**ENGLISH 207: INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL STUDIES**

MONSTERS AND MONSTROSITY

**David Kumler** ENGL 207 A

Office: Padelford B5-A Fall Quarter 2020

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“The monster’s body is pure culture.”

*Jeffrey Jerome Cohen*

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| **COURSE OVERVIEW** |

When you hear the word *monster*, what is the first thing you imagine? You may think of Godzilla, a giant reptilian creature capable of destroying cities. Or perhaps you imagine Frankenstein’s monster, a grotesque assemblage of body parts stitched together by a mad scientist. Maybe your first thought is hordes of zombies who, once human like you, now roam the earth searching for brains and infecting the living. You might even imagine real-life serial killers, often described as monsters due to their horrific and seemingly inhuman acts. The fact is, the word *monster* can evoke countless ideas and, when we try to define it, things start to get complicated. Are monsters only imaginary creatures or can real creatures be monsters as well? Can a human be a monster? Do monsters have to be scary or ugly? Are all monsters violent? Does it all just depend on your perspective? Despite the difficulties involved with defining “monster,” it’s nevertheless true that monsters (and stories about them) have been a central part of the human imagination and human culture for thousands of years. If we want to understand our cultures and our histories, looking at monsters is actually a great way to start. We might begin by asking *why* we are so fascinated by monsters. We might consider how and why the monsters we imagine and fear change over time. We might examine the ways that monster stories have fueled and justified atrocities ranging from the witch trials to the Holocaust to the slave trade to Manifest Destiny. What we will begin to see through such examinations is that, as entertaining and fun as monster stories can be, the cultural function of the monster is often something deadly serious.

This course introduces students to the complex and often-contested field of cultural studies—itself something of a monstrous assemblage—and it does so by focusing on what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen famously called “monster culture.” As we will see, the study of monsters and monstrosity reflects many of the concerns, preoccupations, and questions at the heart of cultural studies. While this course does not purport to cover everything that cultural studies is and has been—such a task, after all, would be impossible—it will introduce students to some of the key debates, trajectories, and contributions of cultural studies as an academic discipline. Perhaps most importantly, students will begin to develop a familiarity with both the language of cultural studies and the critical tools it has to offer.

Over the course of the quarter, students will sharpen their analytical, communicative, and argumentative skills through regular writing assignments and weekly discussion groups. Through these assignments and discussions, students will work to understand key cultural studies concepts—like hegemony, ideology, representation, the human, and, of course, culture itself—and to deploy these concepts critically as optics for reading the world around them. Finally, students will reflect on what it means to engage in cultural studies as both an academic discipline and as a form of civic engagement.

**Learning Objectives:** Successful completion of this course means that:

* Students are acquainted with a range of texts useful to understanding the course topic and doing future work in the area.
* Students have an appreciation for and knowledge of literature’s relationship to related areas or disciplines.
* Students are able to contextualize and analyze the materials covered, historically, politically, and culturally.

**Required Materials:** We will be reading the following texts. I have requested that the University Book Store stock these texts. However, you are welcome to purchase these elsewhere, but please make sure to check the ISBN number and to buy the edition listed below so that our page numbers will be consistent. These texts are *required*:

* Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (any edition of this is fine).
* M. R. Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (Orbit books, 2015).
* Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation* (FSG Books, 2014).
* Additional readings will be provided via Canvas.

You will also need the following additional course materials—however, if you’re experiencing difficulty acquiring any of these, please talk to me:

* A computer (or phone) with a webcam for online Zoom meetings.
* Reliable internet access.
* A Dropbox, Google Drive, or similar cloud storage account on which you regularly back up your work.
* Money to rent any films unavailable through UW.

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| **ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING** |

**Discussion Prompts & Discussion Leadership (2 x 10% of final grade):** Twice this quarter, you will each be required to lead (with one other person) your discussion group’s meeting to discuss the week’s readings. This will involve two responsibilities: First, you will be required to **write 2-3 discussion prompts to anchor your discussion** and, second, you will be asked to **lead the group’s meeting and discussion** for the week. You will not be required to do this every week but, rather, in your groups, you will develop your own discussion schedule. Each member must lead at least twice. For more on this, see the **Discussion Leader Guide** page on Canvas.

