

**HIST 197: Monsters in Western History**  
Spring 2021



Mondays and Wednesdays 3:25-4:40 pm  
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*“Perhaps it is time to ask the question that always arises when the monster is discussed seriously...Do monsters really exist?”*

*“Surely they must, for if they do not, how could we?” - Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”*

Why do we create monsters? What human needs and wants do monsters fulfill? Why do monsters continue to frighten and fascinate us, and how did people feel about them in different places and times? What counts as a monster? In this lecture and discussion-based online course we will explore these questions and more as well as examine the roles monsters have played (and continue to play) in identity formation and the shaping of the “other” from antiquity to the present day in the “western” world. We will interrogate moments of cultural anxiety and the monsters they create in their historical contexts and see how monsters can help us understand the

fears and beliefs of people throughout history, especially in regards to race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality.

### **Required Texts:**

All of these books are available at Rush-Rhees Library in full-text online versions as well as in physical form. You can purchase them at the bookstore and online—if you are able, I urge you to support an independent bookstore local to you with your purchase. Most are willing and able to procure any book if you ask!

If you choose to purchase electronic versions of these books made for e-readers, you are responsible for making sure that the pages you read in your book line up with the page numbers assigned each class period.

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**(DEM 1)** Mittman, Asa Simon, and Marcus Hensel, eds. *Demonstrare: Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, Vol. 1. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018. ISBN: 9781942401193.

**(DEM 2)** Mittman, Asa Simon, and Marcus Hensel, eds. *Demonstrare: Primary Sources on Monsters*, Vol. 2. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018. ISBN: 9781942401216.

**(WOOD)** Wood, Juliette. *Fantastic Creatures in Mythology and Folklore*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 2018. ISBN: 9781350059252.

**(Blackboard)** Miscellaneous texts available on Perusall via Blackboard.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. Analyze representations of monsters in western history and develop an interpretive framework for locating these representations in their larger historical and cultural contexts.
2. Understand theories of monstrosity and how these theories are applied to larger conversations regarding race, gender, class, and other cultural institutions.
3. Become familiar with the practice of using primary sources in a historical context in conjunction with secondary sources.
4. Improve critical thinking and writing skills.

### **Course Information:**

**Blackboard:** Please check the course blackboard often for updates on readings, assignments, and changes to the schedule. I will do my best to stick to the syllabus in the form you see now, but unforeseen circumstances are, of course, unforeseen and may interfere with my plans.

**Perusall:** We will be using the program Perusall for reading and assignment purposes. You do not need to download anything additional- it is linked through Blackboard already. You are

expected to complete a certain number of Perusall tasks per Perusall assignment—I will outline this further both in this syllabus and in class.

Office Hours: I will hold office hours on Zoom by appointment. I strongly encourage you to utilize office hours early and often if you have questions, need assistance, want another pair of eyes on your paper, or even if you just want to chat about the readings beyond what we are able to cover in class.

Papers: All papers for this class should be double spaced and written in 12-point font with 1-inch margins in Times New Roman or a close equivalent. Please submit documents in a .doc format for ease of grading. PDFs will not be accepted. The citation style for history is **Chicago or Turabian**. Please familiarize yourself with it and use one of the many helpful style guides on the internet to help you! (This one, for instance.

[https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)) The use of other citation styles may result in the loss of points. Make sure to include your name in a header or footer on every page, and always include page numbers. Do not rely solely on spellcheck, as it misses far too many errors—always proofread your papers yourself. Spelling and grammar errors may result in the loss of points. I am available for questions and to discuss papers prior to the due date. I also encourage you to make use of the U of R Writing and Speaking Center for additional assistance. Scheduling is available at <http://writing.rochester.edu/help/index.html>.

Late Work: Late assignments will be assessed on an individual basis, but may be docked **5%** for each calendar day an assignment is late. Contact me if you have any questions.

Content Warning: It is impossible to discuss the history of monsters without encountering topics such as racism, gender-based discrimination, homophobia, class conflict, and other forms of violence. At times, you will be asked to read and/or watch materials that deal frankly with such topics, and some primary documents will use language that would be deemed offensive today. These texts are included because they have value as historical documents and are relevant to our topic of inquiry. I will do my best to highlight these texts ahead of their due date. If you have particular concerns about specific readings or assignments, please reach out to me for discussion.

