

Honors 300 (4 credits)  
Spring 2019  
TTH 9:45-11:20  
Office Hours: **M 2:30-4:00;**  
**TH 4:30-5:30; F 12:30-2:00**

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## Monstrous Mirrors

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Swamps, closets, the occasional summer camp, remote European hostels: that's where the monsters of our childhoods live. Or at least where we hoped they lived, either tightly shut away or securely removed from where *we* live. Yet during times of cultural disruption and political change, monsters can seem far closer to home, and the fictions which separate *them* from our daily lives grow thin. Rather, we may find the monster in our own mirror, the self and our own identity made strange through the prism of a world in flux. We are forced, in other words, to acknowledge a darkness within.

It is precisely these times that this course will be interested in; more specifically, we will begin by looking at the revolutions of the eighteenth century and how they reshaped the definition of the human. As literary and cultural beneficiaries of this revolutionary age, we have come to accept this definition as the norm and may find these representations of the monstrous just a little too familiar, at times our spitting images. Or as we become denizens of a digital age and engage a new posthuman revolution, these norms may have started to seem slightly off kilter. Our primary texts for this section – two of them iconic – will be Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Charles Brockden Brown's early American novel, *Wieland*, and Mary Shelley's classic monster text, *Frankenstein*.

The nineteenth century unleashed a revolution of a more insidious nature, a dramatic shift in the status of the domestic space and consequently the sense of an increasing power for women. Writers and artists of the period registered their anxiety regarding these changes through a fascination with the original bad girl – not Eve – but rather Lilith, Eve's dark double, and according to ancient legend, Adam's more profoundly disobedient first wife. Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Sheridan Le Fanu are just a few of the writers who evoked her cautionary image. Contemporary artists have found Lilith equally fascinating and feminist writers such as Angela Carter have returned to her image or one very like it to reclaim her transgressions as empowering ones; in some respects, Carter completes the work begun by the nineteenth-century poet, Christina Rossetti, in her strange tribute to female appetite in "Goblin Market."

The fears of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved nightmarish. The rise of totalitarian states so distorted reality that visions of humanity proved grotesque by contrast. And whereas previous writers had viewed language as a weapon in combating such monstrous distortions, language – as manipulated by the state – now proved their greatest adversary. In 1984, George Orwell raised the specter of such a nightmarish state, and made the ability to alter the facts the greatest threat to moral existence. His hero is a monster by the end, no less disturbing for being an impotent, toothless one. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, totalitarianism may take the form of full digital immersion – a 24/7 online public presence which threatens to eliminate the private or the "within" altogether by bringing everything ruthlessly to light. Such is the case for Katniss Everdeen in the dystopian novel, *The Hunger Games*, who must confront life and death for a television audience, and for

whom even love becomes indistinguishable from performance. She may win the game, but she doesn't like what she sees in the mirror at the end of Volume I.

Finally, we will look at the contemporary crime story and the culture of American violence it encodes, starting with Alfred Hitchcock's still haunting *Psycho* and moving to Truman Capote's still controversial *In Cold Blood*. Each speaks to that odd American phenomenon of finding something sympathetic in the villain, and in the case of these two stories of serial killers, even something that borders on the heroic. At a time in which violence has become an everyday event in our culture, the need to examine these iconic treatments of the transformative effects of violence becomes urgent.

A course entitled "Monstrous Mirrors" cannot end, however, without some meta-reflection, without looking in the mirror ourselves. The contemporary play *Pillowman* will help us reflect on how the very commerce in horror stories can make monsters of its literary players, both its writers and its readers. This play, also set in a totalitarian state, forces us, brutally, to think about what it means to tell stories about monsters and whether such acts represent forms of resistance to larger controlling narratives or become the literal (and literary) manifestation of our fears.

The primary work for the course will be independently driven and determined by your interests and expertise. One paper – titled "My Own Personal Demon" – will span the length of the course and will consist of three parts: personal narrative, historical/cultural overview, and literary analysis. Another – titled "Monster Rx" – will draw upon your disciplinary expertise and will ask you to diagnose the source of the "monster" in a text we read, using the tools of your chosen major. The first paper will be a more conventional analysis paper and will serve to introduce you to the methodologies and expectations of the literary discipline. In addition to these three formal papers, there will be frequent informal writings (i.e. response papers.) The informal writing will be factored into your class participation grade.

Both the writings and the readings in the course will ask us to examine what constitutes our darkness within and what constitutes the monstrous in the mirror of our own time.

