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Human Monsters: Representations Of The Limits Of Humanity In The Early Modern Period (SPAN/LITRS 058) Syllabus

Eli Cohen

Swarthmore College, ecohen3@swarthmore.edu

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Representations of the Limits of Humanity in the Early Modern Period



Prof. Eli Cohen
Kohlberg 323
ecohen3@swarthmore.edu
(610) 957-6099

Office Hours:
Mondays and Fridays 11:00-1:00
(or by appointment)

Class Meeting Information:
M 1:15-4:00 PM
Kohlberg 334

Course Description

What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be a monster? Under what conditions and at what point does one exceed or not meet the standards of humanity and become a monster? Focusing on the so-called 'Age of Exploration,' this course examines the ways in which authors, artists, politicians and philosophers imagined the limits between the human and the monstrous during the early modern period. Ranging from classical mythology and the medieval worldview to Renaissance drama and the chronicles of the discovery of the New World, we will consider the physical, psychological and cultural boundaries of the human and the monstrous, as well as explore the ways these identities shift across time and space and have a continuing impact on the way we think of otherness today.

Taught in English.

No prior knowledge of Spanish is necessary.

This class is open to all students, without prerequisites.

Eligible for Spanish and LALS

1 credit

Methods: in-class discussion will be emphasized and for this reason student participation is a fundamental part of this course. True participation includes preparing thoroughly, being present and attentive, and contributing actively to the conversations and activities that take place in the classroom. Accordingly, attendance is crucial.

General course goals: students in this course will (1) increase the breadth and depth of their understanding of the history of alterity and monstrosity; (2) develop a specific knowledge of constructions of alterity and monstrosity in the early modern period in Spain, Europe and the Americas; of the classical and medieval ideas and authors that influenced those constructions; and of the influence those constructions have had on modern culture; (3) improve their critical capacities through close readings, sustained dialogue, and reasoned argumentation.

Student learning objectives:

1. Students will situate early modern and colonial notions of monstrosity within their specific cultural (theoretical, artistic) contexts;
2. demonstrate an ability to interpret and analyze works of different genres within their specific historical and intellectual contexts;
3. develop their capacity to move beyond reaction and to construct an interpretation founded on textual (and pictorial) evidence;
4. practice and polish their ability to synthesize and summarize diverse types of cultural works;
5. improve their ability to draw connections and conclusions across historical periods and geographical locations;
6. strengthen their aptitude for presenting their ideas in logical and cohesive ways in different expressive forms.

Required Full-Length Readings (will be available at the College Store or on Moodle):

- o Eurpidedes, *The Bacchantes*
- o William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- o Luis Vélez de Guevara, *The Mountain Girl from La Vera*
- o Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- o José Camilo Cela, *The Family of Pascual Duarte*
- o Caryl Churchill, *The Skriker*

All other materials (films, critical articles, fragments and selections of primary sources, etc.) will be made available on the course Moodle site.

Evaluation:

-Participation	25%
-Weekly response papers	10%
-Presentations	10%
-Short essays (4-5 pp.)	30%
-Final Project	25%

Participation (25%):

Participation is fundamental in this class and attendance is therefore required. In-class participation consists of active intervention in group discussions. This intervention should reflect an individual's prior preparation (reading of assigned materials, for example), as the classroom is a space in which we will all share our unique experiences with the course materials. For this reason, it is expected that each member of the class has read/viewed and reflected on the course material, and discussion questions or other assigned homework, and that they have formulated their own ideas, questions, doubts and commentaries regarding the material for any given session. Finally, students are expected to demonstrate a conscious effort to develop and improve their ability to express their ideas through verbal and written critical analysis.

Weekly response papers (10%):

Each student will write a brief, informal response to the material (texts, images, etc.) assigned each week and the class discussions on that material. These commentaries will be submitted to the professor by 8:00 PM Thursday. These papers (1-2 pp.) should be a reflection on and response to what has been read and discussed on Monday, and students can either continue the conversation begun in class or present new ideas or questions that weren't sufficiently covered in class.

Presentations (10%):

Students will present on the readings for each week. Students will present the works, offer a summary of the ideas communicated by the work, and, when appropriate, provide a handout to classmates of relevant passages to be discussed. Students will formulate specific questions they would like the class to discuss based on the readings and will initiate those discussions.

Essays:

Students will write **two short essays** (30%), of 4-5 pages in length. The first essay will be one of the works dealing with early modern travel narratives and the colonial encounter and experience (weeks 4-6). The second essay will be on one of the literary representations of monstrosity in the early modern Europe (weeks 8-9).