Students with Disabilities: Students of all backgrounds and abilities are welcome in this class. If you experience any barriers to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources at [disability@rochester.edu](mailto:disability@rochester.edu), (585) 276-5075, and <https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/> in order to develop a plan of action. I also encourage you to reach out to me directly so that I can better understand your needs and work with you to make this course accessible.

Academic Honesty: All students in this course are expected to produce works and behave in ways that are in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all work **MUST** be your own. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>.

Statement Regarding Credit Hours: The College’s credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 197 are expected to devote at least one hour each week to analyzing the course readings, working alone or in groups, and to reading and writing for the three papers and other assignments in the class.

### Course Requirements and Grading:

You are expected to read all of the assigned texts each week—coming to class prepared is essential. Your course grade will be determined by your **participation**, your **10 reading responses**, **10 Perusall assignments**, and **three papers**, each of which will be described in further detail below and when they are assigned. Two of these papers will only require you to use texts provided by this class, while the third will involve independent research on your part.

If you find yourself struggling in this class, please do not hesitate to reach out to me, I am always happy to talk to students. The earlier you alert me to a problem the more options we have to solve it.

- Participation (10%):

Participation is integral to your success in this class. I expect students to be engaged learners, which means asking questions and showing up for class. The 10-15 minute meeting that you will schedule with me in your first week of class will count towards your participation grade, as will your preparedness for each class, your contributions to discussions in class, and your attendance.

- Perusall (10%):

Perusall is an application that is integrated into Blackboard that enables you to engage with the readings as well as your colleagues in this class. Because of the online nature of the course, there are fewer opportunities for traditional discussion and interaction. Perusall will help to replace some of these. On the ten days we are using Perusall, you are expected to make **three** unique comments *per reading* and add **at least five** comments to other conversations, also *per reading*. Your comments should be thoughtful, complete sentences and demonstrate that you are engaged with the readings and your classmates. Perusall comments are due by **1 pm EDT** the day that those readings are to be completed so that I have a chance to look them over before class. Readings that require Perusall comments will be indicated on the syllabus by a **(P)** at the end of the assignment listing.

A	100-93%
A-	92-90%
B+	89-87%
B	86-83%
B-	82-80%
C+	79-77%
C	76-73%
C-	72-70%
D+	69-67%
D	66-63%
D-	62-61%
F	60% and below

- Reading Responses (10%):

For ten class sessions you will be asked to write a 300 to 500-word response to the works we have read or watched for class. These response papers are **NOT** summaries of the text, but

should instead demonstrate your engagement with the works assigned. Compare and contrast them to other readings we have done, point out parts you find interesting and why, highlight particular phrases and explore why they grabbed your attention. Reading responses are due on Blackboard by the **beginning of class (3:25 EDT)** each day they are assigned.

- Close Reading Paper (20%):

This **3-5-page** paper will require you to select a primary source text we have read in class and closely analyze it. A close reading includes three basic parts: a thesis that asserts the meaning and function of the text in the form of an argument, evidence from the text to support your argument, and analysis of the evidence you provide, also in support of your argument. More detailed instructions will be provided later in the semester.

- Comparison Paper (20%):

This **3-5-page** paper will require you to compare and contrast two different primary sources we have read this semester. You must choose texts that you did **NOT** use for your close reading assignment. More detailed instructions will be provided later in the semester.

- Research Paper (30%):

This **5-7-page** paper will require you to embark upon some research beyond the texts we have been reading in class. In this paper you will pick a specific monster and argue the ways in which it has changed over time. In the first part of your paper you will identify where the monster comes from and argue what it originally communicated. In the second part of your paper, you will identify ways in which the meaning of that monster has changed over time, and in the third part of the paper you will identify and argue the meaning the monster holds in the modern world. More detailed instructions will be provided later in the semester.

### Online Expectations and Information

Due to the pandemic, this course is being taught online. This means that some regular features of a class are impossible—I will only be able to hold office hours by appointment, rather than a drop-in process—and other aspects must be adapted. If you have questions or concerns about the online format and class expectations, please meet with me for discussion.