### **Learning Outcomes for the Course:**

- 1) Apply skills of close reading to a variety of texts across a variety of historical and cultural contexts;
- 2) Persuasively identify and explain the meaning of a text using an interdisciplinary framework;
- 3) Understand connections between literary narrative and historical/cultural context;
- 4) Write persuasive critical analytical papers;
- 5) Integrate primary and secondary texts in a longer work that also incorporates personal narrative.
- 6) Heighten self-awareness, self-understanding, and compassion for others.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

*Gulliver's Travels* (Penguin edition)  
*Wieland* (Penguin edition)  
*Frankenstein* (Longman Cultural Edition)  
*The Bloody Chamber*  
1984 (Signet)  
*Hunger Games* (Scholastic)  
*In Cold Blood* (Vintage)

*The Pillowman*

Selected additional readings on Moodle.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

### **1. Class Participation (15% of the grade)**

- **Attendance.** As this course is discussion based, your participation is essential, and attendance is mandatory. You are, however, allowed **four absences without penalty**, after which you will lose a letter grade for each absence. **If you miss more than seven classes, I will ask you to withdraw from the class.** Of course, absences due to a documented illness are excused, but numerous absences based on extended illness can still affect your performance in the class. So please contact me as soon as possible if you know you are going to miss several classes. We will need to work out a plan in advance for how to address these excused absences.
- **Class Participation.** The success of this course depends upon the quality of participation. So, I want to reward those who participate on a daily basis and who provide informed and reflective comments and questions on the readings. (That doesn't mean you provide all the right answers, but that your comments reflect an honest attempt to understand the material.) If I find that most students are not prepared for class, I will *regretfully* institute daily quizzes. Sometimes class participation may take a more formal turn with students leading class discussion.
- **Response Papers:** Students will frequently be asked to do in-class writing and at times required to complete informal writings in preparation for the course discussion. These response papers will be graded with a check, check plus, or check minus. You will complete five response papers. These papers provide low stakes opportunities to develop analytical writing skills and demonstrate understanding of the assigned readings. They also allow us to jump start a class discussion and allow for a more layered response to a question to emerge.
- **Peer Critique.** As this class is writing intensive, I want us to spend time in class discussing your writing. I also think you have a lot to learn from your peers. So, we will be "workshopping" your papers in class. Failure to participate in the workshop process by either not bringing a draft of your paper to class or not providing attentive commentary on another student's work will result in the loss of one letter grade on the final paper. (In the case of illness or other excused absence, a student can meet with a Writing Advisor in the Writing Center to substitute for the workshop, but I still need to receive the draft on the day it is due.)

### **2. Papers (85% of the grade)**

- **My Own Personal Demon paper (8-10 pages) – 35% of the grade (capstone project)**  
As mentioned earlier, this paper will span the course of the semester and will be composed of three parts: personal narrative, historical/ cultural overview, and literary analysis. Drafts of these three sections will be due at various dates during the semester. (See schedule of readings for details.) You will meet with writing groups throughout the semester to work on this paper.
- **Monster Rx (4-5 pages) – 30% of the grade**

In this paper, you will diagnose the source of the monster in one of the literary or film texts we have reviewed. You will use the expertise acquired in your major to make this diagnosis. You will present the findings orally first and then a week later provide a formal written analysis. A draft of the paper will be due at the time of the oral presentation.

- **Literary analysis papers (3-4 pages) –20% of the grade**  
Our first paper will be a comparative analysis of the monsters discussed in the first part of the course and will introduce you to the practice of literary analysis. Students will write two drafts of this paper; the second will be graded.

#### **Late paper policy:**

**I will provide up to a one-week extension for one of your final drafts (no questions asked), but you do need to alert me that you will be using this option. I do not accept late first drafts; failure to provide a first draft will result in the loss of one letter grade. If your absence is excused for that day, you may make up this loss of letter grade by workshopping the draft of the paper with a writing advisor at the Writing Center. I will accept one late response paper up to one week late.**

#### **Important Note:**

**To pass the course, students MUST complete ALL written work. No exceptions. In special cases, I will consider providing an incomplete in the course if all written work is not completed, but these exceptions need to be discussed one week in advance of the finals period and a written agreement signed.**

#### **Statement on Academic Honesty**

I take academic dishonesty very seriously, as I am sure you do as well. In the past, it has been my practice that if students *intentionally* plagiarize, they will *fail the course* regardless of their previous performance on other assignments. So, if you are tempted to plagiarize, please don't do it. If you start to feel overwhelmed, call me instead and let me help you.

Students are expected to sign each *final paper* with the Wittenberg Honor Code. Please see the Quick link for Honor Council on the Wittenberg Web page for further details regarding the code and for an explanation of what constitutes academic dishonesty.

