

Fall 2005, ENGL 1600, Sec. 005  
MWF 1:00-1:50 in CLRE 301  
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## Masterpieces of American Literature: “The American Gothic”

“A class is ... a process, an independent organism with its own goal and dynamics. It is always something more than what even the most imaginative lesson plan can predict.” — Thomas P. Kasulis

Description: This course focuses on American Literature from the last 200 years. We will also be studying other media, including the graphic novel and film. While the texts in this course are (mostly) arranged chronologically, this will not be a typical survey course. Rather than attempt a broad exploration of the whole of the American literary canon, in this course we will trace the invention and continued reinvention of a single genre: the gothic. Many literary critics argue for a clear distinction between the gothic genre and the horror genre, and yet in this course we will be equally interested in the intersection between these two genres and neighboring ones such as science fiction. These genres have been much maligned throughout history for their focus on the lurid and the sensational, the marvelous and the fantastic, the gory and the grotesque. And, yet, the gothic genre has defined and influenced the American literary heritage in extremely significant ways. We don't have to go digging far into the underbelly of American literature in order to find these horrors. They are, instead, always there, brimming to the surface. Thus, we will be reading works written by many of the masters of American literature, such as Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, William Faulkner, and Toni Morrison. And, yet, we will also be questioning the very notion of masterpieces by reading lesser-known works and carefully considering what constitutes a literary or filmic masterpiece.

In studying a single genre, we will be exploring the recurrent themes and motifs that define a literary tradition. We will start by looking at some of the inventors of the genre in America. As the course progresses, we will explore the way later writers and filmmakers carry on the tradition by imitating, repeating, and transforming the work of their predecessors. Through this process, we will begin to see the way that literary traditions are formed and re-formed. We will see the ways that history influences and is influenced by literary culture. We will see the way that various artistic media intersect, the way film responds to literature and vice versa. And, most importantly, we will think about the relationship between readers/viewers and texts, exploring the real (psychological and physical) impact literature and film have on us. Given some of the subject-matter (monsters, ghosts, corpses, and other gnarly stuff), the gross-out factor of the course will be a little higher than usual. The gothic speaks to some of our most basic human emotions: fear, horror, disgust, revulsion. And so when the characters in our texts and films scream, you might find yourself screaming too. So if you are utterly squeamish you would probably prefer another section of this course.

### Required Texts:

Joyce Carol Oates, Ed., *American Gothic Tales*  
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*  
Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*  
Joyce Carol Oates, Ed., *Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*  
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*  
Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*  
Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale, *Batman: Dark Victory*  
\*\*Supplemental Readings (Available online)\*\*

### Required Films:

Alejandro Amenabar, *The Others* (2001)  
George Romero, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)  
John Carpenter, *Halloween* (1978)  
Ridley Scott, *Alien* (1979)  
Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982)

Richard Kelly, *Donnie Darko* (2001)

Attendance and Class Participation: Since this is a discussion course, you have a responsibility to yourself and your classmates to show up for class—on time and prepared. The class will be a cooperative learning experience, a true intellectual community. And so, *you* are, in a very real sense, the primary text for this course. In addition to determining the directions we will go in each day, all project/paper topics, assignments, etc. will arise directly from your comments in class discussion. Because of this, participation will be a very large component of your final grade. Thus, it follows that more than three or four absences during the semester will directly affect your grade. If you are going to miss class, please let me know in advance either in person or via e-mail. Also, I'm required to say that students who miss the first three classes will be dropped from the course.

Office Hours: I have scheduled regular office hours and I'm also available by appointment. Please come to office hours as often as possible. This is the most effective way for me to give you individual attention and get to know you better. In general, it is best to come early in the semester, especially if you have any particular questions or concerns. I am also very easy to reach by e-mail. In fact, e-mail is (by far) the best and quickest way to contact me. You can send an e-mail with questions or comments to me at [Jesse.Stommel@colorado.edu](mailto:Jesse.Stommel@colorado.edu) or to your e-mail discussion list.