**Discussion Overview Paper (15% of final grade):** For each discussion group meeting, one member will be responsible for taking detailed notes and writing up **a concise summary of the meeting**. While your summary does not need to cover *everything* your group talked about, you should summarize and explain some of the key moments of insight and inquiry. What ideas did your discussion generate? What questions were raised and how were they answered? What new questions did your discussion generate? Did you answer them? What questions or provocations remain? The purpose of these overview papers is twofold: First, it helps me to see how your conversations are going, what interests you, and what you are learning. Second, these papers will serve as a shared set of notes for your whole group (which is not to say that you can’t or shouldn’t take your own notes). When it comes time write your essays and term paper, these will likely be valuable resources. Each of you will be responsible for writing **one overview paper** over the course of the quarter. For more on this, see the **Discussion Overview Guide** page on Canvas.

**Reflection Essays (3 x 10% of final grade):** Three times this quarter, you will be asked to write a brief “reflection essay” on a topic of your choosing. You might think of these as formalized brainstorming activities to help you prepare for your final term paper. The primary goal of each paper should be to raise, to explain, and to articulate the importance of **one question (or set of questions) that has arisen from your readings and discussions in this course**. While you might posit potential answers to your question, your aim with this paper is not to *answer* your questions so much as to think through them *as* questions. For more on this, see the **Reflection Essays Guide** page on Canvas.

**Final Paper (20% of final grade):** Your final paper requires you to revise and expand one of your reflection essays from earlier in the quarter. Your primary aim is to take up the topic either from a new perspective or with a greater degree of depth than before. This is not so much a research paper as it is an opportunity to return to your thinking from earlier in the quarter and, perhaps, to bring a new perspective to it. For more on this, see the **Final Paper Guide** page on Canvas.

**Participation (15% of final grade):** You are expected to come to your discussion group meetings and conferences prepared to participate. This means, importantly, that you should seek to contribute to the conversation even on days you aren’t leading it. (You might think of it as paying it forward—leading a discussion can cause a bit of anxiety, and it really helps to ease that if the others in your group are engaged, active participants.) I understand that not everyone feels comfortable speaking up in class and, as a result, this class may require you to step outside your comfort zone. However, it is my hope that, by working with a smaller discussion group on a regular basis, you’ll develop a degree of familiarity and comfort with one another, despite the awkwardness of online meetings. That said, if speaking out is something that you truly find difficult or uncomfortable, talk with me and we can strategize some ways to overcome that. Participation also includes watching the weekly lectures (and Canvas provides me with an array of statistics on this, so I will know whether or not you have been watching these). Participation is graded on the following scale:

* 1: Student occasionally comes to discussions but is often mentally checked out or simply does not participate. Student occasionally watches the weekly lectures.
* 2: Student usually comes to discussions prepared, usually pays attention, and usually participates. Student usually watches the weekly lectures.
* 3: Student not only comes to discussions consistently prepared, but also encourages participation *among their peers* by listening closely to others’ comments, asking questions of their peers, and generally contributing to a positive and productive discussion. Student always watches the weekly lectures.

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| **COURSE POLICIES** |

**Attendance:** This course meets virtually and is largely asynchronous. What this means is that *most of the time* you won’t have to “attend” anything. However, you will have **weekly discussion meetings** throughout the quarter, for which attendance is mandatory. You will attend these through Zoom (which has been integrated into Canvas). You will also attend **three group conferences**, during which you and your discussion group will meet with me informally to discuss the course material and any questions you might have. Finally, you will have **weekly lectures** that you are required to watch—these will be recorded, so you’re free to watch them at your own convenience, but you should be sure to watch them *before* you meet with your discussion groups. We will very rarely meet as a full class, simply because the size of this class tends to be too large for productive conversations, particularly when meeting online. For the specific dates of these meetings, refer to the class calendar.

**Missed or Late Work:** While our meetings will be asynchronous, you will have specific times and days that assignments are due. Because this timing is important to the success of the class, you must submit your work on time. **Late work will be counted as missed work.** However, if something comes up, please get in touch with me. I understand that extenuating circumstances will likely happen for some of us, and I’m happy to try and accommodate those as best I can.

**Turning in Work:** Everything for this class will be submitted via Canvas. While many of you will have used Canvas before, there are a couple things I ask that you take note of:

* Any time you submit an assignment on Canvas (or any online form, for that matter), you should **double check to make sure your submission has gone through**. This is your responsibility as a student, not mine. Claiming that you submitted your work and that (for some reason or another) it simply did not go through *does not* constitute an acceptable excuse for late or missing work. If Canvas isn’t working, email me and attach the assignment.
* Any documents that you submit must be saved either as Word or PDF files. **Do not submit Pages files because Canvas cannot process them.**

**Classroom Behavior:** Ultimately, there is only one rule in this class: **Act in ways that will benefit the learning of those around you.** This means that you should be respectful and attentive. You should ask questions. You should challenge your peers’ ideas and arguments, but you should do so in constructive (rather than hostile) ways. You should come to class. You should come to class *on time*. I could go on, but you get the point.

