

“Monsters in Literature and Film”
IAH 207: Literatures, Cultures, and Identities

“He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*



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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs, 2:00-3:00pm, by appointment

Meeting Time: Tues/Thurs, 6:00 – 7:50 PM

Meeting Place: 011 Olds Hall

Course Description

This course will introduce students to the literary and cultural study of “monsters” in the modern era, from nineteenth-century gothic literature, through modernism, to the postmodern and contemporary periods. We will examine not only fictional and mythic monsters, but also human monstrosity. What is monstrosity? What does it mean to identify someone or something as monstrous? How does the monstrous help define our conceptions of inhumanity or immorality (and, therefore, humanity and morality)? The course will introduce students to basic practices of interpretation and analysis, as well as fundamental elements of popular genres, including horror, science fiction, and fantasy. Using close reading of literary and visual narratives, our study of these texts will include attention to their historical and cultural backgrounds; to issues of race, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability; and to technology and definitions of the human. The course will include fiction and film, as well as supplementary poetry, music, visual art, non-fiction, and criticism.

Mission and Goals of Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities

The mission of Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities is to help students become more familiar with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities. IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s); they also encourage students to learn more about the history and culture of other societies. They focus on key ideas and issues in

human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship; highlight the value of the creative arts of literature, theater, music, and arts; and alert us to important issues that occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world. The goals of IAH courses are to assist students to

- Cultivate habits of inquiry and develop investigative strategies from arts and humanities perspectives;
- Explore social, cultural, and artistic expressions and contexts;
- Act as culturally aware and ethically responsible citizens in local and global communities;
- Critically assess, produce, and communicate knowledge in a variety of media for a range of audiences; and
- Recognize and understand the value of diversity and the significance of interconnectedness in the classroom and beyond.

Goals of this Course

By the end of the semester, students will demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which representations of monsters and monstrosity inform different cultural constructions of humanity, ethics, race, nation, sexuality, gender, and embodiment, as described below. These learning outcomes correlate with specific dimensions of MSU's Undergraduate Learning Goals (see <http://learninggoals.undergrad.msu.edu/>). Successful students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical, political, and literary uses to which the notion of "monstrosity" has been put in various historical and cultural contexts (including "non-Western" contexts). (Cultural Understanding, Integrative Thinking)
- Use critical thinking, literary interpretation, and cultural analysis to demonstrate their understanding of course concepts. (Analytic Reasoning, Integrative Thinking)
- Define and analyze concepts related to monstrosity, including the uncanny, the abject, the grotesque, posthumanism, and the "Other." (Analytic Reasoning, Integrative Thinking, Cultural Understanding)
- Define and analyze genres related to monstrosity, including the gothic, horror, science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy. (Analytic Reasoning, Integrative Thinking, Cultural Understanding)
- Reflect on real-world implications of the rhetorical usage of monstrosity in a variety of contexts, including serial murder, terrorism, racial and sexual violence, and dis/ability. (Cultural Understanding, Analytic Reasoning, Integrative Thinking)
- Demonstrate an ability to collaborate with peers through course discussion and the creation of a group presentation (Effective Communication, Cultural Understanding, Integrative Thinking)
- Demonstrate growth in the practice of speaking, writing, and thinking in a critical and creative manner about cultural problems, literary texts, and film in a variety of contexts and cultures (Effective Communication, Cultural Understanding, Integrative Thinking, Analytic Reasoning)

Course Materials

Required Texts to Purchase (4):

1. Butler, Octavia. *Fledgling* (Grand Central Publishing, 2007).
ISBN: 978-0446696166
2. Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber & Other Stories* (Penguin Classics, 2015).
ISBN: 978-0143107613
3. Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Translated by Susan Bernofsky (Norton, 2014). ISBN:
978-0-393-34709-8
4. Liu, Marjorie. *Monstress, Volume 1: Awakening* (Image Comics, 2016).
ISBN: 978-1-63215-709-6

Note: The translation of *The Metamorphosis* noted above is strongly recommended, but not strictly required.