The **final project** (25%) will be a digital project. Students will learn how to use the digital platform Omeka in order to create their own multimedia exhibits of human monsters.

Detailed instructions for the essays and final project will be provided well in advance of the deadlines for each.

Academic Requirements

- **Attendance is mandatory.** Two absences will be excused. 3 or more unexcused absences will affect your final grade; after more than 6 unjustified absences (3 weeks of classes), the professor has the right to withdraw or fail any student (see attendance policy below).
- Achieving a solid grade in this course (B or higher) should require roughly 12 to 15 hours of work per week: 2½ hours in class; 8 hours reading and watching the assigned materials; 2-4 hours working on assignments. This time commitment may need to be adjusted depending upon the individual student's language and literary proficiency.
- **All reading assignments and viewing of the audiovisual material must be completed before each class.**
- The course will be part lecture and part group discussion. The professor's lecture will supplement the day's reading assignment, but will not provide a simple repetition of the reading. Students are expected to contribute to the lectures through questions, commentary, critique, and general participation.
- **This course is reading and writing intensive.** A sustained reading of often difficult texts is a core element of the course. Some "outside" reading will also be required. All readings will be in English.
- Some classes will include in-class activities. Students will work in teams of 2-3 on an assigned task relevant to the day's topic. Students will communicate their conclusions to the larger group.
- Writing assignments are due at the beginning of class or at the time stated by the professor. Assignments turned in after the deadline will suffer a 3% reduction in their grade each day that they are late.
- If you must miss class the date an assignment is due but have no justified excuse for your absence, send the work to class with a classmate or turn in the work to your professor in advance (in person or via email as required) and it will not be counted as late.
- All written assignments must follow the MLA format. Please, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (8th edition): <http://www.mla.org/style>

Attendance Policy

Class participation and frequent contact with the target language are essential to language acquisition and therefore your presence in the class is required.

If you are absent three or more days, your final cumulative grade will be reduced by 1%,

- unless you are representing the university off-campus in an official capacity. You must provide your professor with a schedule of away games or other appropriate documentation, and it is recommended that you discuss all impending absences with your professor and keep her or him aware of your upcoming scheduled trips. According to College policies and procedures and the *Student-Athlete Manual*, student athletes who have potential class/game conflicts must present faculty with a *copy* of their competition schedules, including departure, or meeting time, at the beginning of their season. A student may not be excused from an activity anything other than a competition. If a game is postponed, students are expected to attend any classes they had anticipated missing for that competition. Students are responsible for arranging to make up all missed course work. Papers or tests should be handed in or taken before the missed class. Only proper *written* documentation—presented at the beginning of the semester—will be considered when dealing with scheduling conflicts.
- unless you miss a class that is during a recognized religious holiday. You should inform your professor in advance that you will miss the class. Recognized religious holidays do not count toward the original limit of permitted absences.
- unless your professor receives notification from your academic dean. If you are hospitalized due to an injury or a severe or longer-term medical condition or suffer from a debilitating chronic condition that means you will miss a graded assignment, contact your academic dean and ask her or him to notify your professor. The notification does not need to include any details about the nature of the condition.

Academic Honesty

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the *Swarthmore College Student Handbook* and its guidelines on Academic Honesty. Note that faculty guidelines *require* faculty to send cases of suspected plagiarism and cheating on exams to the College's Judiciary Committee (CJC), where suspension is likely and expulsion possible. In addition, the instructor has the automatic policy that any student whom he considers, on the basis of evidence available to him, to have engaged in plagiarism or cheating in any individually assigned work (i.e., in this course, exams and written assignments) will automatically receive No Credit for the course.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability or a chronic medical condition, please contact Student Disability Services (Parrish 113W, 123W) via e-mail at studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the office will issue students with documented disabilities or medical conditions a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, [visit the Student Disability Services website](#). You are also welcome to contact me [the faculty member] privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged, in advance, through Student Disability Services.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments¹

Week 1: Introduction

January 22: Introduction to the Course / What is a Monster?

