [standard copy]

Writing Assignment Details

Homework Assignments: Detailed homework assignments are available at the course website, at <http://monsterlit.wordpress.com/links>. This page also hosts recaps of what we did during class and what is due for the next class.

Response One: due to LL conference by 7 pm Mon (1/18)

Option A: Choose one of the following literary terms; if necessary, look it up in a college-level dictionary and/or a glossary of literary terms (the website links to an electronic one). Respond to any of Friday's readings, incorporating a discussion of your chosen literary term into your response to your chosen piece(s).

- motif (or leitmotif)
- theme
- palimpsest
- kenning

Option B: Lytton Smith's poem "Monster Theory" claims that the monster "can be seen . . . / at the Gates of Difference, dependent on their unlocking" (lines 4-6). Reflect on the significance of these lines in light of the 'story' told by the entire poem.

Response Two: due to LL by 7 pm Sun (1/24).

Option A: According to St. Augustine in *City of God*, monsters may be human, non-human, or imaginary, but if they are human, they are descended from Adam. If they are not descended from Adam, they are not human. Speculate on where the *Beowulf* poet would stand in a conversation with Augustine.

Option B: Olsen and Olsen argue that in the wake of Christianity, medieval monstrosity undergoes a shift in emphasis from the “existential to the ethical.” How might you read the dragon in light of ethical concerns in the poem?

Option C: The Grendelkin and the dragon can plainly be seen to be monstrous: their bodies demonstrate their difference. What makes for moral monstrosity in the poem’s world, such as Heremod’s or Thryth’s (aka Modthryth)? (You don’t need to discuss both – this is just a way to start thinking of a response.)

Option D: If cultures produce monsters that embody anxieties, what anxieties are revealed through the monsters in *Beowulf*? (You may want to focus on only one.)

Paper One

- Freewrite/brainstorming due in class Wed, Jan 27.
- Two copies of rough draft due in class on Friday, Jan 29.
- Final draft due Wed, Feb 3 (in a folder with all prewriting and peer review work).

Final draft is to be 4-6 pp. with double spacing, one-inch margins, and Times New Roman 12 point font. Follow MLA standards for formatting and citations.

These possible topics are meant to get you started – they are not, in themselves, thesis statements, because they do not put forward arguments. As you work with any of these prompts – or another topic that you would like to write about – you will need to shape your own, original, arguable claim during the writing process. Don’t feel that you must answer any of the following point-by-point, as if they are essay questions on a final exam. They are just meant to get you thinking.

Possible topics:

Nietzsche writes, “He who fights monsters should see to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.” Does *Beowulf*’s lifelong engagement with monsters change him? For the worse? For the better?

Some critics have argued that *Beowulf* is a poem steeped in pagan traditions, depicting a world of grim fate, inevitable death, uncertainty about the afterlife, and mankind’s ultimate powerlessness over his destiny. Others have argued that it is essentially a Christian poem, in which even pagan characters may be redeemed if they are virtuous, and in which heaven and salvation are always a possibility. Where do you stand in this debate?

Beowulf depicts human struggles with monsters such as the dragon and the Grendelkin, but it also depicts struggles within and between human groups as well as personal struggles of human beings against their own natures or worst tendencies. Do you detect a central theme or message about these struggles in the poem? Is one set meant to be read more seriously than another?

In modern Western culture, we incarcerate criminals and wrongdoers, locking them away within walls. In US states that sentence prisoners to death, such a sentence is considered punitive rather than vengeful. Examine some aspect or occurrence of punishment, justice, or vengeance in the poem. Identify some characteristic attitudes or practices related to the punishments or to the blood-feud system. Do the characters share the same attitudes? Does the poet?

Response Three: due to LL conference by 7 pm Sun (2/7)

You may respond to any of Monday's reading – Keats' "Lamia," Ovid excerpts from Bk. I, or the Selkie ballad.