Note: Digital copies of *Monstress, Volume 1: Awakening* are available at:

<https://imagecomics.com/comics/releases/monstress-vol--1-tp>

Required Course Pack (1):

All other required texts will be included in a Course Packet available at the Spartan Bookstore on campus: <http://www.bkstr.com/spartanbookstore/>

Additional supplementary material (not subject to examination) may be shown or distributed in class.

Required Films to View (9):

*Note: It is very important that you watch the correct version of each film. Many of these films have multiple adaptations, versions, and/or sequels. If you're procuring or watching the films yourself, take care to acquire the right one!

Alien (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979)

Bram Stoker's Dracula (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1992)

District 9 (dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009)

The Fly (dir. David Cronenberg, 1986)

Godzilla [Gojira] (dir. Ishirō Honda, 1954)

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (dir. Kenneth Branagh, 1994)

Night of the Living Dead (dir. George Romero, 1968)

The Silence of the Lambs (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991)

World War Z (dir. Marc Forster, 2013)

Film Screenings

Although there are eight required films for this course, please note that there will be no in-class film screenings. In other words, you are responsible for watching each of the required films on your own time. Perhaps the easiest option would be renting (or purchasing) digital copies of these films, all of which are available on iTunes, Amazon, or both. If you do not wish to rent or purchase the films, physical copies (DVD or BluRay) of all required media will also be on Course Reserve at the

Digital/Media Center at the Main Library, and can be checked out for a limited period of time. You may find the library copies useful if you wish to revisit or review material that you rented for a limited time. However, keep in mind that these materials may be checked out at any given time, and make sure you plan accordingly. Ultimately, you may watch the films in any way you like. I encourage watching them in groups whenever possible (on a big screen, with the lights out, and plenty of snacks on hand!). You may also wish to practice “attentive” watching—i.e., take brief notes, or actively think about how the film connects to the course themes and concepts while watching it.

Grading Scale

All course assignments will be graded on MSU’s 4.0 grade scale (i.e., 4.0, 3.5, 3.0, and so on). Final course grades will be rounded to the nearest half grade, except that at least a 1.0 must be earned to receive a 1.0 final course grade. So, for example, a 2.74 could round to a 2.5 course grade; a 2.75 could round to a 3.0 course grade, and so on. Any final course grade below a 1.0, however, earns a 0.0; thus, a 0.75 would not round to a 1.0, but rather would earn a 0.0 (failure in the course).

90-100 = 4.0

85-89 = 3.5

80-84 = 3.0

75-79 = 2.5

70-74 = 2.0

65-69 = 1.5

60-64 = 1.0

1-59 = 0 ?

Course Requirements and Assessment

Attendance and Participation	15%
Reading/Viewing Quizzes	10%
Mid-Term Essay	25%
Mid-Term Project	25%
Final Exam (Take-home Essay)	25%

Attendance and Participation

Our classroom is a dynamic social space that requires both your attendance and your participation. Your attendance, in other words, involves more than just showing up: it must also involve being awake, alert, prepared, ready for discussion, and open to a variety of activities. While we’re together, I will ask you to resist the temptations of social media, Internet rabbit holes, and work for other courses. Classes will regularly involve not only brief lectures, but also extensive seminar discussion, group work, in-class writing, and so on. If you do not participate in these activities, this portion of your grade will suffer.

Your attendance at every class meeting is required. **You are allowed two absences**; save these for illness, major religious holidays, funerals, court dates, job interviews, etc. **For each additional absence beyond two, your final grade will be lowered by 1.5%**. More generally, absences tend to negatively impact other portions of your grade; make sure you get notes, announcements, and in-class materials from a classmate—it's your responsibility. Should a medical or family emergency arise that will require your absence beyond two classes, please notify me as soon as possible. You will be expected to provide documentation from a physician or hospital and to make up missed work. Students who will use one or more of their absences to observe a major religious holiday may make up missed course work only if they make arrangements in advance with me. If a conflict arises between your obligation to attend class and an obligation to the University, it is your responsibility to see me in advance, to hand in all assignments on time, and to make up work missed during your absence.

