

ENGL 159—American Gothic Fiction



Professor Niles Tomlinson
Room: Maguire 101
Day/Time: 10:45-12:45 MTWR

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Office hrs: 1:00-2:00 M & W

In this course we will explore the haunted houses and woods of the American imagination. Through our study of mid-19th-Century American Gothic writers, we will engage the persistent question of why a country that values clarity, freedom, religious purity, inclusion, and progress, produces literature so often characterized by darkness, claustrophobia, madness, monstrosity, and haunting. Specifically, we will look at dialogues between the American dream and madness, between “normal” communities and maniacal individuals, between “The City on the Hill” and the “wilderness” beneath. Then, as we move into the late 19th Century and 20th Century, we will consider what these novels and short stories reveal about alternative narratives (especially narratives of otherness) that confront the dominant story of a “self-evident” culture. Among many questions we will address: What is the relationship between the distinctly interior notion of America as an idea (a dream) and the psychological nightmares expressed in many of these texts? What are the distinct forms of dominant culture paranoia that issue from nature spaces and urban spaces? Why might the American South be a repository for the Gothic and the grotesque?

Grades will be determined as follows:

Group Presentation	15%
Participation and preparedness	20%
5 discussion analyses of class readings	20%
Midterm paper (3-4 pages)	15%
Final paper (7-10 pages)	30%

Grading Scale: 100-92% A; 91-89% A-; 88-87 B+; 86-82% B; 81-79% B-; 78-77% C+; 76-72% C; 71-69% C-; 68-67% D+; 66-60% D; 59% F

Required Texts

Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales, Nathaniel Hawthorne
Great Tales and Poems, Edgar Allan Poe
The Haunting of Hill House, Shirley Jackson

Psycho, Robert Bloch
Requiem for a Dream, Hubert Selby Jr.

Participation and Attendance

Participation is an essential part of this course (and a significant percentage of your final grade), and entails not only showing up to class but also coming prepared.

You get two free absences (whether excused or not). At three absences, a student's final participation grade will be lowered by one point, and each subsequent absence will incur the loss of another point. Students who miss more than 5 classes will in all likelihood fail the course.

Paper Formats and Deadlines

Papers are due at the beginning of the class. When papers are late, a third of a letter grade will be taken off for each class day they are late.

Please use twelve-point Times or Times New Roman fonts. Margins should be an inch on all four sides. All papers should include your name, the project #, the date, and a title. **Only stapled papers are acceptable.**

Blog Analyses

The discussion blog, accessible from Blackboard (in the blue, left margin box), will offer you a low-stakes, informal forum to develop your ideas and hone your argumentative writing skills. Think of this as an opportunity to generate ideas for your papers. You need to compose 5 responses in all and they should be spread out over all 5 weeks. The length of responses should be 300 to 500 words. As one of the goals of this exercise is to create a dialogue between you and your classmates outside of class, you are encouraged to also respond to analyses that address a common reading.

While your writing style can certainly be less formal than in your essays, you should refrain from merely summarizing—that is, your close-reading should offer interesting, and substantial critical insights into the texts we are discussing in class. How does a particular passage resonate with a larger theme of the work? How does it identify a central tension? What figurative language does your chosen passage employ that serves as a key to unlocking hidden meaning? How does it reflect the concurrent cultural/historical moment? How does it complicate conventional readings of the text?

You should respond to a particular reading on the day *before* we discuss it in class as this will allow me to incorporate some of your ideas into our class conversations. Each of your analyses will receive a point total (out of 4 possible) with each total corresponding to a letter grade—thus 3.5 would be a B+, 3.6 an A-, and so on. To get an idea of what I am looking for in these analyses and the range of response quality you should refer to “Three Levels of Analysis” posted on Blackboard under the “Assignments” button.