Response Four: due to LL conference by 7 pm Sun (2/14)

For this response, you should incorporate Cohen's "Monster Culture" AND a work of literature we've read, perhaps by revisiting an idea or claim from an earlier response paper and applying one of Cohen's "Theses" to that idea. Since you are writing about two texts in this response, you must take special care to cite carefully and correctly, and you must have Works Cited entries for both texts. Do NOT try to take on all of Cohen's essay in this response; similarly, you should not try to take on all of Ovid, or all of *Beowulf's* monsters. Think small – think "microreading." This assignment will require you to use the Focus skills you've been developing in your writing so far this semester.

Response Five: due to LL conference by 7 pm Tues (2/23)

Your response should incorporate some discussion of Freud's "The Uncanny." You may respond to Freud's essay itself, treating it as your primary text for analysis, or you may use some aspect of it to discuss another literary text on our syllabus.

Paper Two

Paper Two must incorporate either Freud's "The Uncanny" or Cohen's "Monster Culture," as well as a work of literature that we have read in class. Ideally, your Paper Two topic will emerge from a previous writing assignment you have done. This assignment asks you to demonstrate your skills in the Shared Criteria, as do all of the assignments in this class, and it also asks you to incorporate a secondary source into your argument. Do not let the secondary source dominate your paper; your thesis must be your own, and the bulk of your paper should rely on your own close reading, as usual.

- Freewrite and topic selection due in class Wed, Feb 24.
- Two copies of rough draft due in class on Friday, March 3.
- Final draft due Mon, Mar 15, at the beginning of class (in a folder with all prewriting, drafts, and peer review work).

Final draft is to be 4-6 pp. with double spacing, one-inch margins, and Times New Roman 12 point font. Follow MLA standards for formatting and citations.

Response Six: due to LL conference by 7 pm T (3/23)

Analyze, or explicate a passage containing, a theme, symbol, motif, recurring element, metaphor, or image in *The Tempest*, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," "Underground People," or "East of the Sun, West of the Moon." If you need a refresher on what we mean when we talk about motifs or symbols in literature, or you would like to see some examples of successful analysis or explication, use the resources available to you in the "links" section of this website (e.g. the Glossary of Literary Terms, Lynch's page on "How to do Close Reading," the sample explications, and the sample analysis essays).

Response Seven: due by 7 pm Th (4/1)

Write a comparative analysis of some element in two works we have read, such as “East of the Sun” and “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon,” *Volsungasaga* and “The Company of Wolves,” *Beowulf* and *Grendel*, etc. Start with some very small element, as in Response Six, but be sure it has some larger significance that makes it worth writing about. You may expand upon or start with writing you have done previously in this course, but work to keep your focus narrow so that you are still in the 2-page range.

Paper Three

Paper Three asks you to write a comparative analysis of two works (or elements of two works) we have read in this course so far this semester. You may select the works yourself. Ideally, your topic for this paper will emerge from previous writing, and you are permitted (and even encouraged) to incorporate elements of an earlier response paper or formal paper.

- Freewrite and topic selection due before class on **Monday, April 5**. I will take you on your honor that you have done the freewrite by this date (note that you will need to turn it in with your final draft!), but you need to **post at least a sentence or two to LL** describing your topic for Paper 3, and **you need to post it by 10:40**, when class begins. If you have a tentative thesis already, that’s great; post that. The more thinking you have done at this point, the better, and the more feedback I can give you on your topic or idea.
- Two copies of rough draft due in class on **Wednesday, April 7**.
- Final draft due in class on **Monday, April 12**.

Final draft is to be 4-6 pp. with double spacing, one-inch margins, and Times New Roman 12 point font. Follow MLA standards for formatting and citations. Submit all pre- and freewriting, peer reviews, etc, as well as graded copies of papers 1 and 2.

