Gothic and Horror in American Literature and Film

1. Gothic
   (n.) 1. A word generally used in relation the the macabre or other darker elements.
   2. A movement in literature that branched off of the individualist movement of the 1700’s, usually revolving around the darker elements of human nature.
   3. Jagged and spacious architecture, usually referenced by gothic cathedrals, in which vast open areas invoke feelings of belittlement.
   4. A stereotype encompassing whiny, pissant teenagers craving attention. Usually identified by an immense use of black, vampires, blood, and anarchy symbols.
   1. The painting had a very gothic feel to it.
   2. Poe was a gothic writer.
   3. There was a piece of a gothic chapel on display at the museum.
   4. A handful of gothic children mingled outside the Starbucks.

(Urban Dictionary)

Gothic fiction is first and foremost, literature where fear is the motivating and sustaining emotion. This fear is shared by the characters within the story and the reader. The Gothic thus examines the causes, qualities, and results of terror on both mind and body. It does so in a process of epistemological inquiry, and because it is concerned with the acquisition and internalizing of kinds of knowledge, the Gothic finds an appropriate vehicle in the quest narrative or, more specifically, the Erziehungsroman or narrative of education. Unlike the traditional narratives of this kind, however, the Gothic journey offers a darkened world where fear, oppression, and madness are the ways to knowledge and the uncontrolled transformation of one's character the quest's epiphany. While the classical quest ends in the regeneration of a decaying world and the integration of the hero into society, the Gothic quest ends in the shattering of the protagonists’ image of his/her social/sexual roles and a legacy of, at best, numbing unease or, at worst, emotional paralysis and death. The Gothic may then be described as a demonic quest narrative.

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life: the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakspeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one: and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? Their different approaches to the novel of terror, as it was called in the eighteenth century, have given been distinguished by some critics as terror Gothic, represented by Radcliffe, and horror Gothic, represented by Lewis. Sometimes this same distinction is tied to gender, with female equated with terror Gothic and with male being equated with horror Gothic. (Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry”)

Course Description
In this course, we’ll examine the gothic and horror genres in American literature (and a few films, and many clips). We will start by looking at the progenitors of this genre in American literature, and move forward to the 21st century. The primary concerns of this course will be how do we define the gothic and horror genres in American culture? What’s the difference? Where do they intersect? How do American texts veer off from the traditional, European gothic? How do these revisions or changes reflect American culture? Express our individual and national anxieties? What cultural purposes do they serve?

We will examine recurring themes and motifs and how they change, shift, morph with the culture and the shifting fears of the culture.

SCHEDULE
All of the reading is due by the date in appears on the syllabus. Think ahead a bit. The Shining and Beloved will require planning. You might want to read The Shining over Spring Break. I may add or subtract readings. If you miss class, contact a classmate to see if there are any changes.

W Jan 18th
Week One
Setting the Stage for the AMERICAN Gothic
Traditional Gothic: European
Sinners in the Hands
Wieland (1798) hearing the voice of God
Cotton Mather (The Witch Trials--)
View: Frankenstein, American Nightmare

W Jan 25
Week Two: The Dark Romantic Gothic
Irving and Hawthorne
In Oates: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820) set in 1790
“The Man of Adamant” (1837)
“Young Goodman Brown” (1835)
On Line:
“The Birthmark”  http://www.online-literature.com/poe/125/  (1843)

Theory:  “The Monster in the Home: True crime and the Traffic in Body Parts.”  Edward J. Ingebretsen.  Journal of American Culture 21 no 1 27-34. (You can find this on Blackboard or most likely on JStor.) (Clips from Sleepy Hollow)

W  Feb  1
Week Three
Transforming the genre:  POE (Group A)
Tell-tale Heart
Cask of Amontillado
Fall of the House of Usher
The Black Cat

W  Feb  8
Week Four:  Perfecting the genre:  POE (Group B)
Murders of the Rue Morgue
The Purloined Letter
Masque of the Red Death
Pit and the Pendulum
Draft 1 Due

W  Feb 15
Week Five:  Following Poe
I felt a funeral in my brain,
And mourners, to and fro,
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed
That sense was breaking through. (Emily Dickinson)

In Oates:
“The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)
“The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” James (1868)
“Cat in Glass,” Etchemendy (2002)
Schrodinger’s Cat, Leguin (1974)
Damned Thing,” Bierce (1893)

View:  Rosemary’s Baby  (Group 1)

W  Feb 22
Week Six:  Female Gothic
Behind a Mask: or, A Woman’s Power, Louisa May Alcott  (1866)
http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/AlcBehi.html

Alcott, "A Whisper in the Dark," (1863)
http://www.horrormasters.com/Text/a0549.pdf
Part I and Part II (1863)(online).

- Paper 1 Due

W Feb 29
Week Seven: The children (Group C)
  - Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)
  - Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*
  - Ray Bradbury, *The Veldt*
Possible View: *The Others*
Exam

March 3-11 SPRING BREAK

March 14
Week Eight: Lovecraft (Group D)

The Outsider (1939)
The Thing on the Doorstep (1937)
“The Lonesome Place,” Derleth (1962)
“The Last Feat of Harlequin” (1991)
Linda Williams, “When Women Look”


View: *Psycho* (1960) (Group 2)
  - Draft 2 Due

March 21
Week Nine: Southern Gothic
1930 A Rose for Emily, Faulkner
Find O’Connor on line: (see Blackboard or Google)
(A Temple of the Holy Ghost)
“Good Country People”
“A Good Man is Hard to Find”

View: Dawn of the Living Dead (Group 3)
EXAM

March 28
Week Ten: (tba)
Shirley Jackson
Sylvia Plath
? Walking Dead? Deliverance? Haunted House movie?