Recording: This course is being taught synchronically, which means that **all class sessions will be recorded** as per university guidelines.

Cameras: While I will not *require* you to turn your cameras on during class, I would strongly prefer that you do. If you have concerns about having your camera on due to internet connectivity issues or other reasons, please meet with me so we can discuss other ways you can stay engaged in class.

Microphones: Conversely, I will ask you to please keep your microphones muted when you are not speaking in order to avoid distracting background noises and echo.

Distractions: As this is a completely online class, I recognize that the siren call of the internet and other distractions will be hard for some of you to resist. I urge you to do what you can to stay focused on class during class time. If you are like me and struggle to stay on task, I would be happy to recommend some time management tools like StayFocusd (<http://www.stayfocusd.com/>) and Habitica (<https://habitica.com/>), both of which I use myself and find quite helpful.

## Schedule of Reading and Other Assignments

### Feb 1: Introduction

### Feb 3: Foundational Texts

- Due:
  - Schedule meeting with Marissa. (I will discuss this 10-15 minute meeting in class.)
- Read:
  - J.R.R. Tolkien, “*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics.” **DEM 1 pp. 3-18.**
  - Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” **DEM 1 pp. 43-54.**

### Feb 8: Monstrous Races

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 1
- Read:
  - Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 43-47.**
  - “The Plinian Races,” *The Monstrous Races*. **Blackboard pp. 5-25. (P)**

### Feb 10: Monstrous Races, cont.

- Due :
  - Response Paper 1
- Read :
  - John Block Friedman, “A Measure of Man.” **DEM 1 pp. 19-26.**
  - *The Wonders of the East*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 67-69.**
  - St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 55-60.**
  - *The Life of St. Christopher*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 101-108.**

## The Undead

### Feb 15: The Undead- Introduction

- Due:
  - Response Paper 2

- Read:
  - Noël Carroll, “The Nature of Horror.” **DEM 1 pp. 27-36.**
  - J. Halberstam, “Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity.” **DEM 1 pp. 75-88.**
  - “Introduction,” *The Penguin Book of the Undead*. **Blackboard pp. xiii-xvi.**

### **Feb 17: Vampires**

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 2
- Read:
  - Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 215-222.**
  - “Unearthing the Dead,” *The Vampire: A New History*. **Blackboard pp. 23-40. (P)**

### **Feb 22: Vampires, cont.**

- Read:
  - “Bleeding Gold,” *The Vampire: A New History*. **Blackboard pp. 147-168.**
- Watch:
  - “Dracula: The First Modern Vampire.” Storied. (About 7 minutes)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc93hC9WAfo&list=PL\\_lsQEz7yLOpq278N-4I72cTXIRE1kVUN&index=12](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc93hC9WAfo&list=PL_lsQEz7yLOpq278N-4I72cTXIRE1kVUN&index=12)

### **Feb 24: Zombies**

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 3
- Read:
  - “A Mistress of the Graves,” *The Penguin Book of the Undead*. **Blackboard pp. 17-25. (P)**
  - “The Blackened Hearts of Stapenhill,” *The Penguin Book of the Undead*. **Blackboard pp. 122-126. (P)**
  - “Rampaging Revenants,” *The Penguin Book of the Undead*. **Blackboard pp. 129-136. (P)**
- Watch:



- “Draugr: The Undead Nordic Zombie” Storied. (About 6 minutes)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNM1Y8i8tuI&list=PL\\_lsQEz7yLOpq278N-4I72cTXIRE1kVUN&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNM1Y8i8tuI&list=PL_lsQEz7yLOpq278N-4I72cTXIRE1kVUN&index=1)
- “The Origins of the Zombie, from Haiti to the U.S.” Storied. (About 18 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIGmsxBMnjA>

### **March 1: Frankenstein’s Monster**

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 4
- Read:
  - Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 179-183.**
  - “In a Country of Eternal Light: Frankenstein’s Intellectual History,” *Monstrous Progeny*. **Blackboard pp. 15-39. (P)**
- Watch:
  - “Frankenstein is More Horrific Than You Might Think.” Storied. (About 7 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsYyBdg4emI>
  - “Golem: The Mysterious Clay Monster of Jewish Lore.” Storied. (About 7 minutes) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCfOH\\_RKgmU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCfOH_RKgmU)