**Academic Integrity**: Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—*but you must clearly acknowledge where these ideas are coming from*. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

**Complaints:** If you have any concerns about the course or your instructor, please see the instructor about these concerns as soon as possible. If you are not comfortable talking with the instructor or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the following Expository Writing Program staff in Padelford A-11: Director Candice Rai, (206) 543-2190 or crai@uw.edu; CIC Director Kimberly Gillis-Bridges, kgb@uw.edu; or CIC Assistant Director Brittney Frantece, britfran@uw.edu. If, after speaking with the Director or Assistant Directors of the EWP, you are still not satisfied with the response you receive, you may contact English Department Chair Brian Reed, (206) 543-2690.

**Changes to Course Policy and Syllabus:** This document issubject to change. Any changes to the syllabus or course policy will be discussed and agreed upon in class. Minor changes to the course calendar are possible (and even likely), but I will never make a formal, sequence-based assignment due *earlier* than initially scheduled.

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| **UNIVERSITY RESOURCES** |

**Writing Centers:** Whether you are working on developing a topic, structuring an argument, or revising a paper, the UW’s writing centers can be a big help. The staff at these writing centers are happy to help you at any stage in the writing process. I highly recommend scheduling a visit. See their web pages for more:

* Odegaard Writing and Research Center: <https://depts.washington.edu/owrc/>
* CLUE Study Center: <http://depts.washington.edu/aspuw/clue/home/>

**Accommodations:** If you need accommodation of any sort, please let me know so that I can work with the UW Disability Resources (DRS) to provide what you require. More information may be found at <http://www.washington.edu/students/drs/>.

**Religious Accommodations:** Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Faculty Syllabus Guidelines and Resources. Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form available at <https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>.

**Counseling Center:** UW Counseling Center workshops include a wide range of issues including study skills, thinking about coming out, international students and culture shock, and much more. Visiting the Counseling Center can have an extremely positive impact on your success and well-being at the University of Washington. Check out available resources and workshops at: <http://depts.washington.edu/counsels/>.

**Q Center:** The University of Washington Q Center builds and facilitates queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirit, trans, intersex, questioning, same-gender-loving, allies) academic and social community through education, advocacy, and support services to achieve a socially-just campus in which all people are valued. For more information, visit <http://depts.washington.edu/qcenter/>.

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| **CLASS CALENDAR** |

In order to avoid too much confusion, the weekly schedule for this course will be roughly the same every week. However, it will be your responsibility to know when *you* are responsible for things like leading a discussion or submitting a discussion overview paper. That said, the general format for this class is as follows. The items in **bold** are things that *everyone* is responsible for *every* week:

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| **MONDAY** | **TUESDAY** | **WEDNESDAY** | **THURSDAY** | **FRIDAY** |
| **Complete readings for the week.**  **Watch lecture video.**  Submit discussion prompts by midnight (if it’s your week to lead). | **Meet with your discussion group for at least one hour of discussion (during class time).** | Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if it’s your week to do this). | Attend conference with instructor during class time (if it’s your week to do this). | Submit reflection paper (if one is due this week). |

A couple notes: [1] This calendar is subject to change. Any changes made will be announced in the weekly lecture video and/or in the announcements section of Canvas. [2] The brackets at the right contain *rough* page counts for each reading to help you plan out your reading time. (I say *rough* because some page counts come from different editions of the text than we will read in class and others are page estimates for online resources that do not actually have pages.) Keep in mind that page lengths will vary—some pieces will use smaller text and smaller spacing (thus more words per page) while other texts are more spaced out and thus shorter than they appear. It’s also worth noting that the fictional texts will probably be quicker, easier reads than the more dense theoretical ones. Just make sure to look ahead and plan your time accordingly.

**Week 1: Course Overview and Syllabus**

Readings (complete by Thursday 10/1):

* Syllabus [6]

F 10/2 (Due Date): Submit completed discussion group schedules by midnight.