Presentations

The purpose of these presentations is to provide you with an opportunity to develop a deeper, more expansive understanding of a chosen text and to connect this knowledge to some of the other cultural, scientific, philosophical issues we've been exploring. As a group of 2-3 you will essentially run the class for 30-40 minutes according to a method that best allows you to communicate this knowledge. You'll want to provide some kind of an overview of your material (presentation, powerpoint/prezi, guided discussion) to offer criticism and clarification, but you'll also need to plan a class activity or two that generates dynamic participation among the other students. These activities might include small group discussions, debate, close-reading activities, panel discussions, responses to youtube clips or audio-recordings, role-playing, mapping, or other imaginative approaches. Inspire us, dazzle us!

The four requirements are: 1) address your given theme; 2) reflect on the primary text we are currently studying; 3) present the arguments of the scholarly article or excerpt that I assign you; 4) make a connection to one additional source which may be another primary source (novel, film, short story, poem, speech, etc.), another secondary (scholarly source), a theoretical/philosophical source, or any kind of source that produces an “a-ha” connection.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

In all cases, you must follow the requirements of Georgetown’s Honor System. The Honor Code and information on plagiarism and documenting sources are available through the following web address: (<http://www.georgetown.edu/honor/>). If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me.

On-Line Writing Help at Purdue University (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>)

This site is a comprehensive Internet Writer’s guide with a prodigious array of worksheets concerning grammar, structure, citation format, etc. It also features online tutors who can help you solve a myriad of writing problems. A great place to visit if you need to quickly look up a grammar or citation rule.

Course Schedule

Please be advised that this schedule might be revised during the semester. I will, of course, always let you know ahead of time via email. Also, note the readings for a particular class session are considered homework and need to be read ahead of time. All readings marked [pdf] will be available on Blackboard under the “Documents” button.

Week 1

American Gothic Roots—Religion, Science, and the Haunting of “Paradise”

Mon. July 6: Introductions. Syllabus. Gothic American images and key concepts of the American Gothic mode. Origins of the American Gothic: English Gothic traditions and Puritanism. Cotton Mather, from *Wonders of the Invisible World*

Tues. July 7: Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* selection; Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”, “The Minister’s Black Veil”

Wedn. July 8: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat”, “Murders in the Rue Morgue”, “The Masque of the Red Death”

Thurs. July 9: Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”; Herman Melville, “The Bell-Tower”; *Black Mirror’s* “Nosedive”; **Presentation #1**

Week 2

Haunted American Houses

Mon. July 13: Poe, “Fall of the House of Usher”, “Tell-Tale Heart”; Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts 1-3)

Tues. July 14: Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts. 4-6)

Wedn. July 15: Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts. 7-9); **Presentation #2**

Thurs. July 16: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” [pdf Canvas]; Marie Wilkin’s Freeman “Old Woman Magoun” [pdf Canvas]

Week 3

Mon. July 20: Robert Bloch, *Psycho*

Tues. July 21: Bloch, *Psycho*; **Presentation #3**

Wedn. July 22: H.P. Lovecraft "The Haunter in the Dark" [pdf Canvas]; Ray Bradbury, "The Veldt" [pdf Canvas]

Thurs. July 23: Film clips from *Get Out*. Paper workshop.

Midterm paper due Sunday, July 28, 5 pm (email it to me)

Haunted American South

Week 4

Mon. July 27: Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Lynching of Jube Benson" [pdf Canvas]; William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" [pdf Canvas]

Tues. July 28: Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"; "Good Country People", "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" [all pdfs Canvas]

Wedn. July 29: O'Connor, "The Displaced Person" [pdf Canvas]; **Presentation #4.**

Haunted American Cities

Thurs. July 30: Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"; Thomas Ligotti, "The Last Feast of Harlequin" [pdf Canvas]

Week 5

Mon. August 3: Hubert Selby, Jr., *Requiem for a Dream*

Tues. August 4: Selby Jr., *Requiem for a Dream*; **Presentation #5**

Wedn. August 5: Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener"

Thurs. August 6: Paper Workshop. Evaluations.

Final paper due Wedn August 12 by 5:00 pm (email it to me)