Paper 2 Due

April 4 The Shining, King

April 11 The Shining (movie, tba)

April 18 Beloved, Morrison

April 25 Beloved

May 2 Final Syllabus project OR your own 3-5 minute horror film

- **Course Requirements:**
  2 Exams  10% each  
  Final Project  15%  
  2 3-5 page papers 15% each  
  Response papers due every class  25%  
  Participation  15%  
  Discussing leading 10% (5% each and impacts your participation grade)

- **A one-page typewritten response paper due every Wednesday.** The paper is due in class. You must turn it in at the beginning of class. It should grapple with that day's reading. You can do many things in a response paper, but usually a good piece engages the language of the work, the way form affects content. (Think in terms of how the author delivers content, and how that affects the reader. Rhetorical questions, tone, narrative voice are all stylistic issues, or issues of form.) Be specific (usually), be analytical (usually), use quotes (usually), and have fun with these. Please make an extra copy of your reaction paper for use during the class session. You may be expected to make an in-class recitation from your paper as well as making a thoughtful and reasoned response to the papers of your classmates. Therefore, in order to submit a paper for credit, you must be in class when they are collected and remain in class for the duration of the period. Late papers will not be accepted. I won’t accept emailed papers or papers on my door. I won’t even accept early papers. **No more than one page.** I'll grade these on a check, plus, and minus basis, and tally your top ten for your grade. (And a truly unacceptable paper would rate a zero, but this will undoubtedly not happen in this class.) 25%

- **Two 3-5 page papers**--A critical analysis of a work we've read in class, using at least three recently published pieces of criticism on the literature. (Gale index does not count. Journal articles or books do count. Use the MLA Bibliography. JStor is good too.). 15%

- **Final project**--you will create an alternate syllabus and write a three-page essay explaining your course and how you made your choices. You will give a 3-5 minute presentation of your syllabus. (Don’t read your paper.) You must change at least ten works. Make a case for each one you add, explaining what it brings to the course. Make a case for each text you drop. You must keep at least two. You will present your syllabus to the class, outlining your course’s thematic concerns. You
may also opt to make (and present to the class) a 3-5 minute gothic or horror film. 15%

- **Leading Discussion--** We will examine many texts in this seminar. Over the course of the term, each of you will lead class discussion twice, with two different groups. You will lead one class on a reading, and you will introduce a film and then lead discussion afterwards.

- **Leading discussion on the reading**
  Leading class discussion on the reading requires you to address three tasks: **First**, you should identify for the class the most salient examples that relate to our overall themes of gothic and horror you found in the weekly readings, and engage the class in an examination of the central themes that the author calls to the attention of the reader. In other words, what issues or themes did you find in the readings that were provocative? Did they further our definition of the genres of American gothic or further complicate it? Did the readings shed any light about what purpose the gothic and horror genres serve in our society? **Secondly**, connect and point out other course readings or texts (including films) that illuminate or challenge the current reading. Highlight ways the current reading echoes, or argues with, points, ideas, definitions made by previous writers. **Third**, select specific passages that you think are interesting or provocative that make a salient point about the text as a whole in a creative or powerful manner. Read them aloud or request that a classmate read them aloud. (You are the facilitator and can call on someone!) Then facilitate an analysis of the passage. Often passages that trouble you—that seem contradictory, that seem to shift tone, that seem overly strident—are interesting spaces to explore a text. The questions that do not have clear, simple answers are also the questions most worth asking. While as class discussion leader, you should have ideas and theories about their question, your primary job as discussion leader is not simply to deliver information, but to facilitate a discussion. Do not lecture. Do not read from a paper. Engage your classmates in a lively, nuanced, provocative discussion.

- **Introducing the film--** You will need to introduce the film, including the year it came out, the director, producer and important actors, and any interesting facts surrounding the film. Keep this under ten minutes total.
  You will also lead a ten minute discussion after the film—make this fun. Start with simply an enjoyable discussion of the film and then bring it back to the context of the class. What does it add to our knowledge thus far?

- **Participation**—is an absolute requirement for this class. You'll be participating in groups, reading each others papers, responding to each other. It's a long class.
  You'll want to be engaged. I'll be quite strict about the reading and will quiz every text in every class. This is great reading and it's a very reasonable amount. I'm aiming for a fun class, but I'll need you to make that happen.

- **Absence policy:** You may be absent one time. After that your grade will drop significantly. At three absences, you will fail the course.

  **Academic honesty policy:** You are responsible for the Rollins College policy on academic honesty. You can find this in the college catalog, on-line, or in your R-Times (Article III, B2). If you plagiarize in this class (which you won't of course), you will fail the course and a letter will be sent to the Dean.
  If you show up for all four Winter Term with the Writers speakers and write a relatively literate one-page response on each, I will average an A in with your lowest grade.
Some other policies. Beware the IPhone. If I see you on it I will silently record an F. Nothing peeves me more than a covert text in my class. No open computers in the classroom.

I tend to be syllabus driven, but I could add or drop readings. Keep an eye on Blackboard and if you miss a class, check with a classmate. I will probably add some theory as we go.

Obviously. You must do all of the work to pass the class. You can fail for not completing any of the requirements on time.

“I think there is something about the "American Dream", the sort of Disneyesque dream if you will of the beautifully trimmed front lawn, the white picket fence, mom and dad and their happy children, god fearing and doing good whenever they can; that sort of expectation, and the flipside of it, the kind of anger and the sense of outrage that comes from discovering that that's not the truth of the matter, I think that gives American horror films in some ways kind of an additional rage...” Wes Craven