

History 450
Topics in the History of Popular Culture: Horror and American Culture
Spring Term, 2019
T: Psy B55 3:30-445
R: His 304 3:30-6:15

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Office hours: Monday: 11:00-12:00,
Wednesday: 3:00-5:00, and by appointment

Course Description:

During the past quarter of a century or so, fictional narratives of “horror” have become a staple in American culture. For better or worse, the popular culture industry has generated a seemingly endless variety of vampires, zombies, werewolves, demonically possessed children, and aliens from space who are out to get us. A whole plethora of artifacts--novels, films, short stories, graphic novels and comic books, television programs, and even musicals—has been produced with the goal of striking fear in audiences. The genre popularly known as “horror,” however, is not a new phenomenon; it has actually played an important role in American cultural history since the eighteenth century, when Gothic fiction vied with sordid tales of real murders in attempting to evoke powerful emotional responses from a fascinated public. In those eighteenth-century works, as well as in the numerous works of horror that were produced thereafter, from the novels of Charles Brockden Brown to the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft to films such as *Halloween* and *The Exorcist*, writers and other artists have continued to use fictional tales of horror as a means of forcing Americans to confront some of their most deep-seated anxieties.

However gruesome narratives of horror might seem to be as a vehicle of cultural expression, its persistence is hardly surprising. The genre is ideally suited to speak to both the primordial fears of individuals and the collective fears of society. A careful analysis of the genre also suggests, though, that horror has not simply been used to identify fears; it has also been used to express the tenacity of humanity’s fascination with the supernatural in an increasingly scientific age and to affirm the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Monsters persistently wreak havoc, but they rarely triumph in the end. The few occasions in which their creators have allowed them to do so constitute important statements about those artists’ (and possibly the audience’s) views concerning the state of culture and society.

This course will trace the genre of horror as it has been conceptualized in a variety of different narrative forms. During the course of our investigation, we will examine the way that the genre has appropriated such important realms of human experience as religion, the natural sciences, and psychology. The course will also examine a variety of different approaches that historians and other students of the genre have used in coming to grips with the meaning and significance of horror in American culture.

Trigger Warning: Some of the material in this course contains violent, sexually explicit, racist, sexist, and arguably misogynistic material. To do justice to the subject of the course, this material needs to be addressed. If you anticipate that this will create a problem for you, you should not register for the course.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to prepare thoroughly for each class session by completing the entire reading assignment each week prior to the Tuesday class meeting. Enthusiastic and informed participation in class will be crucial to the success of the course. Students should feel free during class discussions to draw on their experiences with narrative horror that go beyond the assigned film and reading. In addition, because one of the most important skills that one can learn is the ability to ask insightful and important questions, each student is required to formulate **THREE WRITTEN QUESTIONS** (one from the week's film and two from the week's readings) and bring them to class every Tuesday of the term. Students should bring two copies of these questions to class. They will submit one copy to the instructor at the beginning of class.

Students are required to write two relatively short papers (2-3 pages). The topics for these papers will be announced later in the term.

Students are also required to write a somewhat longer essay (9-11 pages) on a topic dealing with the history of the relationship between narratives of fictional horror and American culture that they find particularly interesting. All topics must be approved by the instructor by **February 14**. The paper is **DUE April 25**.

Students are required to **SUBMIT TWO COPIES** of each of their papers. One will be returned to the student. *All papers must be submitted in order to pass the course.*

Academic Integrity:

The penalties for plagiarism and other instances of academic misconduct can be--and properly should be--very severe. Students should consult the College of Arts and Sciences Academic Conduct Code (www.bu.edu/cas/academics/programs/conductcode.html) if they are unsure of official standards.

All ideas, as well as quoted or closely paraphrased material within a paper, must be clearly attributed to the source from which they are taken. Please feel free to check with me if you have questions about this.

Attendance:

The success of this colloquium depends on students' attendance and participation in the discussions. Accordingly, attendance at *every* class is mandatory. Failure to attend class without an acceptable excuse will result in a lower grade in the course.

