Throughout the semester, we have argued with cultural historians Robert Mills and Bettina Bildhauer that no monolithic, univocal Middle Ages existed. A study of medieval monstrosity in a wide range of texts (sagas, romances, mystical and devotional writings, travel narratives) as well as examples of material culture (maps, manuscript illuminations, gargoyles, sculpture, tapestries) confirm that “monsters are polysemous entities, functioning in a wide range of situations and to a variety of ends; no singular discourse of the monstrous can be discerned in this period” (Mills and Bildhauer, p. 6). Nonetheless, monsters perform important cultural work, pointing to the center through the margins as they “upset, construct or enforce” medieval categories of identity.

Your final assignment in Connections 303 requires you to demonstrate your own ability to make “connections” between primary texts and the material culture that provides us a rich context for interpretation. In a ten-page, critical essay explain how monstrosity on the margins in one of our primary texts works to reveal the values at the center of the text’s meaning.

You will need to explain your “theory” of monstrosity, informed by the secondary essays we’ve read this semester (Mills and Bildhauer, Camille, Cohen, and others). You will also need to define the genre of the text and place it in a historical context. Finally, your close reading ought to make use of some of the images we have provided this semester, illustrating your claims and concepts with visual evidence.

As might be expected in a 300-level course, your essay will be evaluated for its depth of analysis, selective integration of secondary materials, and elegance of organization and written expression. If you have not written a critical essay in a while, you should visit the Center for Writing, Learning and Teaching’s website, which features a number of writing resources, including a terrific edit sheet that moves carefully from “higher order concerns (such as thesis, topic sentences and logical scaffold) to “lower order concerns” (syntax, diction, punctuation).
You may use the MLA, Chicago, or APA stylesheet for the essay, but it is imperative that you quote properly and cite your sources. Please do not use secondary materials beyond those provided for the course. Plan on bringing completed drafts of your work to the required writing workshops on May 1 and 6th. Students who do not attend these workshops will receive a grade of “O” for the essay unless their absence is due to illness. Students without completed rough drafts will also receive a lower grade on the final essay. We will collect the draft from May 1 and give extra credit to peer writing advisors who do an especially good job, as is demonstrated by evaluative comments on the draft.

All deadlines for the final project are noted in the current version of the syllabus (on our web site).