

English 261: British Literature 1

(a survey of monsters, marvels and mysteries)

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Office Hours MW 1:30-3:30

“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)*

English 261 offers a survey and historical introduction of British literature from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century. Throughout the course, you will be asked to situate texts historically and write well-supported and persuasive interpretations of the texts you read.

A survey course like this one covers a lot of ground – hundreds of years of literary production! – 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 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., but we’ll pause every few weeks to consider the extent to which these stand-alone monsters fit inside a larger story arc. 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?

STRANGE NEWVES

out of Kent, of a Monstrous and mishapen Child, borne in *Olde Sandwich*, vpon the 10. of *Iulie*. Last, the like (for strangenes) hath neuer bene seene.



Imprinted at London by T. C. for W. Barley, and are to be sold at his shop in Gresham-street. s 60 p.

Course Materials

Beowulf ISBN-10: 0393320979

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight ISBN-10: 1933202890

Lais of Marie de France ISBN-10: 0140447598

Shakespeare, *Macbeth* ISBN-10: 0393923266

Milton, *Paradise Lost* ISBN-10: 0393924289

Cavendish, *The Blazing World* ISBN-10: 0140433724

Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* ISBN-10: 0141439491



Print copies of course texts are required; no e-texts. In addition to the books listed, a few readings will be made available to you on blackboard. These must be printed out as well and brought to class. If you come to class without your text, you will lose participation points for the day – 1/2 credit for quizzes or in-class activities. Again, **no e-texts.**

Participation

Participation points are 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 3 points every week (~45 points of the total 150 points reserved for class participation) to students who contribute substantially to class discussion. This is a big class, but we meet 3 days a week; speak up at least once per week and stay engaged in the discussion during the entire week (that means staying alert and off your phone), and you'll likely receive full credit.

Attendance & Make-Up Policies

I'll take roll to learn names, but 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, unless you know you'll be absent for an entire week or during an exam.

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. At semester's end, I will drop the lowest in-class exercise grade. Some in-class writing exercises may be made up. By all means ask me if you missed an exercise and want to know if you can make it up; just avoid asking, "did I miss anything when I was absent?" The answer to that question is always *Yes, you missed class.*

Coursework

Participation	150
Monster Defense	200
Response Paper: the Biggest Bad	250
Midterm	200
Final	200

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 Defense

Choose one of the monster-types from the literature discussed so far. Compose a PSA that enlightens a general audience on the misunderstood and/or potentially redeemable aspects of your monster. What can we learn from this monster if we investigate it rather than merely condemn it? (detailed guidelines TBA)

Response Paper – Brit Lit’s Biggest Bad

Compose an essay (~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)

Midterm and Final

Sit for exams that test your knowledge of and ability to analyze course texts.

Course Outcomes

This course fulfills GEC Objectives 3 and 5

Objective 3, The Past and its Traditions: Apply knowledge, methods, and principles of inquiry to understanding the past.

Objective 5, Artistic Expression: Apply methods and principles of critical inquiry to the analysis of literary or artistic expression.



Laptop Policy

Put away laptops and smartphones during class. If you can't resist the temptation to check these devices, you may lose participation points.

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.

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 and works of art that include sexual content, graphic language or violence. 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.



Non-Discrimination

This class does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, disability, or veteran status. Alternative viewpoints are welcome; however, statements deemed racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, or otherwise discriminatory toward others in or outside the class will not be tolerated.



Course Schedule (subject to change)

8/17 Course Introduction

8/19 Beowulf, 1-89

8/21 Beowulf, 89-150

8/24 Beowulf, 150-213

8/26 Sir Gawain & the Green Knight, part 1, pages 1-37

8/28 Sir Gawain & the Green Knight, parts 2 & 3, pages 41-147

8/31 Sir Gawain & the Green Knight, part 4, pages 150-187

9/2 Marie de France, Bisclavret, Yonec and Laustic

9/4 *no class (online assignment TBA)*

9/7 *no class, labor day*

9/9 Discussion day: Medieval Monsters of the Week

9/11 Discussion day: What's the Big Bad of the English Middle Ages?

9/14 [The Faerie Queene](#), Book 1

9/16 The Faerie Queene, Book 1

9/18 The Faerie Queene, Book 3

9/21 The Faerie Queene, Book 3

9/23 The Faerie Queene, Book 6

9/25 Macbeth, Act 1

9/28 Macbeth, Acts 2 & 3

9/30 Macbeth, Acts 4 & 5

10/2 Midterm Review

10/5 Midterm

10/7 Monstrous Births & Fashion Monsters

10/9 Work on Monster Defense in class; Outline with tentative thesis due at end of period

10/12 *no class, Fall break*

10/14 Witch Pamphlets; Skelton, ["The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng"](#)

10/16 Paradise Lost

10/19 Paradise Lost

10/21 Paradise Lost

10/23 Paradise Lost

10/26 Discussion day: Renaissance Monsters of the Week; Due in class, Annotated Bibliography for Monster Defense

10/28 Discussion day: What's the Big Bad of the English Renaissance?

10/30 Halloween Presentations

11/2 The Blazing World

11/4 The Blazing World

11/6 The Blazing World

11/9 Gulliver's Travels

11/11 Gulliver's Travels

11/13 Gulliver's Travels

11/16 Pope, [An Essay on Man](#)

11/18 Discussion day: What's the Big Bad of the Enlightenment?

11/20 Work on Response Papers in class; Outline with Thesis due by end of class

11/23 – 11/27 Break, Sign up for Conference Time before 11/30

11/30 Conferences: bring your outline or draft and an annotated bibliography

12/2 Conferences: bring your outline or draft and an annotated bibliography

12/4 Response Papers due; Final Exam Review

12/7 Final Exam Review