Grades:

The course grade will be determined as follows:

Each short paper	10%
Longer paper	40%
Class participation	40%

Required Reading:

Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, (Simon and Schuster), ISBN 9781439170984
 Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, (Taylor/Routledge), ISBN 9780415902168
 W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Baylor University Press) ISBN: 9781481308823
 Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories* (Oxford UP) ISBN: 9780199536177
 William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, (Harp Pub), ISBN 9780062094360

Students should obtain the editions of the books that have been listed above. This will facilitate discussions by ensuring that everyone will be referencing the same page numbers.

Other readings, hereafter abbreviated as BL, will be posted on the course website:
<http://learn.bu.edu>.

Schedule of Class Meetings

Week 1 (January 22-25)

January 22 Introduction to the Course

January 24 Film: *The Silence of the Lambs*

Week 2 (January 28-February 1)

January 29 Reading:

Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, ch. 1

Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, chs. I-III, X

W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, Preface to Second Edition, Preface to First Edition, Introduction

Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" (BL)

Andrew Tudor, "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre" (BL)

Bruno Bettelheim, "Introduction," in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (BL)

January 31 Film: *Scream*

Week 3 (February 4-8)

February 5 Reading:

W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, chs. 1-2

Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, ch.4

Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*, chs. 1-2 [available online from Mugar]

S. L. Varnado, "The Idea of the Numinous in Gothic Literature" (BL)

Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (BL)

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" [1839], "Ligeia" [1838], and "The Tell-Tale Heart" [1843] (BL)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" [1835], "The Birthmark" [1843], and "Rappaccini's Daughter" [1844] (BL)

February 7 Film: *Jacob's Ladder*

Week 4 (February 11-15)

February 12 Reading:

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* [1898] in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*

Brad Leithauser, "Even Scariest: On 'The Turn of the Screw'" (BL)

F. Marion Crawford, "The Upper Berth" [1886] (BL)

Edith Wharton, "Afterward" [1910] (BL)

August Derleth, "The Panelled Room" [1933] (BL)

Fritz Leiber, "Smoke Ghost" [1941] (BL)

Stephen King, "Room 1408" [1999] (BL)

February 14 Film: *They Live*

Week 5 (February 18-22)

February 19 **No Class (Monday schedule is in effect)**

February 21 **FIRST SHORT PAPER IS DUE**

Film: *Frankenstein*

Radio Version of *War of the Worlds* [1938]

Week 6 (February 25-March 1)

February 26 Reading:

W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, ch. 3

Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, ch. VII

S. T. Joshi, *The Evolution of the Weird Tale*, ch. 3 (BL)

Fitz-James O'Brien, "What Was It?" [1859] (BL)

Ambrose Bierce, "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot" [1890] "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" [1890] (BL)

F. Marion Crawford, "The Screaming Scull" [1908] (BL)

H. P. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space" [1927] and "The Call of Cthulhu" [1928] (BL)

February 28 Film: *King Kong*

Week 7 (March 4-March 8)

March 5 Reading:

Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, ch. V

Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, ch. 3

Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction*, ch. 1 and pp. 50-75 (BL)
 Noël Carroll, "King Kong: Ape and Essence" (BL)
 C. M. Eddy, "The Loved Dead" [1924] (BL)
 William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" [1930] (BL)
 Arthur J. Burks, "The Room of Shadows" [1936] (BL)
 Ray Bradbury, "The Jar" [1944] (BL)
 Ray Bradbury, "Mars is Heaven!" (1948) [Online on Internet]
 Shirley Jackson, "The Summer People" [1948] (BL)
 Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" [1948] (BL)

March 7 Film: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

March 9-March 17 Spring Break

Week 8 (March 18-22)

March 19 Reading:

W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, ch. 4
 Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, ch. VI
 Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction*, ch. 8 (BL)
 Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*, ch. 3 (BL)
 Mike Benton, *Horror Comics: The Illustrated History*, chs. 3-6 (BL)

Watch: Rod Serling, "The Monsters are Due on Maple Street" (YouTube)

March 21 **SECOND SHORT PAPER IS DUE**

Film: *Salem's Lot* (tentative)

Week 9 (March 25-29)

March 26 Reading:

