ENGL 2120
British Literature Survey: “Monsters and Martyrs”

Required Texts:
Please note: course content includes adult language and situations.

McDonagh, Martin. The Pillowman. Dramatist’s Play Service, 0822221004
Walpole, Horace. The Castle of Otranto. Penguin, 0140437673

E-text, Book II of Paradise Lost at
E-text, “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” at
http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/268.html
E-text, Christabel at
http://etext.virginia.edu/stc/Coleridge/poems/Christabel.html

PDF and Word versions of texts posted at the WebCT/CourseDen site for this course.

It is fine if you get other editions of these texts, though I would like you to show me your edition before you commit to reading it.

Course Description:
As there is no real way to survey more than a thousand years of British literature in fifteen weeks, what we’re going to do instead is take a thematic approach to the corpus—in this case one that looks at what monsters (and martyrs) in many different periods of the long history of British literature. In the course of the semester, you will be exposed to most of the canonical figures and many noncanonical ones, on your way to thinking about, discussing, and coming to some conclusions about what Britons dreamt up to scare themselves and others with. I have designed the course to foster critical thinking through the close analysis of literature; to bolster memory skills; to develop your ability to understand literature, particularly poetry; to come to some grasp of British political history and culture, which is fundamental to a comprehension of our own; to give you space and opportunity to have complex and interesting discussions, both out loud and on paper, about human responses to, and the creation of, threatening ideas, people, events, and the like—that you might find useful in informing your other reading, as well as enriching to your lives outside the classroom.

Course Goals Set by the Department
• Students will develop the ability to recognize and identify significant achievements in British literature.
• Students will understand the relevant social, historical, and aesthetic contexts of these literary works.
• Students will appreciate the implications of theoretical and critical approaches to such literature.
• Students will develop enhanced cultural awareness and analytical skills.
• Students will demonstrate their command of academic English and of the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.

Assignments and Grades

Work done for other classes will not count in this one. Generally speaking I offer no extra credit.

Tests: Format is short answer and identification on the first day and in-class essay on the second day.

Papers: In addition to the essays you write as part of your tests, you will write one short paper as part of your presentation grade, and one longer paper (roughly ten pages) at the end of the course. You must use current MLA style citations and include a works cited page for every out of class essay you turn in.

Class participation: based on attendance and tardiness, preparation, willingness to talk, general attitude about the class and the work.

Presentations: You are required to do a single, ten-minute presentation on a matter of cultural, literary, and/or historical importance to Britain or its literature. After drop/add, I’ll pass out assignment sheets, a list of terms to choose from, and a sign-up sheet. These should be fun.

Reading Quizzes: You must take several reading quizzes during the semester. These will be available on WebCT/CourseDen starting next week, and are objective, content-based evaluations. Usually, quizzes are open for you to take until one class period before we discuss the text. You will not be allowed to take quizzes after they have been closed and will receive a zero on any you do not take on time. WebCT/CourseDen can go down periodically, so don’t procrastinate on these. You may use your texts to do the quizzes, though probably, if you’ve read, you won’t need to. Questions are randomized, so you won’t get the same test as anyone else in the class. You will have twenty minutes to take each quiz. This is the only reminder you will have that you are required to take reading quizzes periodically.

Note on the work load: It is very unwise to take this course this semester if you are carrying an overload, working a job at which you need to spend more than twenty hours a week, or have a lot of commitments in other areas that take up a great deal of your time. Since ENG2120 is offered very often, if you think you will not have time for the class, take it later. I say this very seriously; I know from experience with other students that if you can commit to the class, you will find it one of the most rewarding ones you’ll ever take, and that if you can’t, you will be miserable. If
you have trouble reading, or don’t like to read, and you want to stay in this class, you’ll have to work very very hard, and will want to visit my office early in the semester (and often thereafter). Please see me if you think you need help writing essays, too.

**Note on theoretical approaches, the intentional fallacy, and how you’ll probably feel like you’re reading gibberish until after class:** Theoretically speaking, my initial approaches to all texts will be fundamentally New Critical. This will normally, and normally quickly, be followed by approaches that are suggested by, but not limited to, those your comments elicit—including psychoanalytical, mythographic, new or old historical, feminist, postcolonial, and deconstructive. My job is to take a text apart in as many ways possible to show you how it works, what it’s talking about, and why you should care.

I am thoroughly uninterested, however, in two things: author biography, which unless we do years of research is irrelevant to the text, and authorial intent. I can’t know what an author meant, and neither can you, and in fact if a text is worth its salt, it’s bigger and more interesting than anything an author meant when s/he sat down to write. We use texts, in this class and everywhere, partly to understand history and culture, but mostly to understand our own minds and the ideas they generate. I don’t want any line of questioning shut down because an author may or may not have intended us to ask those questions.

I remember distinctly taking this course when I was a sophomore in college and trying for the first time to read this material. I felt like I was just passing my eyes over the text and when I got to class I was very frustrated because I had missed so much. I felt completely stupid. Everyone, even students who see stuff you don’t, feels this way. You may too. Think of it like this: if you got everything the first time you read the text, what would you need to come to class for—what would you need the class for at all?

**Grading Scale**

I use a standard, 10-point grading scale. Your assignments are weighted towards your final grade as follows:

- Daily grade: 10%
- Presentation grade: 10%
- Reading Quizzes: 10%
- Test One: 15%
- Test Two: 20%
- Test Three: 20%
- Paper: 15%

*I don’t curve grades or drop low grades*