Response Eight: due by 7 pm Sun, April 18

An annotated bibliography includes a summary and/or evaluation of your sources. For Response 8, write a one-paragraph summary of **one** of your sources for your final paper. Your summary should briefly state the author’s main idea or claim (thesis), providing a brief explanation of the major evidence used in support of that claim. If the author relies on a particular theory or is interpreting from a particular school of thought, include that information. If the piece is clearly written for a particular audience, such as film critics or high school teachers, mention that as well. Conclude your summary with a one or two sentence evaluation of the source and how it fits into your research project.

Questions to keep in mind as you read, summarize, and paraphrase:

- What are the author’s main arguments? What is the point of this book or article?
- If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say?
- How does the source compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is it more or less scholarly, more or less reliable, more or less objective? About the same?
- What is the author’s goal in writing this piece? What did he or she set out to do, or prove? And to whom?
- How does the source help you shape your argument or defend your claim?
- How and where can you use this source in your research project?
- Has this source confirmed something you already believed? Changed how you think about your topic?

The length will depend on how complicated your source is. If you are using only one chapter from a book, you need only summarize the chapter you’re using, but make sure you understand enough of the context to accurately state what the author is doing or claiming in the chapter (hint: the introduction may briefly

summarize and/or outline the chapters for you, so it's good research practice to at least skim through book introductions to get a sense of what the author or editor is setting out to accomplish). Use minimal quotations, if any. If you quote a word or phrase, it must be properly attributed in MLA style.

Response 8 should be posted to the Learnlink conference by 7 pm Sunday, April 18th, so that I can look over the responses before class on Monday. However, in order to grade the response, I must have a hardcopy of the source you are creating your annotated bibliography entry on, so bring the source to class with you and be prepared to hand it in to me. As you will thus be without that copy for a couple of days, don't give me your only copy. I will return the sources by Wednesday (though I may not be finished commenting on your responses at that point).

Final Research Paper

The final paper assignment asks you to write a research paper. However, the work of other writers should not dominate your paper; the bulk of your paper should be based on the same close reading and analysis you have been doing all semester. Ideally, your topic for this paper will emerge from previous writing, and you are permitted (and even encouraged) to incorporate elements of an earlier response paper or formal paper. Use research to help you support your own original, arguable thesis that you develop from your own close reading of a work of fiction. The scope of this paper should not be drastically different than any of your previous formal papers. Your final draft should be 5-7 pages, excluding your Works Cited page.

You should use as many sources as you need to get the job done. I expect you to refer to at least five secondary sources, though you may not rely on all of them equally. Expect to read more secondary sources than this; part of the writing process for this paper will involve surveying available secondary work in order to determine what will be most helpful for you, so you will probably not end up citing everything you read. **At least one of your cited sources must be available in hardcopy (book, journal article, etc).**

One of the major goals of this assignment is for you to leave this class knowing how to write a researched argument about a work of literature, with proper and effective formatting, citation, integration of quotes and paraphrases, and organization. Failure to properly cite, quote, and paraphrase can result in a failing grade for this assignment, so leave plenty of time in your writing process for proofreading and editing. If you think you might need help or even just a second set of eyes, do not wait until the last minute to set up an appointment with the writing center or with me. Appointments are notoriously difficult to come by in the last two weeks of the term, and if you wait until the last minute to ask for help, you may be out of luck.

- Draft of Works Cited page due on **Wed, April 21**. (Yes, it will probably change as you continue to read, work, and write. I'm interested in seeing what you have so far and intervening in any major issues with MLA style.)
- Two copies of rough draft due in class on **Friday, April 23**. Bring a hardcopy of the sources you have cited so far, including the relevant publication information. For instance, if you are citing a book, you need to turn in a photocopy of the page(s) you are citing and the publication information from the title page, not the whole book. You will be without these copies over the weekend as I review them, so do not give me your only copies.
- Revised draft due in class on **Monday, April 26th**.
- Final draft due in folder with any pre- or freewrites, outlines, peer feedback, etc. Include graded copies of papers 1, 2, and 3. **You MUST include photocopies or printouts of all secondary sources that you cite in your paper.** Due date is **Thurs, May 6 at 5 p.m.**

Final draft is to be 5-7 pp. with double spacing, one-inch margins, and Times New Roman 12 point font. Follow MLA standards for formatting and citations.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

As not all classes progress at the same rate, reading assignments are subject to change.