### **March 3: No Class- Study Day**

### **March 8: Werewolves**

- Due :
  - Response Paper 3
- Read :
  - Marie de France, *Bisclavret*. **DEM 2 pp. 89-91.**
  - *Völsung Saga (The Saga of the Volsungs)*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 93-100.**
  - “Topographia Hibernica.” *Lycanthropy Reader*. **Blackboard pp. 57-61.**
  - “What About some Good Wether?” *Werewolf Histories*. **Blackboard pp. 121-136.**

### **March 10: Werewolves, cont.**

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 5

- Read:
  - “Jean Grenier, a French Werewolf.” *Lycanthropy Reader*. **Blackboard pp. 62-68. (P)**
  - “Of the Metamorphosis of Men into Beasts.” *Lycanthropy Reader*. **Blackboard pp. 77-90 (P)**
  - “Malleus Maleficarum.” *Lycanthropy Reader*. **Blackboard pp. 106-114. (P)**
  - “The Werewolf in the Popular Culture of Early Modern Germany.” *Werewolf Histories*. **Blackboard pp. 185-200. (P)**

### **Fantastic Beasts**

#### **March 15: Fabulous Beasts- Introduction**

- Due:
  - **Close Reading Paper due via Blackboard by 11:59 pm EDT.**
- Read:
  - “Introduction,” **WOOD pp. 1-9.**

#### **March 17: Mermaids and Sirens**

- Due:
  - Response Paper 4
- Read:
  - “Lingering in Sea Caves: The World of the Mermaid,” **WOOD pp. 49-78.**
  - “In the Jaws of the Merman.” *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*. **Blackboard pp. 48.**
  - “New Tunes.” *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*. **Blackboard pp. 64-65.**
  - “The Mermaid.” *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 141.**
- Watch:
  - “The Fatal Song of the Sirens.” Storied. (Around 10 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IYisDTeycY>

#### **March 22: Sea Monsters**

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 6
- Read:

- “Lingering in Sea Caves: The World of the Mermaid,” **WOOD pp. 78-91.**
- Ambrose Paré, “Concerning Marine Monsters.” *On Monsters and Marvels.* **Blackboard pp. 107-136. (P)**
- Watch:
  - “Release the Kraken! Origins of the Legendary Sea Monster.” Storied. (About 6 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTpbZVxz3SI>

### **March 24: The Unicorn and Other Fabulous Beasts**

- Due:
  - Response Paper 5
- Read:
  - “When Unicorns Walked the Earth: A Brief History of the Unicorn and its Fellows,” **WOOD pp. 11-38.**
  - Marco Polo, *Travels*, selections. *Fabulous Beasts.* **Blackboard pp. 186-191.**

### **March 29: The Unicorn and Other Fabulous Beasts, cont.**

- Due:
  - Response Paper 6
- Read:
  - “When Unicorns Walked the Earth: A Brief History of the Unicorn and its Fellows,” **WOOD pp. 38-48.**
  - “Things with Wings: The Creatures of the Air,” **WOOD pp. 93-106.**
  - Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, selections. *Fabulous Beasts.* **Blackboard pp. 47-49.**
  - “The Romance of Alexander,” selections. *Fabulous Beasts.* **Blackboard pp. 169-172.**
  - “A Latin Prose Bestiary.” *Fabulous Beasts.* **Blackboard pp. 131-134.**

### **March 31: The Unicorn and Other Fabulous Beasts, cont. 2**

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 7
- Read:
  - “Things with Wings: The Creatures of the Air,” **WOOD pp. 106-126.**

- Aelian, *On Animals*, selections. *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 74-79. (P)**
- Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, selections. *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 192-194. (P)**
- Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, selections. *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 273-279. (P)**

### April 5: Dragons

- Due:
  - Response Paper 7
- Read:
  - “The Age-Old Scourge: Dragons and Monstrous Serpents,” **WOOD pp. 127-151.**
  - “Apollo and Python.” *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 35-36.**
  - *Beowulf*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 73, 82-85**, beginning with “Then came the broad kingdom...”

