

## English 120: Literary Monstrosities

Dr. Jennifer Phegley  
Fall 2017 T 2:30-3:45 and Online  
Blended EUREka Course



**Instructor Contact Information:** Contact me via Virtual Office on our Discussion Board, email at [phegleyj@umkc.edu](mailto:phegleyj@umkc.edu), or phone at 235-5973. I will typically respond to your questions within 24-48 hours. I can also meet with you in person during my office hours in 106 CH on Tuesdays from 1:00-2:30 and 4:00-5:30. Please make an appointment in advance.

### **Course Catalog Description:**

This course explores representations of monsters in literature. Students are introduced to different ways of thinking about monstrosities from a range of cultural and historical perspectives, as well as through a variety of materials in order to approach this question from an interdisciplinary perspective. **Credits: 3 Co-requisites: DISC 100.**

**Course Overview:** This course will introduce you to the “penny dreadful,” one of the most popular genres of fiction in nineteenth-century England. These lurid tales of crime, detection, adventure, and the supernatural captivated a wide range of readers from the 1830s to the 1890s, but were particularly aimed at the working- and lower-middle classes. Penny dreadfuls were printed in pamphlet form or published in magazines alongside woodcut illustrations of intriguing scenes that drew the attention of window shoppers and those passing by street-side bookstalls. Penny dreadfuls were popular not just because they were exciting, but also because they were cheap. In fact, the genre was the first mass-market publishing phenomenon noted for its ability to reach what author Wilkie Collins referred to as “the unknown public.”

John Logan created and wrote the Showtime television series *Penny Dreadful*, set in 1891 London, with the goal of examining the parallels between the rapidly modernizing Victorian era and our current internet age: “People then were grappling with a large question: ‘the modern age is coming, where do we fit in?’ . . . I think we’re grappling with exactly the same things now. I look at social media and think: this is a world that’s going to change human behaviour in primal ways. Have we really considered the moral and humane consequences?”<sup>1</sup> To explore these questions, Logan weaves together the stories of famous nineteenth-century “monsters” from the fiction of Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Oscar Wilde with original characters who appear to be “normal” but embody something that might be considered monstrous by society.

Remarkably, the novels that form the basis of Logan’s series are not penny dreadfuls, but higher literary productions that appealed to middle- and upper-class audiences. We will examine how and why these famous novels serve as the backbone of the television show while also conducting research into the vast field of actual penny dreadfuls in an effort to more precisely define the genre. We will strive to make meaningful connections between the Victorian era and the present day as we uncover the mysteries of this forgotten literary form. Your research projects will be aimed at uncovering specimens of the genre, exploring their publication histories, researching their authors and readers, and formulating your own theories about how real penny dreadfuls may reinforce or complicate Logan’s notion of the genre.

This is a Blended course: it is partially face-to-face and partially asynchronous online. This means that we will meet in person every Tuesday and online via our course blog on Thursdays and Fridays. Students will be expected to attend and engage in both face-to-face and online sessions. All written work will be submitted via the Blackboard blog.

**EUREka Designation:** Our course is designated as a EUREka (Experiences in Undergraduate Research) course. EUREka courses offer students opportunities to get involved in research projects with faculty mentors and to share the results of their research with audiences beyond the classroom. Such undergraduate research experiences are designated as “high impact” practices because successful college alumni often point to such opportunities as the most significant experiences of their undergraduate careers. We’ll talk more about this exciting dimension of our course in class.

**Undergraduate Research@UMKC:** While formal learning opportunities in classrooms and assignments are essential to your education as college students, my hope is that you’ll be able to participate in undergraduate research at UMKC beyond our EUREka class. Through summer grants (SUROP), grants during the academic year (SEARCH), & other programs, you can develop relationships with faculty mentors, learn research methods, make an original contribution to knowledge, and disseminate your important ideas to larger audiences. Due dates for various undergraduate research opportunities are on the course calendar, and you can find out more about undergraduate research at UMKC at <http://www.umkc.edu/searchsite/>.

