

# English 159—American Gothic Fiction, Summer 2021



**Professor Niles Tomlinson**

**Email:** [bnt2@georgetown.edu](mailto:bnt2@georgetown.edu)

**Day/Time:** 1:00-3:00 MTWR

**Office hrs:** 3:00-4:00 M & W and by appt

In this course we will explore the haunted houses and woods of the American imagination. Through our study of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-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 19<sup>th</sup> Century and 20<sup>th</sup> 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:**

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

## **Required Texts (that are not in Canvas "Files")**

[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. 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. I realize, of course, that a fully online course during a pandemic needs to offer flexibility since some of you will likely experience technology problems and life issues that may make it difficult for you to fully participate in a synchronous platform at times. I am happy to offer asynchronous participation workarounds (perhaps through added content to the Discussion board) when these issues occur. Just keep me informed so I can set up alternative methods.

## **Paper Formats and Deadlines**

Please share your two assigned essays as Google docs. Use twelve-point Times or Times New Roman fonts. All essays should include your name, the project #, the date, and a title.

## **Discussion Analyses**

The Canvas "Discussions" will be crucial component of your class experience and will offer you opportunities to develop your ideas and improve 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 other 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 by 9:00 am (EST) on the day we discuss it in class, as I like to use your interpretations as catalysts for our class conversations. Each of your analyses will receive a point total (out of 4 possible) with each total corresponding to a letter grade—3.5 would be a B+, 3.6 an A-, 3.7-4.0 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 Canvas under the “Files” 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 you will essentially run the class for 40-50 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 (using Powerpoint, Google Slides, Prezi, etc.) 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.

## **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 Canvas under the “Files” button.**

### *Week 1*

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

Mon. July 12: 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 13: Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* selection; Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”, “The Minister’s Black Veil”

Wedn. July 14: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat”, “Murders in the Rue Morgue”, “The Masque of the Red Death”

Thurs. July 15: Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”; Ray Bradbury, “The Veldt” [pdf Canvas]; *Black Mirror*'s "Nosedive" OR "Fifteen Million Merits"; **Presentation #1**

### Week 2

#### Haunted American Houses and Minds

Mon. July 19: Poe, “Fall of the House of Usher”, “Tell-Tale Heart”; Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts 1-3)

Tues. July 20: Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts. 4-6)

Wedn. July 21: Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts. 7-9); **Presentation #2**

Thurs. July 22: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” [pdf Canvas]; Marie Wilkin’s Freeman, “Old Woman Magoun” [pdf Canvas]

### Week 3

Mon. July 26: Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (Chpts. 1-12)

Tues. July 27: Bloch, *Psycho* (Chpts. 13-17); **Presentation #3**

#### African America Gothic and the Haunted American South

Wedn. July 28: Paul Laurence Dunbar, “The Lynching of Jube Benson” [pdf Canvas]; Zora Neale Hurston “Spunk”

Thurs. July 29: Film clips from *Sorry to Bother You*. Paper workshop.

**Midterm paper due Saturday, July 31, 5 pm (email it to me)**

### Week 4

Mon. Aug 2: William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily”; “Barn Burning” [both pdfs Canvas]

Tues. Aug 3: 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. Aug 4: O’Connor, “The Displaced Person” [pdf Canvas]; **Presentation #4**

## Haunted American Cities

Thurs. Aug 5: H.P. Lovecraft “The Haunter in the Dark” [pdf Canvas]; Thomas Ligotti, “The Last Feast of Harlequin” [pdf Canvas]

Week 5

Mon. August 9: Hubert Selby, Jr., *Requiem for a Dream*, chpts 1-6

Tues. August 10: Selby Jr., *Requiem for a Dream*, chpts 7-9; **Presentation #5**

Wedn. August 11: Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener” [pdf Canvas]

Thurs. August 12: Paper Workshop. Evaluations.

***Final paper due Monday August 16 by 5:00 pm (email it to me)***