E-mail: The University now requires that every student have an active e-mail account that they check regularly. E-mail is an important component of this course. You will be required to subscribe to an e-mail discussion list ([readgroup1@lists.colorado.edu](mailto:readgroup1@lists.colorado.edu), [readgroup2@lists.colorado.edu](mailto:readgroup2@lists.colorado.edu), [readgroup3@lists.colorado.edu](mailto:readgroup3@lists.colorado.edu) or [readgroup4@lists.colorado.edu](mailto:readgroup4@lists.colorado.edu)) AND you must check your e-mail regularly. I will be sending regular announcements to the lists, so if you are not subscribed or do not check your e-mail, you will miss crucial information related to the course. Throughout the semester, you will also be sending weekly responses to the list. And so, the list will serve as an online "reading group," a place to converse with each other about the class, the readings, the films, etc. Feel free to raise questions, which will be answered by me or anyone in your group. You can also use the list to exchange materials, set up group screenings, work sessions, etc.

Online Content: There are numerous links on this webpage that will take you to various assignments and readings that we will be doing throughout the semester. My advice: if you make this web site your friend, you'll have no trouble completing all the reading and assignments for the course. As we proceed, I will be uploading additional content, including some course notes, activities, and assignments, so keep checking for updates.

#### The Work of the Course:

- **Class Participation.** This includes your attendance, involvement in class discussion, in-class assignments, small-group work, and a few short worksheets that you'll do throughout the semester. As I mentioned, this is (by far) the most important component of the course.
- **Reading Responses.** This is essentially an offshoot of class participation. Throughout the semester each of you will be sending weekly reading responses to your e-mail discussion group. Some of these will be more structured (i.e. a response to questions I give to you), while many of them will be more flexible, allowing you to respond to any aspect of the text/film we are studying. Your group's e-mails should be as collaborative as possible. In other words, don't just throw your e-mail into a vacuum. Instead, ask questions of each other and use the other e-mails sent to your list as a jumping off point by responding to questions, amplifying or complicating ideas, etc. The length of individual responses isn't as important as the work your group produces as a whole over the course of the semester. So, if you write a short response one week, then write a longer response the next. No e-mail response is required for the first or last weeks of the semester.
- **Leading Class Discussion.** You will be asked to help lead discussion at least one time throughout the semester. This is, by no means, a formal presentation. Rather, on the day you sign up for, be prepared to come to class with a few questions or topics related to the reading/film for that day. You'll also want to bring at least one or two passages (if you're doing a text) or clips (if you're doing a film) which you'd like the group to look at in detail. As you are leading class discussion, I will be mostly silent, moderating the discussions to some degree but primarily acting as a member of the group w/ my own questions, comments, etc. This activity will generally help shape the direction our discussion takes for the rest of the class period. For this requirement, you will have the option of leading a small group discussion in pairs OR leading large group discussion as a member of a panel.

• **2 Short Papers.** These two papers will be about three pages apiece. In each of them, you will close-analyze either a few sentences from a novel or a shot from a film. The first short paper will be due on Sep. 9. There will be three due dates for the second short paper, Oct. 24, Oct. 28, or Nov. 2, depending upon which film you choose to work with.

• **Midterm Project.** For the midterm project, you will create a photo/fiction, basically a series of visual images and text that tells a story inspired by the works we've been reading. The parameters for this assignment will be fairly wide open, however you will need to write a short artist's statement analyzing your own work—explaining how your project addresses issues we've been discussing and drawing connections to one or more texts from the course. While I encourage the use of collage and “found art” (magazine clippings, etc.), make sure that your project is made up of at least some (if not all) *original* work (i.e. your *own* photography, text, etc.). You are welcome to make this project digital (with computer slides, Powerpoint, etc.) or feel free to play around with incorporating some other artistic media (painting, Polaroid transfers, etc.). You are also invited to collaborate on this project. More details, including question/topic suggestions, will be announced well in advance of the due date, and we'll look at some examples in class before you begin working on this project. A 1-paragraph proposal or summary of your midterm project will be due on Sep. 30. The Midterm project itself will be due on Oct. 7.

• **Final Project.** The goal of your final project is to investigate one of the important subjects of this course. There will be two components of the final project: a creative component and an analytical component. The degree to which these two elements overlap is up to you.