Readings:

- Euripedes, *The Bacchantes*
- Natalie Lawrence, [“A History of Monsters”](#)

***Week 2: Origin Stories ***

January 27: The Where and What of Monstrosity

Readings:

- Ctesias, *Indica* (selections)
- Herodotus, *Histories* (selections)
- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (Book VII)
- St. Augustine, *City of God* (selections)
- Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels* (selections)
- John B. Friedman, “The Plinian Races”
- Alexa Wright, “Monstrous Strangers at the Edge of the World: The Monstrous Races”

Week 3: Visualizing Monsters

February 3: Mapping Monstrosity

Readings:

- John B. Friedman, “Cultural Conflicts in Medieval World Maps”
- Marina Münkler, “Experiencing Strangeness: Monstrous Peoples on the Edge of the Earth as Depicted on Medieval *Mappae Mundi*”
- Seymour Phillips, “The outer world of the European Middle Ages”
- Asa Simon Mittman, “The Monsters on the Edge”

Maps:

- Late Medieval Maps: <http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/LMwebpages/LML.html>
- Renaissance Maps: <http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/Ren/Ren1/Reno.html>

¹ Subject to modification by the professor. Any changes will be announced in advance. All readings are to be completed prior to the day for which they are assigned.

Week 4: There be Monsters

February 10: Cultural Topographies of Monstrosity

Readings:

- Odoric of Pordenone (selections)
- Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354* (selections)
- Sir John Mandeville, *The Travels* (selections)
- Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, “The Topography of Wonder”
- Lynn Ramey, “Monstrous Alterity in Early Modern Travel Accounts: Lessons from the Ambiguous Medieval Discourse on Humanness”

Week 5: New World Monsters

February 17: The Colonial Experience

Readings:

- Amerigo Vespucci, “Mondus Novus”
- Columbus, Journal and Letters (selection)
- Walter Mignolo, “Putting the Americas on the Map”

- Hernán Cortés, *Letters from México* (selections)
- Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (selections)
- Inga Clendinnen, “‘Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty’: Cortés and Conquest of Mexico”
- Charles H. Parker, “European States and Overseas Empires”

***Week 6: European Monsters ***

February 24: Monsters in the Mirror

Readings:

- Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (selections)
- Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *A Treatise on the Just Causes for War against the Indians* (selections)
- Miguel de Carvajal, *Complaint of the Indians in the Court of Death* (selections)
- Michel de Montaigne, *Essays* (selections)

***Week 7: Normalizing Monstrosity ***

March 2: Natural Histories

Readings:

- Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Natural History of the West Indies* (selections)
- Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (selections)
- Jean Michel Massing, “Early European Images of America: The Ethnographic Approach”

SPRING BREAK

Week 8: Monstrous Entertainment

March 16: Shakespeare and the Performance of Monstrosity

Readings:

- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- Mark Thornton Burnett, “Mapping ‘Monsters’” and “‘Were I in England Now’: Localizing ‘Monsters’ in *The Tempest*”
- Wes Williams, “‘L’Humanité du tout perdue?’: Early Modern Monsters, Cannibals and Human Souls”

***Week 9: Domesticating Monstrosity ***

March 23: Of Monsters and Men (and Women)

Readings:

- Luis Vélez de Guevara, *The Mountain Girl from La Vera*
- María de Zayas y Sotomayor, *Tales of Disillusion* (selections)
- Stacey L. Parker Aronson, “Monstrous Metamorphoses and Rape in María de Zayas”

Week 10: The Science and Art of Collecting Monsters

March 30: Cabinets of Curiosity and Portraits of Deformity

Readings:

- Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, “Monsters: A Case Study” and “Wonders of Art, Wonders of Nature”
- Toubia Ghadessi, “Difference as an Inquiry”
- Laurel Byrnes, [“Ole Worm’s Cabinet of Wonder: Natural Specimens and Wondrous Monsters”](#)

Week 11: The Science of Creating Monsters

April 6: Monsters Born and Made

Readings:

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*
- Elaine Graham, “What made Victor’s creature monstrous?”

Viewing:

- *Vampyr* (Carl Theodore Dreyer, 1932)

Week 12: Making (Our Own) Monsters

April 13: Digital Workshop (McCabe Library)

Week 13: Modern (Literary) Monsters

April 20: Twentieth-Century Monstrosity

Readings:

- José Camilo Cela, *The Family of Pascual Duarte*
- Caryl Churchill, *The Skriker*
- Alexa Wright, “Modern Monsters and the Image of Normality”

Viewing:

- *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932)
- *Pan’s Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006)

Week 14: Undead Monsters

April 27: The Latest Monsters and Why We Love Them

Viewing:

- *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932)
- *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968)
- [*Monster*](#) (Jennifer Kent, (2005)

Reading:

- Jeffrey J. Cohen, “Undead (A Zombie Oriented Ontology)”

Conclusions:

- Dominique Lestel, “Why Are We So Fond of Monsters?”