

## The Monstrous in Renaissance Literature

### Course Description

The social, economic, religious, and political instability of the Renaissance informed some of the most brilliantly anxious literature in the history of England. As some authors strained to construct coherent identities, hierarchies, and worldviews, others challenged received notions about what is sacred, natural, or true. In the midst of such tensions, the writers we will discuss produced gorgeous, funny, complicated, disturbing, and infinitely interesting works of poetry, prose, and drama.

In this course, we will examine how cultural disruptions in the early modern period are manifested in gendered constructions of the monstrous. Considering the dislocation of Renaissance bodies of knowledge (scientific, legal, geographic, economic, etc.), we will investigate how resulting anxieties become displaced onto the monstrous body. Our focus will be on the conjunction of violence, gender, and the unknown. We will study the relation of the monstrous to the feminine, to race, and to nationalism; the historical relation of the monstrous to violence and social control; and the role of literature in shaping those relations.

One of our goals will be to examine not only how early modern texts-- and the culture in which they were embedded-- constructed meaning, but also why it is important for us to undertake such an examination. We will consider how reading Renaissance literature enables us to understand more fully our own constructed selves.

**Class 1:** Jeffrey Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"; Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (chapter 1); Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex"; Joseph Swetnam, "The Araignment of lewde, idle, forward, and unconstant women..."; "Hic Mulier/ Haec Vir"

**Class 2:** Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinities in Early Modern England* (chapter 5); Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (chapters 1 and 2); William Shakespeare, *Othello*

**Class 3:** Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman & Scattered Rhyme"; Sir Philip Sidney, "Like some weak lords," "Fair eyes, sweet lips, dear heart"; Robert Herrick, "Delight in Disorder," "The Vine"; Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress"; Sir John Suckling, "Against Fruition: fie upon hearts"; John Donne, "The Flea"; Aphra Behn, "The Disappointment"; Jonathan Swift, "The Lady's Dressing Room"; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "The Reasons that Induced Dr. S. to Write a Poem Called The Lady's Dressing Room"

**Class 4:** ); Kathryn Schwarz, "Missing the Breast: Desire, Disease, and the Singular Effect of Amazons"; Speeches of Queen Elizabeth I; Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book III*; (John Donne's sermon, "Death's Duel")