**Required Texts:**

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818), Broadview Press  
G.W.M. Reynolds, *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf* (1846), Wordsworth Editions  
Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Broadview Press  
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Broadview Press  
Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897), Broadview Press

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<sup>1</sup> Gritten, David. “Penny Dreadful: A Journey into the Victorian Supernatural from the Write of Bond.” *The Daily Telegraph* (19 January 2017). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10804419/Penny-Dreadful-a-journey-into-the-Victorian-supernatural-from-the-writer-of-Bond.html>

John Logan and Sam Mendes, "Penny Dreadful," Showtime/Sky Atlantic, Seasons 1-3 (2014-2016). Available on Amazon as a boxed DVD set for \$25 or via streaming subscriptions through Netflix or Showtime. You can also view it with the Showtime add on from Amazon or Hulu.

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Throughout the semester, you will:

- Demonstrate your ability to read closely and think critically about literature and other media;
- Analyze the language, themes, characters, and forms of literature and other media;
- Assess the importance of social context in understanding literary and media culture;
- Define the genre of the penny dreadful and compare it with gothic, sensational, and detective fiction;
- Create a record of your own reading and viewing experiences via the course blog;
- Craft coherent arguments about the penny dreadful supported by evidence from the assigned texts;
- Conduct original research that identifies and explicates a forgotten example of the penny dreadful and that builds a publication, authorship, and/or readership history of your chosen text; and
- Produce a public research blog that contributes to our understanding of the genre of the penny dreadful and its relevance to our current media culture.

### **Course Requirements:**

**Daily Quizzes (10%):** During the semester you will take ten quizzes aimed at encouraging you to be more productive participants in class discussions by keeping up with your reading and viewing assignments. Each quiz is worth ten points and will be given at the beginning of class.

**In-Class Participation (5%):** Your daily attendance and active and informed participation are essential to this course especially since we only meet in person once a week. Participation also includes required research mentoring meetings. If you have more than 3 unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered by half a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence. Absences that are the result of a documented illness, the illness of an immediate family member for whom you are required to care, the death of an immediate family member, the observance of a religious holiday, or the representation of UMKC in an official capacity will be excused. You should notify me of excused absences and make arrangements to make up work in advance, where possible.

**Blog (50%):** Each of you will write four blog entries during the semester. These Blackboard blogs will provide a record of your reading of the assigned novels, your viewing of the *Penny Dreadful* television series, and your research into the genre of the penny dreadful. You will be assigned to Group A, B, or C for due dates. Every week, each student must respond to at least two peer blogs, constituting a minimum of 20 total responses.

Your four 250-500-word blog entries, due at 11pm on Thursdays, will be graded weekly and will each account for 10% of your grade. Blog responses should be 50-100 words and are due at 11pm on Fridays. Responses will be graded at the end of the semester and will account for 10% of your grade. Late blogs and responses are not accepted as they are part of an interactive dialogue that must happen within a specific time frame. However, you will have the opportunity to make up one missed blog, replace one low blog grad blog, or add two blog responses to your final tally on Bonus Blog day at the end of the semester.

In blogs 1, 2, and 4 you will write about the week's assigned novel in relation to the television series. The topics of the blogs will be determined by your own interests and insights, but each one should have a specific focus that enlightens us about the nature of the penny dreadful. You should set forth a specific argument backed by evidence from the reading/viewing and/or invite conversation by posing questions derived from your analysis of the verbal and visual texts. Here are a few ideas:

- Analyze a particular character, theme, plot point, or narrative or visual technique. Explain why you've chosen it and what it tells us about the penny dreadful as a form, then and now.

- Explore the relationship between a specific passage in the novel and a scene in the series. How does the treatment of the subject differ in each era and form? In what ways are the representations part of a coherent whole?
- Choose a selection from the appendix of one of our Broadview novels, which are intended to enlighten us about important social issues in the Victorian period. They might be historical documents, magazine articles, book reviews, letters, etc. Apply what you've learned from one of these texts to your reading/viewing experience.