Reading/Viewing Quizzes

There will be periodic quizzes, usually unannounced, to encourage you to keep up with the reading and viewing. These will cover details from the reading/viewing as well as critical engagement with course concepts. They will likely occur on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Mid-Term Essay: Students will write short individual essays (800-1000 words) synthesizing course themes with assigned readings and viewings.

Mid-Term Project: Group Presentation: Students will work in small groups (5-6) to research one “monster” not on the syllabus, and will prepare a presentation that is both critical and creative (fusing research, writing, presentation skills, art/design, performance, creative media). Presentations will be performed in front of the class. Graded components of this presentation also include a 2-page project proposal, annotated bibliography, and group and self-assessment forms.

Final Exam

Your final exam will be a take-home essay that asks you to synthesize ideas from the course with assigned readings and viewings.

Disclaimer

Given the subject matter of this course, it should be no surprise that much of the required course content includes large amounts of violence, sex, gore, horror, death, and things you may find disgusting or repugnant on multiple levels (aesthetic, moral, political, sexual, etc.). Many of the texts we'll study have also been criticized as racist, misogynistic, sensationalist, and so on—indeed, these will be some of our core topics of discussion. Though I will try to give you a sense of what's coming week by week, please consider this disclaimer a “trigger warning” for all required material. If you think this might present problems, I would encourage you to speak with me at the beginning of the semester, or to consider taking a different course.

Classroom Conduct

Respect for your peers and instructor is a basic component of all higher education—and a cornerstone of democracy, if you want to get serious about it. Given the sometimes controversial, politicized, and/or sensitive nature of much course content, it is especially important that we balance the freedom to disagree with one another, on one hand, with civility, basic respect, and compassion for others (especially those we disagree with), on the other.

This course will be conducted in accordance with Michigan State University's policy on relationship violence and sexual harassment and its commitment to equal opportunity and non-discrimination. More info can be found here: <http://inclusion.msu.edu/equity/SexualHarassmentAssault.html>

Late Assignments

I will not necessarily accept late assignments—especially if they are more than one week late. If accepted, late assignments will be marked down 2.5% for each day (not each class session) they are late. I am often willing to grant extensions *if asked in advance* and provided with a rationale.

Academic Honesty and Integrity

There are complicated ways of putting this, but let's start with a simple piece of advice: Any time you use somebody else's ideas, words, images, media, etc., you must cite the source. If you're not sure whether you need to cite something, cite it—it's always better to err on the side of caution. (The other side runs the gamut from plagiarism to academic dishonesty, and will have serious consequences.) The first instance of academic honesty will result in a failing grade for that particular assignment; the second instance will result in a failing grade for the course, with possible further action at the level of the University. You can find more information about MSU's policies here: <https://ombud.msu.edu/academic-integrity/>

You might also keep in mind the Spartan Code of Honor, which states: "As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the **highest ethical standard**. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that **honor is worth more than grades**. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do."

Turnitin OriginalityCheck

Consistent with MSU's efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool in D2L called Turnitin OriginalityCheck to compare a student's work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student's work with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a "similarity score." The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student's work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool. Students should submit assignments to be screened by OriginalityCheck without identifying information included in the assignment (e.g., the student's name, PID, or NetID); the system will automatically show identifying information to the course faculty when viewing the submissions, but this information will not be retained by Turnitin.

Online SIRS evaluation policy

Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SIRS system, and you will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. In addition, participation in the online SIRS system involves grade sequestration, which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. We hope, however, that you will be willing to give us your frank and constructive feedback so that we may instruct students even better in the future. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct

Michigan State University is committed to fostering a culture of caring and respect that is free of relationship violence and sexual misconduct, and to ensuring that all affected individuals have access to services. For information on reporting options, confidential advocacy and support resources, university policies and procedures, or how to make a difference on campus, visit the Title IX website at www.titleix.msu.edu.

