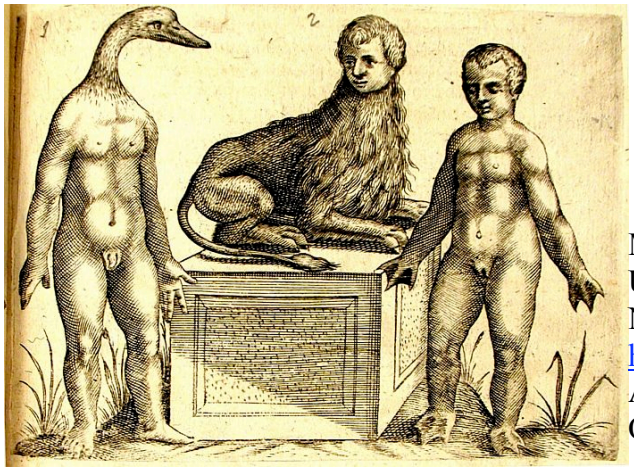

Liceti (1616)

Making Monsters * ENGL 3040
University of Minnesota * May 2007
Nicholas Hengen
hengen@umn.edu
Amundson 120 * MTWR * 545-950PM
Office Hours: by appointment

What is a monster? A ghoulish costume created in a Hollywood prop shop? A serial killer like Aileen Wuornos (whose life was recreated in the movie Monster)? What about Adolf Hitler? Or Cookie Monster? In this class, we will talk a lot about what monsters might be and the more important questions of why and how societies create them.

The Course

We're spending a lot of time together—much of which will be spent in conversation—and it will take commitment to keep our meetings lively. It is impossible for this to happen without your participation—that is, your commitment to reading the assigned texts and sharing your ideas about them.

To say something in class is always a risk; if we all enter each meeting with the understanding that this is a mutual venture—one in which most of us will make some "mistakes"—we can, I hope, have productive discussions. I will ask that you come to class with a willingness to take risks, to suspend closure, and to accept that asking questions is often more important than being "right."

Books

Beowulf, Ed. Daniel Donohue, Trans. Seamus Heaney. Norton 2001.
Coetzee, J.M. Waiting for the Barbarians. New York: Penguin, 1982.
Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. New York: Norton, 1996.

Schedule

WEEK 1

Monday: Introductions
Who is in this class and why? What will we do in this class? How do we define "monster"?
HW: Read Beowulf (3-34); "The Monster and the Critics" (103-130)

Tuesday: Beowulf I
Who is Beowulf? Who (or what) is Grendel? Are these characters or archetypes? How do the characters, settings, and plot relate to our definitions of monstrosity?
HW: Read Beowulf (34-47)

Wednesday: Beowulf II
How do we fight monsters? (Why) Is the narration of Beowulf confusing? How is the Creature (un)like Grendel?
Viewing: Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954)
HW: Finish Beowulf (47-78)

Thursday: Beowulf III
Can you kill a monster? What's the deal with this dragon? How dated is this text? How (and why) does the film reshape the narrative?
Viewing: Beowulf & Grendel (2001)
HW: Frankenstein Vol. I (7-58); Watch Frankenstein (1931)*

*It's fairly widely available—most video stores will have a copy—but a fall-back is always the LRC in Walter Library (though you, alas, have to watch it there).

WEEK 2
Tuesday: Frankenstein: Vol. I
Who is Frankenstein? Why does he do what he does? How is Frankenstein's beginning different from Beowulf? (How) does the Enlightenment change monstrosity? How does Whale's film revise Shelley's opening moves?
HW: Vol. II (59-101)

Wednesday: Frankenstein : Vol. II
Where is Shelley's sympathy? Where is yours? (And does it shift?) Why does Shelley structure the narrative as she does? What about literacy? How does Bladerunner revise this narrative?
Viewing: Bladerunner (1982)
HW: Vol. III (103- 156) & Johnson, "My Monster/ My Self" (241-251)

Thursday: Frankenstein : Vol. III
Why does Frankenstein end this way? How are the endings of Bladerunner and Frankenstein different or similar? How does this book speak back to the Enlightenment? What's the scariest text we've encountered?
HW: Waiting for the Barbarians : I & II (1-55)

Friday: **MOVIE REVIEW DUE** by **email** (hengen@umn.edu) by **11AM**

WEEK 3
Monday: Waiting for the Barbarians : I & II
Does this book feel more (or less) contemporary? Relevant? Postmodern? Does this change the way we think about monstrosity? How are the barbarians like other characters we've met? To whom can we relate the Magistrate?
Workshop: Claims for final paper
HW: Waiting for the Barbarians: III & IV (56-119)

Tuesday: Waiting for the Barbarians: III & IV

How is this novel structurally different/similar to our other texts? Is the definition of monstrosity more or less fluid here? Is torture monstrous? Can one become a monster?
Viewing: Freaks (1938)
HW: Waiting for the Barbarians: V & VI (120-152)

Wednesday: Waiting for the Barbarians: V & VI
What does this novel's ambiguity do for our understanding? Does Coetzee's ending reflect a changed perspective on monsters?

Thursday: Conclusions
What are monsters today? And how does this relate to what they were in the past? How are the "human" monsters like Grendel? Which text gives the fairest depiction of the monster? Which is most sympathetic?
Workshop: First two pages of final paper
Viewing: Natural Born Killers (1991) (?)

Friday: **Final Paper DUE** at 4PM (by email <hengen@umn.edu> or in 330B Lind).

Assignments & Grades

Attendance & Participation (20%)
With each meeting standing in for a week of class, missing even one meeting will leave you behind. Missing more than one will result in failure. Please let me know in advance if you'll be absent—that way you can find out what you're missing.

Presentation (20%)
Each student will be required to bring in some sort of monstrous text—prose, poetry, still images, film clips, music, news story…anything you can imagine—and give a brief presentation (approx. 10 minutes) to the class connecting this to our ongoing discussion of monstrosity. You'll sign-up for a time.

Review (20%)
This will be another chance for you to engage with some of the themes we will be reading and writing about. Throughout the term, we will watch six movies (five in class; one as homework). From these you can choose one to write a two-to-three page review discussing the film's relationship to our reading and class discussions of monsters.

Paper (40%)
This is a research paper which demonstrates your engagement with the question of monstrosity. All texts—novels, films, and presentations—are fair game, though you must discuss at least one novel. Your job is to deploy your skills in close reading and argument to make a persuasive point about monstrosity. Your paper should be eight pages long, in 12 point font, with one inch margins, and should utilize MLA formatting—including a Works Cited page. I encourage you to focus on no more than two texts. Due Friday June 8 at 4PM by email or in my mailbox.