Blog 3 is a research report about the penny dreadful you've identified for further study. You should explain its publication history and authorship (if known) as well as its major plot(s), characters, and themes. Given the length of some penny dreadfuls, you may want to focus on one subplot or set of characters or on the first few chapters or installments. Draw some conclusions about the significance of your chosen work as an example of the genre. While you are unlikely to find many scholarly articles about these obscure texts, you should make an effort to find background materials that help you place it in its historical and cultural context. Cite your sources in MLA style (see [Purdue Owl](#) for guidelines).

Blogs will be assessed using the following rubric:

	Exemplary/A	Good/B	Satisfactory/C	Unsatisfactory/D-F
Clarity and Concision				
Distinct and Engaging Voice				
Incorporation of Evidence from Reading/Viewing				
Compelling Argument or Thoughtful Inquiry				
Critical Framework or Cultural Context				
Stimulation of Dialogue with Peers				

**Final Blog (35%):**

Drawing on your work throughout the semester, you will write a final blog entry of 750-1,000 words that contributes to our understanding of the penny dreadful. You should use your original research into the penny dreadful and your reading and writing throughout the semester to discuss the genre in the past and/or the present. This blog is intended to be shared with the public online via the UMKC English Blog should you agree to do so. You are also encouraged to develop an oral presentation of your work for the English Undergraduate Council Symposium in the spring or to create a poster presentation for the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Each Final Blog should present a thoughtful and compelling argument set forth in an engaging manner. It should provide:

1. Close readings of relevant texts.
2. Appropriate background or historical context.
3. Acknowledgement of relevant scholarly conversations.
4. A clear purpose that illuminates something new or interesting about the genre of the penny dreadful.

You are encouraged to revise and expand upon a previous blog entry, but you will be expected to conduct additional research that will substantially improve your understanding of the subject and allow you to reach new conclusions about the penny dreadful in the nineteenth century and beyond.

The Final Blog will be built in stages as follows:

- **Proposal (5%)** Provide a 1-paragraph description of your topic and the questions you seek to answer.
- **Annotated Bibliography and Image List (5%).** List and briefly annotated at least 3 primary and/or secondary sources using MLA Style. Summarize the sources and demonstrate their relevance to your topic. Likewise, compile a list of 2-3 images that you could use to enhance your blog. I recommend using one of the following resources to locate relevant images:
  - a. [Wikimedia Commons](#)
  - b. [The British Library Commons](#)
  - c. [The Harry Ransom Center Digital Collections](#)
  - d. Or read this article from [The Atlantic](#) about many new open source image databases
- 2. **Rough Draft (5%).** You will share a draft with the class online.
- 3. **Peer Response (5%).** You will respond to a subset of drafts following the peer response guidelines.
- 4. **Final Blog (15%).**

*\*Please note that course assignments and due dates are subject to change.*

<b>Week One:</b> T 8/22	<b>What is a Penny Dreadful?</b> <b>The Television Series, The Gothic Classic, and The Victorian Serial</b>
R 8/24	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> Vol. 1 (47-115)
<b>Week Two:</b> T 8/29	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> Vol. 2 (117-174) <b>Quiz 1</b>
R 8/31	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 1, Episodes 1-2 <b>Group A, Blog 1</b>
<b>Week Three:</b> T 9/5	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> Vol. 3 (175-244) <b>Quiz 2</b>
R 9/7	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 1, Episodes 3-4 <b>Group B, Blog 1</b>
<b>Week Four:</b> T 9/12	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> Preface-Ch. 9 (41-151) <b>Quiz 3</b>
R 9/14	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 1, Episodes 5-6 <b>Group C, Blog 1</b>
<b>Week Five:</b> T 9/19	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> Ch. 10-20 (152-251) <b>Quiz 4</b>