The creative component can take any of a number of forms, including but not limited to fiction, film, video, photography, Powerpoint, painting, sculpture, poetry, screenplay, etc. The idea here is for you to *do* a bit of creative work yourself, investigating one or more of the subjects of the course, using whatever style/form/medium *you* find best suited to the task. For example, you might address ideas from the course through a series of still photographs accompanied by written captions. Or, you might write a short story that explores or complicates one of the subjects that arises in our discussion. We'll consider more examples together as the semester proceeds.

The other component of the final project will be an analytical paper. The length of this paper depends on the nature of your creative work. For example, if you do an elaborate creative project, you might write a short artist's statement, discussing connections between your creative work and one or more of the texts we've read. On the other hand, you might write a longer analytical paper about a particular text (or film we've watched), accompanied by a more simple creative project that helps illustrate your points.

Feel free to develop your project from one of your shorter papers or e-mail responses, broadening its scope or reinventing it in some significant way. You may also collaborate on this project with someone, if you'd like. A 1-page proposal or summary of your final project will be due on Nov. 21, so it is best to start thinking about and planning your project as early as possible. The final project is due on Dec. 7. The final project takes the place of a final exam.

A Note on Grading: While you will be receiving a grade at the end of the semester, I will not be putting grades on individual assignments, but rather questions and comments that truly *engage* with your work rather than simply *evaluate* it. Throughout the semester, you will also be responding to your own work in a similar fashion. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you are *expected* to. I hope that this process will give you (and me) a partial liberation from letter grades, but if it ends up causing more anxiety than it alleviates, feel free to see me at any point to confer about your performance in the course to date. If you are worried about your grade in the class, your best strategy should be to attend class, join the discussions, do the reading, and complete all assignments.

Collaboration: I encourage collaboration on midterm and final projects. If you'd like to work with someone on either, just chat with me about your plan in advance.

Plagiarism: First, I will say that if you are unable to complete an assignment for any reason, it is in your best interest to discuss the situation with me. Authorship is a hotly contested topic in the academy. At what point do we *own* the words that we say and write? Is it possible to *own* an image? Among authors and filmmakers, creative influence, collaboration, and a certain amount of borrowing are acceptable (even encouraged). So, what sort of statement or warning about plagiarism would be appropriate in this class? Let me go out on a limb and say this: in this class, I encourage you to borrow ideas (from me, from the authors we read, from the films we watch, from your classmates). However, even more, I encourage you to really make them your own—by playing, manipulating, applying, and otherwise turning them on their head. In the end, it's just downright boring to rest on the laurels of others. It's altogether more daring (and, frankly, more fun) to invent something new yourself—a new idea, a new way of thinking, a new claim, a new image. This doesn't give you license to copy something in its entirety and slap your name on it. That's just stealing. Instead, think very self-consciously about the way that you are influenced by your sources—by

the way knowledge and creativity depend on a sort of inheritance. And think also about the real responsibility you have to those sources.

Please Note: If you have specific physical, psychological, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. If you have questions or concerns, you can also contact the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671). Also, please let me know if the observance of religious holidays conflicts in any way with class assignments, attendance, etc., and I will make appropriate accommodations.

## I. The Evolution of the Gothic Tradition – The 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### Week 1

E-mail Response: Not Required.

Aug. 22: Introduction

Aug. 24: Emily Dickinson Poetry (Handout – Click [here](#) to access the assigned poems via the Web)  
**Worksheet #1 Due**

Aug. 26: Charles Brockden Brown, “from *Wieland, or The Transformation*” (AGT, pp. 10-18)  
Washington Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (AGT, pp. 19-44)  
(Optional): “Introduction” (AGT, pp. 1-9)  
**Worksheet #2 Due**

### Week 2

E-mail Response: TBA

Aug. 29: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Man of Adamant” and “Young Goodman Brown” (AGT, pp. 45-64)

Aug. 31: Herman Melville, “The Tartarus of Maids” (AGT, pp. 65-77)  
Ambrose Bierce, “The Damned Thing” (AGT, pp. 121-128)

