



Spring 2020 Honors Seminar

Monsters

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THEA_UT 801.001 – 4 Credits

Tuesdays 2:00-4:45

Monsters loom large in the global imagination as figures of alterity. Whether they are terrifying or merely misunderstood, grotesque or unexpectedly alluring, monsters stand at the limit of cultural life. In almost every historical period, everywhere around the world, ideas of monstrosity arise in moments of fracture and catastrophe to catalogue the fears that people have over who they are and what they might become. This has social and political implications, of course, as the concept of monstrosity inevitably begins to organize exclusionary and phobic discourses of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, class, size and ability, demarcating – often violently – who counts as human and who does not. At the same time, monsters are frequently endowed with otherworldly power, and the fear and reverence with which they are greeted mark the monstrous out as a refuge for those who understand themselves to be different or unwelcome.

In this seminar, we will explore monstrosity in theatre and performance across cultures and time periods, from *Beowulf* and the *Ramayana* to *King Kong* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. We will discuss the ways in which theatrical framings of monstrosity draw its entanglement with politics, history, religion, ecology, moral philosophy and so on into greater relief. Students will have broad latitude to engage critically and creatively with the material, drawing their own connections to issues of political, theoretical and artistic concern.