#### **Wittenberg Statement on Learning Disabilities**

Wittenberg University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers (including mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision and neurological, or temporary medical conditions, etc.), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, you must register with Accessibility Services by contacting Jamie Rippey, the Director of Accessibility Services at 937-327-7870 or by email at [rippeyj@wittenberg.edu](mailto:rippeyj@wittenberg.edu). Please note that services are confidential and may take time to put into place, and are not retroactive. The Accessibility Services Office is located in the Office of Academic Services COMPASS Sweet Success Center, Thomas Library on the first floor. Walk-in appointments are welcome 8AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday.

**In Closing,**

This is an ambitious course with difficult material. For many of you, it is also your first foray into collegiate level literary analysis. So, please don't hesitate to come talk to me if you start to feel overwhelmed by the material. I am always happy to help you find your way through this material and make this a class where you can achieve your goals. Once again, my office hours are: **Monday 2:30-4:00; Thursday 4:30-5:30; and Friday 12:30-2:00.**

**SYLLABUS**

*(Tentative: syllabus subject to change depending upon needs of the course.)*

**Week I**

January 8 Introduction; begin "My Own Personal Demon" Paper

**Eighteenth-Century Revolutions,  
Monstrous Selves**

January 10 Historical Overview: The Glorious Revolution and the Glare of Enlightenment (Contextual materials on Moodle: "A Modest Proposal, from "Essay on Human Understanding," and from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*); Part II *Gulliver's Travels*

**Week II**

January 15 Part IV *Gulliver's Travels*

January 17 Historical Overview: The American Revolution and the Blank Space of a New World (Contextual materials on Moodle: TBA)/ *Wieland* (Chapters 1-12)

**Week III**

January 22 **NO CLASS/ Faculty Retreat**

January 24 *Wieland* (Chapters 12-27) – **Response paper #1 due**

**Week IV**

January 29 Historical Overview: The French Revolution and the Fractured Pieces of History/ Contextual materials on Moodle: freewriting on personal demon essay; *Frankenstein* (Volume 1)

January 31 *Frankenstein* (Volume II)

**Week V**

February 5 *Frankenstein* (Volume III) – **Response paper #2 due**

February 7 **Workshop Paper #1 – First draft of first paper due (no late drafts)**

**Week VI**

February 12 Historical Overview: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Revolutions: Readings on Lilith; "The Angel in the House: "Little Mermaid" (On

Moodle)

**Week VII**

February 14 Romantic Incarnations and Victorian Specters: “Christabel” and “Goblin Market”  
**Final draft of paper #1 due**

**ATTENDANCE OF THEATER PRODUCTION OF FRANKENSTEIN AT CLARK STATE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

February 19 Turn of the Century Nightmares: “Camilla”; *Monster Rx* (**One presentation**)

**Week VIII**

February 21 Postmodern Revisions: “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Lady of the House of Love” from *The Bloody Chamber*  
**Response paper #3 due**

February 28 **Monster Rx (Three presentations)**

**March 2-9 Spring Break**

**Totalitarian Nightmares:  
Cold War and Modern-Day Dystopias**

**Week IX**

**March 12** Historical Overview: Ideological Revolutions, the Mechanics of Change, and the Persistence of War – Contextual Materials TBA;  
*1984*: ONE

March 14 *1984*: TWO – Part II – **Personal Demon Part I draft due**

**Week X**

March 19 *1984*: THREE

March 21 **Monster Rx (three presentations)**

**Week XI**

March 26 Historical Overview: Digital Revolutions, Surveillance Culture, and Post-human Conflicts  
*Hunger Games* (Book I)

March 28 *Hunger Games* (Book II) – **Response paper #4 due**

**Week XII**

April 2 *Psycho* (extended class session)

April 4	<i>Psycho</i> discussion – <b>Personal Demon Part II Draft due</b>
	<b>American Monster, American Hero?</b>
<b>Week XIII</b>	
April 9	<b>Monster Rx (3 presentations)</b>
April 11	Historical Context: American Violence and Personal Revolution; <i>In Cold Blood</i> (sections TBA)
<b>Week XIV</b>	
April 16	<i>In Cold Blood</i> (complete book) – <b>Response Paper #5 due</b>
April 18	<b>Monster Rx (3 presentations)</b>
	<b>Meta-reflection: Monstrous Readers and Monstrous Writers</b>
<b>Week XV</b>	
April 23	<i>Pillowman</i>
April 25	<b>Monster Rx (3 presentations)</b>
<b>Week XVI</b>	
April 30	Final Reflections – <b>Draft of Part III of Personal Demon paper due</b>
May 6 (finals week)	<b>Final Draft of Personal Demon paper due by 5 pm</b>