W 1/13	Syllabus and policies. Course overview. Class introductions. HW due by 7 pm Th.
F 1/15	Snopes.com, "Horrors" (excerpts). Smith, "Monster Theory."
M 1/18	Martin Luther King Holiday (no class); Response One due by 7 pm.
W 1/20	<i>Beowulf</i> , lines 1-990
F 1/22	<i>Beowulf</i> , lines 991-1650; Response Two due to LL by 7 pm Sun (1/24).
M 1/25	<i>Beowulf</i> , lines 1651-2820
W 1/27	<i>Beowulf</i> , lines 2821-3182
F 1/29	<i>Grettisaga</i> (excerpt – pp 169-177 in Liuzza); writing workshop; draft of Paper One due in class.
M 2/1	<i>Volsunga saga</i> (excerpts); grammar workshop; Paper One due in class.
W 2/3	Marie de France, "Bisclavret." Response Three due by 7 pm Th (2/4).
F 2/5	Carter, Angela. "The Company of Wolves."
M 2/8	Poetry by Keats, Swinburne, & Baudelaire.
W 2/10	Carter, Angela. "The Lady of the House of Love."
F 2/12	Cohen, "Monster Culture" (on e-reserve). Response Four due by 7 pm Sun (2/14).
M 2/15	Cohen cont. Bring Smith, "Monster Theory," to class. Writing workshop.
W 2/17	Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market."
F 2/19	Freud, "The Uncanny."
M 2/22	Marie de France, "Lanval." Response Five due by 7 pm T (2/23).
W 2/24	"Underground People: Migratory Folktales."
F 2/26	<i>Grendel</i> , Chs. 1-3
M 3/1	<i>Grendel</i> , Chs. 4-6
W 3/3	<i>Grendel</i> , Chs. 7-9; Paper Two draft due.
F 3/5	<i>Grendel</i> , Chs. 10-12
M 3/8 –	Spring Break
F 3/12	
M 3/15	Paper Two due. <i>The Tempest</i> , Act I.
W 3/17	<i>The Tempest</i> , Act II.
F 3/19	<i>The Tempest</i> , Act III.
M 3/22	<i>The Tempest</i> , Act IV. Response Six due by 7 pm T (3/23).
W 3/24	<i>The Tempest</i> , Act V.
F 3/26	Tempest, "Introduction." Ovid (excerpt).
M 3/29	Tempest, "Florio's <i>Montaigne</i> "; Snopes.com, "Roast Fetus" and "Lights Out."
W 3/31	Asbjørnsen, "East of the Sun." Response Seven due by 7 pm Th (4/1).
F 4/2	Carter, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon."
M 4/5	Perrault, "Bluebeard." Snopes.com, "Aren't you glad you didn't turn on the light..."
W 4/7	Carter, "The Bloody Chamber"; Paper Three draft due in class.
F 4/9	Research Methods: meet in Library. Paper Three final draft due in class.
M 4/12	Hawthorne, "Rappacini's Daughter."
W 4/14	Carter, "The Erl-King." Response Eight due by 7 pm, Th (4/15).
F 4/16	Ovid, Book V (excerpt); Margaret Atwood, "Siren Song."
M 4/19	Andersen, "The Red Shoes"; Snopes.com, "Satan's Choice."
W 4/21	Wulfstan, "On False Gods," in Liuzza.
F 4/23	Workshop and conferences; draft of final paper due in class.
M 4/26	Workshop and conferences; course evaluations. Final paper due at Final Exam time.