

GE 30CW.1: The Monstrous and the Marvelous in Myth (Spring, 2013)

Th 3-5:30, Public Affairs 2278

Professor Joseph Nagy, jfnagy@humnet.ucla.edu

office hours, Mondays 3-4:30 and by appointment (Hum 278A)

English *monster/monstrous* from Latin *monstrum* ‘portent, warning’; ‘monster’ (with genitive); from the same Latin verb (*moneo*) as *admonish, demonstrate*

English *marvel(ous)* from Latin *mirabilis* ‘astonishing, looked-at with wonder’; from the same verb (*miro*) as *miracle, admire*

In this seminar, we will examine characters from texts (our old GE 30 friends) who are “monstrous” and/or “marvelous,” starting with literature from ancient Mesopotamia (remember Gilgamesh?) and continuing with selection from Homer and Ovid. Then we will revisit some mythic materials from Britain and Ireland of the early Middle Ages:

Beowulf (passages having to do with Beowulf’s opponents, Grendel and the dragon)

The Mabinogi (the Welsh quartet of mythological tales replete with monsters and marvels)

“Culhwch and Olwen” (that veritable inventory of Arthur’s marvelous companions and monstrous enemies)

Stories about the Irish heroes Lug and Cú Chulainn, and their encounters with various monstrous opponents (on line, TBA)

There will be no need to purchase any books for this course, unless you no longer own Ford’s translation of *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (which include “Culhwch and Olwen”).

Creating counterpoint with these texts from pre-modern cultures, we will also sample (in class) some of the “classic” horror films of the twentieth-century Western cinematic tradition: *Dracula, Frankenstein, The Mummy, and The Wolfman*—as well as selections from animation and non-Western cinematic traditions.

In the latter half of the seminar, we will turn to topics chosen and researched by **YOU**. Everyone will be expected to give a seminar presentation (ten minutes, including discussion) on what they are working on, sometime during the last three meetings of the class. **BY THE END OF THIS MONTH (APRIL)**, each student is to have had at least one discussion with Nagy (office hours or appointment) about what they would like to choose as a topic/research project. Your pursuit of the chosen topic will entail an exploration of a text or texts (literary, visual, or cinematic) relevant to the subject of the seminar, to be analyzed by the student in its cultural context and contrasted with the texts we will be reviewing/reading. The research project, seminar presentation, and subsequent discussion with fellow

students and Nagy will culminate in a ten-to-fifteen-page paper in which you will utilize the writing and critical skills you have honed as a GE 30 veteran.

Your seminar grade will be based on your participation (25%, including regular attendance, contributions to discussion, and the extent to which you keep in touch with the instructor about the progress of your research), the seminar presentation (25%), and the paper (50%, **due on the Friday of exam week, June 14, on Turnitin**). The presentation and the paper will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- clarity and correctness of expression, oral or written
- originality of critical thought or proactive use of primary and secondary sources (which are to be properly acknowledged and cited)
- cogent marshaling of evidence in arguing for a thesis or interpretation of text(s)

For questions about style, format, and citation, please consult the Hacker *Writer's Reference*.

Schedule of Required Readings

April 4: Introduction; Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and Humbaba/Huwawa (readings: Gaster, "Monsters," and selections from A. George, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, available on the course website, Week One)

April 11: Monsters and Monster-Slaying in Classical Mythology (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 9; selections from Latin literature, TBA, on line)

April 18: NO CLASS

April 25: Diane Mizrachi visits; *Beowulf* extracts (website); *The Mabinogi* (Four Branches, including Ford's introduction);

May 2: *The Mabinogi* (continued), and "Culhwch and Olwen" (also in Ford)

May 9: selections from the "Battle of Mag Tuired" and the Ulster Cycle (TBA, on line)

May 16: NO CLASS

May 23, 30, June 6: Seminar Presentations

In addition, a conference on "Monsters and the Marvelous" will be held under the auspices of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Royce 314 on **Saturday, June 1**—details and program to be announced. You will be expected to attend!