

# LITERATURE *and* COMPOSITION 101

## Aliens, Monsters, and Robots

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The aims of this course are to introduce students to the humanistic qualities of literary fiction and to identify the literary techniques through which various writers humanise their characters. To achieve these aims, this course brings students into contact with a range of texts that depict distinctly non-human entities — aliens, monsters, and robots — so as to propose differing definitions of what exactly constitutes humanity. Students taking this course will consider how the authors of these texts encourage readers to empathise and sympathise with non-human characters who tend to be treated poorly by the human beings they encounter. By being exposed to cinematic as well as literary texts, students will develop an awareness of the ways in which characters' physical appearances and psychological capacities influence our ideas of what it means to be human as well as our ability to acknowledge and connect with the humanity of others.

### **Unit 1: Forms of Human Intelligence**

Focusing on representations of non-human entities that appear to possess some form of human intelligence, this unit asks whether such entities can be and should be treated as human beings.

- Franz Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy' (1917)
- Peter Jackson (dir.), *King Kong* (2005)
- H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896)

### **Unit 2: Bodies No Longer Human**

Focusing on representations of human beings who suffer some disfiguration or transformation that gives them a non-human appearance, this unit builds on the preceding unit to ask whether physical appearance can in any way be a determining characteristic of humanity.

- David Lynch (dir.), *The Elephant Man* (1980)
- Neil Blomkamp (dir.), *District 9* (2009)
- Ang Lee (dir.), *Hulk* (2003)

### **Unit 3: Defining Humankind**

Focusing on representations of non-human entities that appear to possess a human form, this unit asks whether entities that look like and behave like human beings — and are treated accordingly by humans — can in fact be considered human regardless of their origins and true natures.

- Philip K. Dick, 'The Father-Thing' (1954)
- Isaac Asimov, 'Robbie' (1939)
- Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)

### **Unit 4: The Humanity of Others**

Focusing on representations of human intelligence in humanoid creatures that have degenerated into sub-human forms, this unit asks whether such creatures can rightly expect to be protected by human laws and can be expected to abide by them, particularly given their capacity for reasoning.

- H.P. Lovecraft, 'Pickman's Model' (1927)
- Philip K. Dick, 'Beyond Lies the Wub' (1952)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

### **Course Assessments**

Students taking this course must complete four 750-word analytical essays. Completion of each course unit requires one essay comparing and contrasting the representations of humanity in the assigned novel and one of the other two assigned texts. Where no novels have been assigned for a particular unit, students may write their essay on any two of the assigned texts.