ENG 480/ENG 554—Twentieth-Century British Literature

“Twentieth-Century Gothic: Monsters and the Grotesque”

**Syllabus and Policy Statement**

MTWRF 12-2 p.m., Carter Hall 110

**Professor:** Matt Oliver

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**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Required Materials:**

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* by H. G. Wells (Modern Library, 978-0375760969)

*A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess (Norton Critical Edition, 978-0393928099)

*The Fifth Child* by Doris Lessing (Vintage, 978-0679721826)

*Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter (Penguin, 978-0140077032)

*The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh (Harper Perennial, 978-0380813940)

*The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1* by Alan Moore and Kevin O’Neill (America’s Best Comics, 978-1563898587)

Course Reader (provided by the instructor)

Students must come to every class with writing materials and the text we are discussing.

A university e-mail address and active TigerNet account: I will use your e-mail address and the course web page on TigerNet to send you course-related information. You are responsible for anything I send by e-mail as if I said it in class, so check your e-mail.

**Course Goals**

At the end of this semester, successful students will exhibit

familiarity with the major literary characteristics and historical contexts of British literature since 1900,

well-developed skills in close reading and critical thinking, and the oral and written expression of those ideas,

awareness of the impact of representation on the perception of and everyday lives of various cultural, racial, ethnic, national, and gender groups,

introductory to intermediate level skills in literary research, specifically developing one’s own arguments, finding related research, reading and comprehending literary theory and analysis, and incorporating that research into one’s own writing, and

the ability to write with precision, correct grammar, and academic integrity while making complex arguments.

**Definitions**

**Gothic:** In general, “Gothic” when applied to the arts means ornamented, convoluted, and mysterious rather than simple, unified, and direct. More specifically, the Gothic novel is “a novel in which magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics. Horror abounds: one might expect a suit of armor suddenly to come to life among ghosts, clanking chains, and charnel houses. […] The term is today often applied to works […] that lack the Gothic setting or the medieval atmosphere but that attempt to create the same atmosphere of brooding and unknown terror” (Harmon and Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*). The critical assumption is often that such fantastic fictions mask deeper anxieties and desires that we cannot face directly.

**Monster:** “In eighteenth-century aesthetic and moral criticism the word ‘monster’ signified ugliness, irrationality, and unnaturalness. The antithesis of neo-classical values of harmonious and unified composition, a monster was deformed, irregular and disproportionate […] a composite term for a range of negative and anti-social features” (*The Handbook of the Gothic*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts).

**Grotesque:** The grotesque is a representational practice that creates its effect by invoking distinctions between different categories of thought. By definition, something appears grotesque if it contains an apparently unnatural mixture of elements, or as Geoffrey Harpham puts it, the grotesque causes “the perception that something is illegitimately *in* something else.” The grotesque mixes domains typically thought of as separate, such as human and animal or man and woman, challenging the ability of language to form stable categories but at the same time reinforcing the need for categories by inducing a feeling of repulsion for the mixed object.

**Introduction to the Course**

This course examines the psychological and social uses for representing monsters or monstrous people in twentieth-century British literature. While monstrous figures often arise from primal fears and existential dilemmas, just as frequently monsters may register social anxieties about differences in race, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation. Although one might assume that such representations would most commonly be a way of demonizing and marginalizing groups of outsiders, just as frequently the monster can be a figure which subverts authority and dominant categories while asserting the freedom and distinctiveness of the outsider.

In addition to representations of literal monsters, we will examine characters and events labeled as “monstrous” (either by the text itself or by the society that text depicts), distortion and exaggeration of characters or writing style, the grotesque and horrific, and the blurring or erasure of conventional category distinctions from H. G. Wells to Amitav Ghosh. A central theme throughout the course will be changing attitudes towards the British Empire across the twentieth century, from the anxiety that the empire lays “us” open to foreign monstrosities to the fear that “we” were the actual monsters or even that only by becoming monsters can we save ourselves from damaging conformity. Some related themes we will consider are the impact of war and violence in the twentieth century; the relationship between memory, trauma, and art; the construction and critique of national (and other group) identities; law enforcement and “deviant” behavior; anxieties surrounding new technologies; cultural constructions of gender and family; and the impact of globalization and migration.