Sep. 2: Edgar Allan Poe, “To Helen” (pp. 19)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “The City in the Sea” (pp. 22-23)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven” (pp. 29-33)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “Annabel Lee” (pp. 42-43)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “The Bells” (pp. 44-47)

### Week 3

E-mail Response: TBA

Sep. 5: NO CLASS

Sep. 7: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (pp. 90-109)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “The Oval Portrait” (pp. 201-204)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death” (pp. 205-211)

Sep. 9: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Pit and the Pendulum” (pp. 212-227)

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Black Cat" (pp. 271-280)  
**Short Paper #1 Due**

**Week 4**

E-mail Response: TBA

Sep. 12: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (*AGT*, pp. 87-102)

Sep. 14: Edith Wharton, "Afterward" (*AGT*, pp. 129-156)

Sep. 16: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (pp. 22-55)

**Week 5**

E-mail Response: TBA

Sep. 19: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (pp. 55-95)

Sep. 21: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (pp. 95-120)

Sep. 23: Film: Alejandro Amenabar, *The Others*

## **II. The Evolution of the Gothic Tradition – The 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Week 6**

E-mail Response: TBA

Sep. 26: H. P. Lovecraft, "The Outsider" (pp. 1-6)  
H. P. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls" (pp. 14-29)

Sep. 28: H. P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu" (pp. 52-76)  
H. P. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space" (pp. 77-100)

Sep. 30: H. P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (pp. 222-274)  
**Midterm Project Proposal Due**

**Week 7**

E-mail Response: TBA

Oct. 3: William Faulkner, "A Rose For Emily" (*AGT*, pp. 182-190)  
Shirley Jackson, "The Lovely House" (*AGT*, pp. 204-225)

Oct. 5: Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/goodman.html>)  
Joyce Carol Oates, "The Temple" (*AGT*, pp. 346-348)

Oct. 7: **Midterm Project Due**

**Week 8**

E-mail Response: TBA

Oct. 10: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 3-59)

Oct. 12: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 60-124)

Oct. 14: NO CLASS

**Week 9**

E-mail Response: TBA

Oct. 17: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 125-187)

Oct. 19: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 188-247)

Oct. 21: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 248-324)

### III. The Gothic / Horror Film

#### Week 10

E-mail Response: TBA

Oct. 24: Mary Roach, From *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* ([.pdf](#))

Oct. 26: Film: George Romero, *Night of the Living Dead*  
**Short Paper #2 Due – If you choose to write on *Night of the Living Dead***

Oct. 28: Film: George Romero, *Night of the Living Dead*

#### Week 11

E-mail Response: TBA

Oct. 31: TBA

Nov. 2: Film: John Carpenter, *Halloween*  
**Short Paper #2 Due – If you choose to write on *Halloween***

Nov. 4: Film: Ridley Scott, *Alien*  
**Short Paper #2 Due – If you choose to write on *Alien***

### IV. The Techno-Gothic

#### Week 12

E-mail Response: TBA

Nov. 7: Ursula K. Le Guin, “Schrodinger’s Cat” (*AGT*, pp. 304-311)  
Ray Bradbury, “The Veldt” (*AGT*, pp. 264-277)

Nov. 9: Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (pp. 3-68)

Nov. 11: Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (pp. 69-144)

#### Week 13

E-mail Response: TBA

Nov. 14: Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (pp. 145-202)

Nov. 16: Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (pp. 203-244)

Nov. 18: Film: Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*

### V. The New Gothic

#### Week 14

E-mail Response: TBA

Nov. 21: Anne Rice, “Freniere” (*AGT*, pp. 349-357)

Stephen King, "The Reach" (*AGT*, pp. 378-397)  
**Final Paper/Project Proposal Due**

Nov. 23: NO CLASS

Nov. 25: NO CLASS

**Week 15**

E-mail Response: TBA

Nov. 28: Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale, *Batman: Dark Victory* (pp. 6-186)

Nov. 30: Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale, *Batman: Dark Victory* (pp. 189-388)

Dec. 2: Film: Richard Kelly, *Donnie Darko*

**Week 16**

E-mail Response: Not Required

Dec. 5: Film: Richard Kelly, *Donnie Darko*

Dec. 7: **Final Paper/Project Due**