

## American Gothic

ENGL 5326-001 Topics in American Literature Before 1900

Spring 2015 Syllabus

Tuesday 6:00 – 8:50 p.m. Preston 211

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### Course Description:

The Gothic novel first emerged as a popular literary genre in eighteenth-century England, but American writers after the Revolution quickly made it their own, adapting and transforming it to suit their purposes. Though this course is concerned with Gothic fiction primarily as it takes shape in nineteenth-century America, we will also explore transatlantic exchanges and influences. Gothic can be seen as an exemplary transatlantic genre, crossing and re-crossing between Europe and the U.S., as writers on both sides of the Atlantic borrowed from each other. Gothic fiction is also recurrently concerned with movements across borders, as well as transatlantic and transoceanic spaces. It explores anxieties about foreigners, immigrants, and aliens, and is preoccupied with porous boundaries, unsettling the relation between inside and outside—whether of self, home, community, or nation. We will investigate the cultural and political fantasies expressed in Gothic fictions. From the nation's beginnings, American writers used Gothic literature to provide darker counter-narratives to prevailing ideologies, asking scandalous questions and exploring transgressive meanings. Marked as a genre by the mixing of terror with pleasure, by excess and violation, Gothic enabled the expression of “unspeakable” cultural anxieties and desires. We will focus on Gothic writing that engages with a range of issues haunting the nineteenth-century American imagination, including race and slavery, gender and sexuality, and family life and domestic ideology, asking whether such Gothic tropes as monstrosity and boundary-crossing worked to contest or affirm prevailing norms and ideals. We will also frame our discussion of primary literary texts with various theoretical and critical readings, on such topics as the uncanny, horror and abjection, haunting and spectrality, in order to explore the rich interconnections between Gothic fiction and contemporary theory, which itself manifests a persistent dark Gothic strain. Authors include Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville, among others.

### Course Texts:

Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers* (William Morrow)

Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (Hackett)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Young Goodman Brown and Other Short Stories* (Dover)

James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Broadview)

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (Bedford)

Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (Bedford)

Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales* (Oxford Univ. Press)

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Penguin)

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Bedford)

Additional readings will be available electronically, unless otherwise noted.

### **Course Requirements:**

1. Eight response papers. Minimum two full pages double-spaced. Response papers should engage with the week's readings, especially emphasizing critical/theoretical readings as well as primary literary texts. You should address the arguments of the scholarly texts we read, but you can also use these papers to explore your own ideas about the readings (critical or literary). Topics for your seminar paper may emerge out of your response papers.

**Note:** Response papers must be submitted in class the week of the readings they address, or emailed to me prior to class. These short papers will not be graded individually—I will give them an aggregate grade at the end of the course.

2. Final paper. A substantial research paper (minimum 15 pages) drawing on readings and issues from the course. Students will give a presentation based on their papers at the end of the course. The final class meeting(s) will be set aside for this purpose.

3. Participation.

### **Course Grade:**

Eight response papers	25%
Participation and presentation	15%
Research paper	60%

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students should be able to:

- Demonstrate critical understanding of the specific authors and texts covered in the course, and identify connections synthetically between these texts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of major themes and issues relevant to Gothic literature.
- Identify the characteristics of Gothic literature as a genre; discuss its difference from and interconnections with other relevant literary genres; and provide an account of important historical changes in the generic characteristics of Gothic literature.
- Demonstrate a complex understanding of the relationship between Gothic literature and significant historical and cultural contexts, including analyzing the relevance of important historical events or topics to specific literary works.
- Explain and make use of analytical and theoretical concepts and literary critical terminology covered in the course.
- Express ideas and perform analysis in clear, concise, logical, and persuasive writing.
- Express ideas clearly through relevant oral contributions to class discussion, and respond substantially to the ideas of other students.

**Gothic Warnings:**

Though nineteenth-century Gothic literature may have lost some of its power to terrify readers, it deals with subject matter and cultural issues that remain potentially controversial or troubling, from transgressive sexuality to explicit and often intimate violence. Gothic writing typically aims to depict untoward desires and deep-seated anxieties, to convey such feelings as despair, fear, hatred, or just a pervasive sense of creepiness. If you feel you will be haunted by such things, consider yourself forewarned.

**Attendance and Participation:**

Because this is a graduate seminar that meets once a week, absences will only be excused in the case of truly unavoidable circumstances. Two or more absences will have an effect on your final grade. I expect you to come to class each week having carefully read the texts for that day's meeting, prepared with questions, comments, thoughts, enthusiasms, or objections. Participation for the course includes informal contributions to class discussion as well as presentations.

**Academic Integrity:**

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. "Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts." [*Regents Rules and Regulations*]

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero.

**Americans with Disabilities Act:**

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

## Reading Schedule:

**Note:** This schedule is provisional. There may be minor changes, additions, or deletions in the course readings.

- 1/20 Introduction
- 1/27 Brown, "Somnambulism: A Fragment" (244-58)  
Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (begin reading this novel)  
Poe, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"  
<http://www.eapoe.org/WORKS/mabbott/tom3t027.htm>  
Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection"  
Fred Botting, "Introduction: Gothic Excess and Transgression"
- 2/3 Brown, *Edgar Huntly*  
Jamie Hinds, "Deb's Dogs"  
Emily Ogden, "*Edgar Huntly* and the Regulation of the Senses"
- 2/10 Shelley, *Frankenstein* including 1831 "Introduction" and 1818 "Preface" (Bedford 19-27)  
Fred Botting, "Reflections of Excess" (in Bedford *Frankenstein*)  
Allan Lloyd Smith, "'This Thing of Darkness': Racial Discourse in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*"
- 2/17 Hogg, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*  
Eve Sedgwick, "Murder Incorporated: *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*"  
George Haggerty, "'Dung, Guts, and Blood': Sodomy, Abjection, and Gothic Fiction"
- 2/24 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"  
Nicholas Royle, selections from *The Uncanny*  
Poe, "William Wilson," "The Black Cat," "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Man of the Crowd," "The Man that was Used Up,"
- 3/3 Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*  
Poe, "MS. Found in a Bottle"  
Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"
- 3/10 **Spring Break!!**
- 3/17 Poe, Tales: "Ligeia," "Berenice," "Morella," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Hop-Frog"  
Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves"  
Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter," "The Birthmark"
- 3/24 Melville, "Benito Cereno"  
Eric Sundquist, "Melville, Delany, and New World Slavery"  
Selections from Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*
- 3/31 Alcott, "Behind a Mask"  
Alcott, "The Abbot's Ghost"  
Theresa Strauth Gaul, "Trance-Formations: Mesmerism and 'A Woman's Power'"  
Judith Butler, from *Undoing Gender*

- 4/7 James, *The Turn of the Screw*  
James, "The Jolly Corner"  
Luke Thurston, selections from *The Haunting Interval*  
Avery Gordon, selections from *Ghostly Matters*
- 4/14 Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror," "The Outsider," "The Call of Cthulhu"  
Eugene Thacker, selection from *In the Dust of this Planet*  
Graham Harmon, selection from *Lovecraft and Philosophy*
- 4/21 Morrison, *Beloved*  
Critical reading t.b.a.
- 4/28 Morrison, *Beloved*  
Critical reading t.b.a.
- 5/5 Presentations
- 5/12 Presentations (if necessary; final exam week class)

**Final paper due Tuesday, May 5 in class**