

HI 185 : History of Ghosts & Monsters

H.P. Lovecraft, now considered the greatest American writer of horror stories since Edgar Allan Poe, wrote in the 1930s that "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the fear of the unknown." Ghost and monster stories therefore become historical sources that enable us to have a sense of what people in the past and in different cultures have fears, and that historical knowledge tells us important things about those societies. Students in HI 185 will read a variety of ghost and monster stories, using them as sources that reflect how past era and different cultures have drawn the boundaries of the known and the unknown, and what their fears were. The course will cover ghost and monster stories from ancient Mesopotamia, Japan, Latin America, and Europe and the United States. We will place the stories in the context of broader cultural and intellectual developments, especially common elements in folktales and the emergence of modern science and psychology. In doing so, we will see how ghosts and monster stories address basic social and cultural beliefs, from human mortality to social justice, and from evolution of the psychology of unconscious.

Credits 4.0