**Classroom Procedure**

Be Prepared: Before every class, you must do the following:

1. Read the assigned text for the following class;
2. Choose a passage (preferably ½ to 1 full page of prose, although it can be longer) that represents an important thematic idea of the text or a particularly well-written example of style—be prepared to discuss your passage and explain how the use of language in this passage fits the author’s thematic ideas;
3. Write some notes about the key details of this passage, your argument about it, etc.—this will not be collected UNLESS STUDENTS ARE REGULARLY COMING TO CLASS UNPREPARED, but I will check to see that you have it.

Quizzes: I do not expect to give quizzes over the reading or material covered in class UNLESS STUDENTS ARE REGULARLY COMING TO CLASS UNPREPARED.

Participation: This will be a VERY small class. I often use small group discussions in my classes as a way of getting the instructor out of the way so students can develop ideas on their own. However, because of the size of this class, I may designate specific times when I am silent or choose specific students to lead discussion for a few minutes. Non-participation in these discussions will be noted and will count against your participation grade.

**Coursework**

Exams: There will be two exams, a take-home midterm and a take-home final. These exams will ask you to close read passages and make arguments linking multiple texts.

Abstract and Analysis Papers: Two times this semester you will choose one of the texts we are reading for a little extra research. First, you will look for scholarly journal articles discussing that text. Start by going to JSTOR and then look elsewhere. After finding and reading an article, write a 1-1½ page abstract (a concise summary of the article’s arguments and evidence with no reference to your arguments or opinions). Then write a 2½-3 page analysis of the article’s argument. Your paper should include your own thesis in response to the article’s central argument plus additional research to further support or disagree with the article.

Research Paper (Graduate): Graduate students will be required to write a 15-page research paper analyzing one of the texts on the syllabus. This paper may use the source from one of the abstract and analysis papers if you choose. Several preliminary steps, including at least one conference with the instructor, will also be required.

Theory Presentation/Discussion (Graduate): Graduate students will be required to choose a theoretical approach (such as psychoanalysis or post-colonial criticism), do some additional readings on this approach throughout the semester, and lead one class discussion applying the questions raised by this theoretical approach to one of the texts we are reading this semester. The methodology, additional readings, and presentation date will be arranged at a meeting with the professor during the first week of the semester.

**Attendance**

Regular attendance is required for this course. It is particularly important for summer terms because each class period represents a much larger percentage of the material we will cover. Furthermore, because our class is so small, your absence will take away greatly from the quality of the class for everyone involved.

At 3 absences (the equivalent of 6 hours in class, or two weeks of classes in a regular semester), you will receive a warning. At 6 absences (the equivalent of 12 hours in class, or four weeks of classes in a regular semester), you will fail the course.

If you know you will be missing a class, contact me ahead of time, make arrangements to turn in any missed work (if possible), and provide documentation of the reason for the absence if I ask for it. Please bear in mind, though, that I am not required to offer the opportunity to make up more than three absences, even if you miss more classes.

If you will be missing classes due to prescheduled university activities, please give me a schedule within the first two weeks of class. These will still count as absences, but I will need to discuss with you any potential difficulties**.**

Excessive tardiness (defined as missing a substantial portion of the class) may be converted into absences at my discretion.

If you have any questions, please ask me as soon as possible. It is easier for me to be flexible if you inform me ahead of time.