R 9/21	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 1, Episodes 7-8 <b>Group A, Blog 2</b>
<b>Week Six:</b> T 9/26	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 2, Episodes 1-3 <b>No Blogs</b>  <b>Library Meeting</b> Students will identify and locate a forgotten penny dreadful that they will write about for the class. Resources include Periodicals such as the <i>The London Journal</i> , <i>Bow Bells</i> , <i>Reynolds's Miscellany</i> , and <i>The Family Herald</i> in our library's British Periodicals Database. The <i>Price One Penny Database</i> is also a good starting place for finding the titles of many penny dreadfuls serialized in periodicals or published in cheap paperback editions <a href="http://www.priceonepenny.info/database/index.php">http://www.priceonepenny.info/database/index.php</a>
R 9/28	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 2, Episodes 4-6 <b>No Blogs</b>
<b>Week Seven:</b> T 10/3	G.W.M. Reynolds's <i>Wagner the Wehr-Wolf</i> Ch. 1-15 (3-77) <b>Quiz 5</b>
R 10/5	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 2, Episodes 7-8 <b>Group B, Blog 2</b>
<b>Week Eight:</b> T 10/10	G.W.M. Reynolds's <i>Wagner the Wehr-Wolf</i> Ch. 39-43 (198-228); Ch. 73-76 (424-464) <b>Quiz 6</b>
R 10/12	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 2, Episodes 9-10 <b>Group C, Blog 2</b>
<b>Week Nine:</b> T 10/17	<b>Group A Research Mentoring Meeting</b>
R 10/19	<b>Group B Research Mentoring Meeting</b>
<b>Week Ten:</b> T 10/24	<b>Group C Research Mentoring Meeting</b>

R 10/26	<b>Groups A, B &amp; C, Blog 3 (Research Reports)</b>
<b>Week Eleven:</b> T 10/31	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> Dedication-Ch. 10 (29-168) <b>Quiz 7</b>
R 11/2	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 3, Episodes 1-2 <b>Group A, Blog 4</b>
<b>Week Twelve:</b> T 11/7	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> Ch.11-19 (169-299) <b>Quiz 8</b>
R 11/9	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 3, Episodes 3-4 <b>Group B, Blog 4</b>
<b>Week Thirteen:</b> T 11/14	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> Ch. 20-27 and Note (300-419) <b>Quiz 9</b>
R 11/16	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 3, Episodes 5-6 <b>Group C, Blog 4</b>
<b>Week Fourteen:</b> T 11/21-R 11/23	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>
<b>Week Fifteen:</b> T 11/28	R. L. Stevenson, <i>The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (31-93) <b>Quiz 10</b> <b>Individual Mentoring Meetings</b>
R 11/30	<i>Penny Dreadful</i> Season 3, Episodes 7-9 <b>Blog Bonus Day</b> <b>Individual Mentoring Meetings</b>
<b>Week Sixteen:</b> T 12/5	<b>Final Proposal, Annotated Bibliography, and Image List (Due 5 p.m.)</b> <b>Individual Mentoring Meetings</b>
R 12/7	<b>Individual Mentoring Meetings</b>
F 12/8	<b>Rough Draft (Due 5 p.m.)</b> <b>Individual Mentoring Meetings</b>

<b>Finals Week:</b> M 12/11	<b>Peer Response (Due 5 p.m.)</b>
T 12/12	<b>10:30-12:30 Final Blog Discussion/Presentation</b>
F 12/15	<b>Final Blogs (Due 5 p.m.)</b>

*This syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be communicated in writing and posted to Blackboard.*

*Important UMKC Resources and Policies are applicable to every course and every student at UMKC. These are located in the Blackboard site for this course under the "UMKC Policies" tab. As a UMKC student, you are expected to review and abide by these policies. If you have any questions, please contact your instructor for clarification.*

*Please refer to the following webpage and linked resources for critical information regarding course policies and resources.*  
<http://cas.umkc.edu/CPR/>

*This course follows the "Faculty not allowing recording" option of the Academic Inquiry, Course Discussion and Privacy policy.*