Description and Course Aims
Werewolves, dragons, cannibals, witches, sea monsters, faeries, moral monstrosity, madness, the uncanny and the grotesque—the monstrous is frightening, fury-filled, unknowable, and seductive. Monsters inhabit the literary imagination and the historic landscape. Monsters live on the margins of society; they are culturally and ideologically fraught; they exhibit sexual, racial, religious, and physical difference. In this course, we shall examine the depiction and meaning of the monster in literature, manuscript images, and maps from England and Wales from about 650CE to 1650CE.

Major questions we’ll be seeking to address include:
• What is it that monsters reveal about the societies that create and fear them?
• From where do monsters emerge? What spaces do they occupy? In what forms do they live among us?
• What functions do monsters serve? In what ways do they permit their communities to exercise control, reform society, and reframe history?

Through this course, students will learn to summarize, research, and discuss complex literary and illustrative texts through close reading, critical analysis, and clear exposition. Lectures will include space for discussion and workshop-style analysis, and will always seek to place the literary works in their social and historical contexts. Sections will focus in detail on textual explication.

Schedule

Week 1 Where the Wild Things Are
Introduction: St Augustine, Liber Monstrorum
Marvels of the East
Mappae Mundi

Week 2 Describing the Indescribable
Beowulf

Week 3 Persecution and Punishment
Judith and St Margaret
Wife’s Lament, Wulf and Eadwacer

Week 4 Dread and Decay
The Grave and Medieval Lyrics
Orienting the Medieval: Reading Early Maps

Week 5 Celtic Magic and Marvels
Gerald of Wales, Topography of Ireland; Marie de France, Bisclavret
Sir Orfeo
Week 6 Fabulous Folk
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
Chaucer’s General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales

Week 7 Monstrous Women
Extracts from the Book of Margery Kempe
Extracts from Malory’s Morte DArthur

Week 8 The Aberrant
Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale
Marlowe, Tamburlaine

Week 9 Deals with the Devil
William Shakespeare Macbeth
William Shakespeare’s The Tempest

Week 10 Centers and Margins
Mapping the Monstrous
Class Projects

By the end of the module, students will be able to:
• interpret, contextualize and comment on early literatures with sensitivity and nuance
• locate and evaluate source materials in relation to relevant social, historical and cultural frameworks
• critically evaluate the role and significance of the monstrous within early texts and images.

Course Textbooks
You’ll be supplied with a course textbook for the earlier materials, which will be supplemented with additional texts as online PDFs as the quarter unfolds.

You will need to buy:
J. S. Cunningham, ed., Tamburlaine the Great (Manchester University Press, 1999)

Assessment: The weekly workload includes prescribed reading of texts and supplementary background materials in the textbooks and on Canvas. All reading must be completed with care for report, reflection and discussion in lecture and in section.

Grades: Final grades are determined by the following formula: Participation Portfolio comprised of weekly short comprehension exercises and commentaries, and in-class discussions 40%; midterm essay, 30%; final project, 30%.