**Week 2: Introduction to Cultural Studies**

Readings (complete by Monday 10/5):

* During, “Introduction” [2]
* Hall, “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies” [8]
* Hebdige, “From Culture to Hegemony” [9]
* [Begin reading: Shelley, *Frankenstein* (finish Volume I)] [~100]

M 10/5 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 10/6 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 10/7 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

Th 10/8 (Group Conferences): Group 1 11:30-11:55

Group 2 11:55-12:20

Group 3 12:30-12:55

Group 4 12:55-1:20

**Week 3: Practicing Criticism**

Readings (complete by Monday 10/12):

* Belsey, “Traditional Criticism and Common Sense” [13]
* Belsey, “Criticism and Meaning” [13]
* Barker and Jane, “Key Concepts in Cultural Studies” [5]
* [Continue reading: Shelley, *Frankenstein* (finish Volume II)] [~75]

M 10/12 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 10/13 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 10/14 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

Th 10/15 (Group Conferences) Group 1 11:30-12:20

Group 2 12:30-1:20

**Week 4: Monster Theory and Cultural Studies**

Readings (complete by Monday 10/19):

* Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” [19]
* Finish reading: Shelley, *Frankenstein* [~90]

M 10/19 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 10/20 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 10/21 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

Th 10/22 (GroupConferences): Group 3 11:30-12:20

Group 4 12:30-1:20

F 10/23 (Paper Due): **Submit first Reflection Essay** by midnight

**Week 5: Human Abnormality and Perceptions of Monstrosity**

Readings (complete by Monday 10/26):

* Weinstock, “Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory” [28]
* Foucault, TBA [TBD]
* Browning, *Freaks* (film) [64 min]
* [Begin reading: Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (to chapter 24)] [~120]

M 10/26 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 10/27 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 10/28 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

**Week 6: Doppelgangers, Puppets, and the Uncanny**

Readings (complete by Monday 11/2):

* Freud, “The Uncanny” (excerpt) [8]
* Mori, “The Uncanny Valley” [5]
* Ligotti, *Conspiracy against the Human Race* (excerpts) [3]
* Peel, *Us* (film) [116 min]
* Ligotti, “The Clown Puppet” [12]
* [Continue reading: Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (to chapter 48)] [~120]

M 11/2 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 11/3 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 11/4 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

F 11/16 (Paper Due): **Submit second Reflection Essay** by midnight

**Week 7: Ontological Perversion and the Living Dead**

Readings (complete by Monday 11/9):

* Mariana, “The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombies” [8]
* Warren, *Ontological Terror* (excerpts) [4]
* Finish reading: Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* [~150]

M 11/9 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 11/10 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 11/11 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

Th 11/12 (Group Conferences): Group 1 11:30-12:20

Group 2 12:30-1:20

**Week 8: Monstrous Inversions and the Question of the Human**

Readings (complete by Monday 11/16):

* Belsey, “Addressing the Subject” [7]
* Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus* (excerpts) [3]
* LaValle, *Destroyer* (graphic novel) [160]
* Butler, “Bloodchild” [29]
* [Begin reading: Vandermeer, *Annihilation* (to page 60)] [~60]

M 11/16 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 11/17 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 11/18 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

Th 11/19 (Group Conferences): Group 3 11:30-12:20

Group 4 12:30-1:20

F 11/6 (Paper Due): **Submit third Reflection Essay** by midnight

**Week 9: Witch Lore and the Monstrous Feminine**

Readings (complete by Monday 11/23):

* Federici, “Witch-Hunting and the Fear of the Power of Women” [10]
* Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (excerpt) [4]
* Eggers, *The Witch* (film) [93 min]
* Biller, *The Love Witch* (film) [120 min]
* [Continue reading: Vandermeer, *Annihilation* (to page 120)] [~60]

M 11/23 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 11/24 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 11/25 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

**Week 10: Weird Monstrosity and Cosmic Horror**

Readings (complete by Monday 11/30):

* Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (excerpts) [6]
* Thacker, *Tentacles Longer than Night* (excerpts) [12]
* Lovecraft, “Dagon” [6]
* Finish reading: Vandermeer, *Annihilation*  [~75]

M 11/30 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 12/1 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 12/2 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

**Week 11: Wrap-Up**

Readings (complete by Monday 12/7):

* TBA: My plan is that we’ll vote on the final text(s)—most likely a film or two.

M 12/7 (Discussion Questions): Discussion leaders submit discussion prompts by midnight.

T 12/8 (Discussion Groups): Meet with discussion groups via Zoom.

W 12/9 (Paper Due): Submit discussion overview paper by midnight (if this is your week).

Th 12/10 (Class Meeting): Final class meeting via Zoom at 11:30

**Finals Week**

W 12/16 (Paper Due): **Submit Final Paper** by midnight