Limits to Confidentiality

Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues based on external legal obligations or that relate to the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the [MSU Counseling Center](#).

Important Dates

I am not listing drop/add dates here, but you can find those, and other important dates, on MSU's official academic calendar: <https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Calendar/academic.aspx>

Schedule

Note: The required reading and viewing should be completed before class on the day it is listed.

Note: I may occasionally make small adjustments to the syllabus, as I see fit. I will do my best to let you know about them beforehand—both in class and online (email or D2L).

Week	Date	Required Reading / In-Class Activities	Required Viewing
1	T Jan 9	Syllabus (in class)	
	R Jan 11	Angela Carter, "The Werewolf" Angela Carter, "The Company of Wolves" Brothers Grimm, " Little Red Cap " (online)	
2	**Individual Role Selection Due: Monday, Jan 15, 12:00pm/noon (Google Doc)		
	T Jan 16	Angela Carter, "The Tiger's Bride" In-class Group Meeting (~30 minutes)	
	R Jan 18	Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, " Monster Culture (Seven Theses) " (online)	Kanye West, " Monster " (online)

	**Monster Selection Email Due: Friday, Jan 19 (via email)		
3	T Jan 23	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> (excerpt, online):	<i>Mary Shelley's Frankenstein</i> (Branagh, 1994)
	R Jan 25	Franz Kafka, <i>The Metamorphosis</i> (Part 1)	
4	T Jan 30	Franz Kafka, <i>The Metamorphosis</i> (Part 2) Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection" (Course Pack)	
	R Feb 1	Franz Kafka, <i>The Metamorphosis</i> (Part 3)	
	**Project Proposal Due: Friday, Feb 2		
5	T Feb 6		<i>The Fly</i> (Cronenberg, 1986)
	R Feb 8	Barbara Creed, <i>The Monstrous Feminine</i> (Course Pack)	<i>Alien</i> (Scott, 1979)
6	T Feb 13	H.P. Lovecraft, " <i>The Call of Cthulhu</i> " (online)	
	R Feb 15	W.B. Seabrook, <i>The Magic Island</i> (Course Pack)	

7	T Feb 20	TBD	<i>Night of the Living Dead</i> (Romero, 1968)
	R Feb 22	David Schmid, " The Limits of Zombies: Monsters for a Neoliberal Age " (online)	<i>World War Z</i> (Forster, 2013)
8	T Feb 27	Group Project Workshop Day	
	R Mar 1	Mid-Term Essay Due	
9	T Mar 6	No Class (Spring Break)	
	R Mar 8	No Class (Spring Break)	
10	T Mar 13	Group Project Presentations (Group/Self Evaluations due day after presentation)	
	R Mar 15	Group Project Presentations (Group/Self Evaluations due day after presentation)	
11	T Mar 20	Bram Stoker, Dracula (excerpt, online)	<i>Bram Stoker's Dracula</i> (Coppola, 1992)
	R Mar 22	Octavia Butler, <i>Fledgling</i>	
12	T Mar 27	Octavia Butler, <i>Fledgling</i>	
	R	No Class	

	Mar 29		
13	T Apr 3	Octavia Butler, <i>Fledgling</i>	
	R Apr 5	No Class	
14	T Apr 10	Jack Halbsertam, " Skinflick: Posthuman Gender in Jonathan Demme's <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> "	<i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (Demme, 1991)
	R Apr 12	Junot Díaz, " Monstro " (online) Junot Díaz, " Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal " (online)	
15	T Apr 17	Marjorie Liu, <i>Monstress</i> (vol. 1)	
	R Apr 19	No Class	
16	T Apr 24	Tim Martin, " Godzilla : Why the Japanese Original is No Joke"	<i>Godzilla [Gojira]</i> (Honda, 1954)
	R Apr 26	Scott C. Johnson, " The Real District 9 : Cape Town's District Six"	<i>District 9</i> (Blomkamp, 2009)
EXAM	Thurs May 3 5:45p m	Final Exam will be due on or after this date (TBD)	