### April 7: Dragons, cont.

- Due:
  - **Comparison Paper due via Blackboard by 11:59 pm, EDT.**
- Read:
  - “The Age-Old Scourge: Dragons and Monstrous Serpents,” **WOOD pp. 151-167.**
  - Solinus, *Collection of Remarkable Facts*, selections. *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 81-84.**
  - Jacob de Voragine, “Saynt George and the Dragon.” *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 160-163.**
- Watch:
  - “How Dragons Conquered the World.” Storied. (Around 6 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsZVKCQHdlo>

### April 12: Cryptids

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 8
- Read:
  - “Every Imaginary Animal is Real.” *Imaginary Animals*. **Blackboard pp. 79-85. (P)**

- “St. Columba and the Ness Monster.” *Fabulous Beasts*. **Blackboard pp. 147-149.**  
**(P)**
- “Slender Man” and “The SCP (Special Containment Procedures) Foundation.”  
**DEM 2 pp. 345-352.**
- Watch:
  - “Unlocking the Mystery of Loch Ness.” Storied. (Around 17 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wW6eKLLViK8>
  - “Slender Man: How the Internet Created a Monster.” Storied. (Around 10 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBVn4SzvImo>

## Human Monsters

### April 14: Human Monsters- Introduction

- Due:
  - Response Paper 8
- Read:
  - “Introduction,” *On Monsters*. **Blackboard pp. 5-11.**
  - Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection.” **DEM 1 pp. 67-74.**
  - “Monsters in the Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors.” *Monsters and Monstrosity in Jewish History*. **Blackboard pp. 134-148.**

### April 19: Gods and Biblical Monsters

- Due:
  - Response Paper 9
- Read:
  - “Biblical Monsters,” *On Monsters*. **Blackboard pp. 63-71.**
  - *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 7-16.**
  - Hesiod, *Theogony*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 25-32.**
  - *The Bible*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 17-23.**

### April 21: Monstrous Births

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 9
- Read:

- Stephen Asma, “The Medicalization of Monsters.” *On Monsters*. **Blackboard pp. 141-162. (P)**
- “The Mother of a Monster, and Not of an Orderly Birth.” *Marvelous Protestantism*. **Blackboard pp. 62-87. (P)**
- John Spencer, *A Discourse Concerning Prodigies: Wherein the Vanity of Presages by Them is Reprehended, and Their True and Proper Ends Are Indicated*, selections. **DEM 2 159-162.**
- Ambrose Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, selections. **Blackboard pp. 3-23, 67-73. (P)**

### April 26: “Freaks” and Human Variation

- Due:
  - Perusall Comments 10
- Read:
  - Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “From Wonder to Error: A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity.” **DEM 1 pp. 89-98.**
  - “Preface: The Gonzales Sisters and their Worlds.” *The Marvelous Hairy Girls*. **Blackboard pp. 3-11. (P)**
  - “Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England.” *Freakery*. **Blackboard pp. 69-80 (P)**

### April 28: Mutants and Lovecraft

- Due:
  - Response Paper 10
- Read:
  - “Darwin’s Mutants,” *On Monsters*. **Blackboard pp. 163-179.**
  - H.P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu.” **DEM 2 pp. 247-261**
  - “The Undead: A Haunted Whiteness,” *Pretend We’re Dead*. **Blackboard pp. 89-121.**
- Watch:
  - “Outsiders: How to Adapt H.P. Lovecraft in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Harry Brewis. (Around 33 minutes)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8u8wZ0WvxI&list=PLosUHhw\\_754bi4OFUj7rRU3QXc-LsbrH1&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8u8wZ0WvxI&list=PLosUHhw_754bi4OFUj7rRU3QXc-LsbrH1&index=1)

### **May 3: Cannibals and Giants**

- Read:
  - *Beowulf*, selections. **DEM 2 pp. 74-82.**
  - “Cannibalism and Popular Culture.” *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain*. **Blackboard pp. 61-96.**

### **May 5: Serial Killers**

- Due:
  - **Research Paper due via Blackboard by 11:59 pm, EDT.**
- Read:
  - “Serial Killers: Murder Can Be Work.” *Pretend We’re Dead*. **Blackboard pp. 13-15, 21-31, 47-51.**