**Late Work**

You are required to turn in all work on its due date. Credit for class discussion or in-class writing is not possible after the class meeting because the classroom conditions can’t be duplicated. I typically do not grant extensions for major papers, except in cases of emergency. I will not grant extensions for extra research or additional work on the paper—everyone in the class has the same amount of time to do the work. Extensions based on exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis on the discretion of the instructor. **If an extension is not granted, I may choose to refuse late work, or to accept it with a lowered grade (typically a half-letter grade for the first day it’s late and 2 points for each day thereafter), again on a case-by-case basis.**

PLEASE NOTE: Contacting me as soon as possible shows good faith on your part. I am much more likely to work with you on deadlines if you approach me early. Having evidence that you are working on the paper (drafts, research, etc.) also shows me your good faith.

AND NOTE ALSO: **Technology failure is not an excuse for a late paper.** You are responsible for providing backup or alternative printers if your computer fails.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the use, citation, or paraphrase of someone else's **words or ideas** without attribution. Anytime you use information or words from a source, you must clearly tell your reader that those words or ideas came from another source. It is considered plagiarism regardless of how much of the paper is taken from a source (in other words, both a paper that is entirely copied word-for-word and a paper in which one paragraph uses the unique ideas from a source are plagiarized if neither attributes the information to its source). Please note that plagiarism may occur on *any* draft presented to your instructor or peers, not just the final draft. You are responsible for the content of any work with your name on it, regardless of who prepared it or turned it in for you.

**Course Calendar**

(dates or readings subject to change)

*Week 1*

Monday, 6/4 Course Introduction: Yeats poetry (in-class reading)

Tuesday, 6/5 Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Chapter 1-14

Wednesday, 6/6 Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Chapter 15-22

Thursday, 6/7 Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, Part 1

Friday, 6/8 Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, Part 2

*Week 2*

Monday, 6/11 Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, Part 3

Tuesday, 6/12 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, Part 1

Wednesday, 6/13 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, Part 2 Chapter 1-7

World War I Poetry (in-class reading)

Thursday, 6/14 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, Part 2 Chapter 8- Part 3 Chapter 3

Friday, 6/15 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, Part 3 Chapter 4-10 and Envoi

ABSTRACT AND ANALYSIS ESSAY #1 DUE

*Week 3*

Monday, 6/18 Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, pages 3-66

Tuesday, 6/19 Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, pages 66-133

Wednesday, 6/20 Pinter, *The Birthday Party* (reader)

Seamus Heaney (in-class reading)

Thursday, 6/21 Alan Moore, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*

Friday, 6/22 Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Chapter 1-11

*Week 4*

Monday, 6/25 Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Chapter 12-21

Tuesday, 6/26 Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Chapter 22-35

British Pop Music: Iron Maiden (in-class discussion)

Wednesday, 6/27 Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Chapter 36-45

Thursday, 6/28 Mieville, “The Tain” (reader)

Friday, 6/29 TBA—TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM DUE

ABSTRACT AND ANALYSIS ESSAY #2 DUE

*Bibliography*

In addition to the many books and articles available through our library about the specific writers covered in this course, the following significant works of literary theory are recommended (available through our library and the EbscoHost e-book database or through my personal library if otherwise unavailable):

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Ed. New York: Verso, 1991.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.

Baucom, Ian. *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.*Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*

Bhabha, Homi, ed. *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge, 1990

Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness : British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Esty, Jed. *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004.

Gervais, David. *Literary Englands: Versions of ‘Englishness’ in Modern Writing.* Cambridge UP, 1993.

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholy*. New York: Columbia UP, 2005.

Hastings, Adrian. *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985*. London: Collins, 1986.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780.* Cambridge UP, 1991

Lazarus, Neil. *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World.* Cambridge UP, 1999.

McLaughlin, Joseph. *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2000.

Nairn, Tom. *The Break-up of Britain.* NLB, 1977.

Richards, Thomas. *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. New York: Verso, 1993.

Rushdie, Salman. “The New Empire within Britain.” *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books, 1991. 129-138.

Said, Edward. *The Edward Said Reader*. New York: Vintage, 2000.

Sinfield, Alan. *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.

Spiering, M. *Englishness: Foreigners and Images of National Identity in Postwar Literature.* Rodopi, 1992.