W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, ch. 7, pp. 214-230
 Norine Dresser, *American Vampires*, ch. 5 (BL)
 Susannah Clements, *The Vampire Defanged*, chs. 4, 6 (BL)
 M. Jess Peacock, *Such a Dark Thing: Theology of the Vampire Narrative in Popular Culture* [selections to be announced] (BL)
 F. Marion Crawford, "For Blood is the Life" [1905] (BL)
 Clark Ashton Smith, "The End of the Story" [1930] (BL)
 Ray Bradbury, "The Man Upstairs" [1947] (BL)
 Fritz Leiber, "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes" [1949] (BL)
 Richard Matheson, "Blood Son" [1951] and "Deus ex Machina" [1963] (BL)
 Anne Rice, "Freniere" [1973] (BL)
 F. Paul Wilson, "Midnight Mass" [1990] (BL)

March 28 Film: *Night of the Living Dead*

Week 10 (April 1-5)

April 2 Reading:

- W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, ch. 7, pp. 205-214
 Kim Paffenroth, *The Gospel of the Living Dead*, "Introduction," Ch. 2 (BL)
 Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), ch. 1 (BL)
 Shawn McIntosh, "The Evolution of the Zombie: The Monster That Keeps Coming Back" (BL)
 June Pulliam, "'We're Them and They're Us': Zombies as a Reflection of American Culture" (BL)
 John Skipp and Craig Spector, "Introduction," in *Book of the Dead* (BL)
 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Undead (A Zombie Oriented Ontology)" (BL)
 Stephen King, "Home Delivery" [1989] (BL)
 Douglas E. Winter, "Less Than Zombie" [1989] (BL)
 Edward Bryant, "A Sad Last Love at Diner of the Damned," [1989] (BL)
 Dan Simmons, "This Year's Class Picture" [1992] (BL)

April 4 Film: *Rosemary's Baby*

Week 11 (April 8-12)

April 9 Reading:

- Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness*, ch. 5 (BL)
 W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America: The Devil We Know*, ch. 6 (BL)
 William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*

April 11 Film: *Psycho*

Week 12 (April 15-19)

April 16 Reading:

- W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, ch. 5, 147-159
 Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*, chs. 7, 9 (BL)
 Joseph Gixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (BL)
 Jeffrey Bullins, "Know Your Killer: Changing Portrayals of Psychosis in Horror Films" (BL)
 Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson" [1839] (BL)
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" [1892] (BL)
 H. P. Lovecraft, "The Outsider" [1926] (BL)
 Richard Matheson, "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet" [1961] (BL)
 Fritz Leiber, "Belsen Express" [1975] (BL)
 Ursula Le Guin, "Schrodinger's Cat" [1982] (BL)

April 18 Film: *Halloween*

Week 13 (April 22-26)

April 23 Reading:

- W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, ch. 5, pp. 159-176 and ch. 6
 Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" (BL)
 Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness*, ch. 8 (BL)
 Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street*, ch. 1 (BL)
 Steve Jones, *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw*, chs. 1-2 (BL)
 Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, ch. 4 (BL)
 Robert Block, "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper," [1943] (BL)
 Ray Bradbury, "The Small Assassin," [1946] (BL)
 Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" [1953] (BL)

April 25 **LONGER PAPER DUE**

Film: *Get Out*

Week 14 (April 29-May 2)

April 30 Reading:

- W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, Conclusion
 Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, ch. VIII
 Stephen Crane, "Monster" [1898] (BL)
 Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks" (BL)
 Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" (BL)
 Isabel Cristina Pinedo, ". . . And Then She Killed Him: Women and Violence in the Slasher Film" (BL)
 Karen Hollinger, "The Monster as Woman: Two Generations of Cat People" (BL)
 Aalya Ahmad, "Gender, Goth, and Gore: Evil in the Horror Fiction of Poppy Z. Brite" (BL)
 Zadie Smith, "Getting In and Out: Who Owns Black Pain?" (BL)
 Glenda R. Carpio, *et al.*, "Virtual Roundtable on *Get Out*" (BL)
 Sherronda J. Brown, "Listen to the Ancestors, Run! '*Get Out*,' Zombification, and Pathologizing Escape from the Plantation" (BL)

May 2 Film: TBD

NOTE: The above schedule and assignments are subject to change by the instructor.