

Haunted Rooms

Gothic and Horror Short Fiction

Primary Instructor: Alexia Mandla Ainsworth (she/her, please address me as Alexia)
English Undergraduate Course



Course Description:

Gothic and horror novels, for the reader, each conjure up images of ghosts, monsters, and, centrally, haunted houses. Less attention has been paid to the smaller corners and crevices in which these haunting texts have often made their homes: short fiction. How can these texts create atmospheres of terror and tension so quickly? And, what tropes and biases do these stories often rely upon as a kind of shorthand to create discomfort? This class will explore not only Gothic and horror short fiction, but also the monsters that lurk behind partially closed doors. Primary texts will include works by Mary Shelley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, H.P. Lovecraft, John Polidori, Flannery O'Connor, Stephen King, and others. Centrally, considerations of the abject, orientalism, and who is painted into the role of the Other in tales of terror will underpin the discussions in this course, shining a light onto the systems and individually-perpetuated harms that re-haunt the Gothic.

Course Texts:

All course texts, unless otherwise indicated, will be accessible via Canvas.

Two longer texts will be assigned. These texts available for purchase / at the library, but will also be available via Canvas:

Carmilla by Sheridan Le Fanu

The Vampyre by John Polidori

Course Objectives/Learning Goals:

This course can serve you in terms of both content knowledge and skill acquisition.

Learning Goals – Content

- Ability to discuss the evolution of horror writing and tropes from the eighteenth century to today.
- Familiarity with the genres of Gothic and horror writing.
- Familiarity with the form of the short story.
- Ability to identify and discuss the influence of biases (such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, ageism, classism, etc.) and systemic issues on how we conceive of “monsters” or “the Other” in literature.
- Ability to analyze the writing techniques used in short stories that create atmospheres conducive to horror fiction.

Learning Goals – Skills

- Recognition of your role within a classroom as an active participant in meaning-making.
- Ability to advocate for yourself through office hours appointments or through emails to the instructor regarding assignments and texts.
- Creation of focused and sustained conversation on a particular subject through instructive presentation and open-ended questions that encourage a variety of different engagements.
- Ability to analyze how different texts work in relation to one another, and how individual texts’ character-systems and narrative structures function internally.
- Ability to critically engage with a text through careful and considered reading, and to then communicate that engagement through essays.

Assignments / Grading:

10% - Office Hours Sign-Up. It is important for you to attend my office hours to clarify any of your course questions, but I would also like for you to have an opportunity to speak with me more about why you are interested in this topic and how you can leverage what you learn in my class elsewhere. Please sign up for at least one office hours appointment with me to receive credit for this assignment.

15% - Attendance and Participation. As this course will move through texts quickly, it is important that you arrive to class prepared to discuss the readings deeply. This can include taking notes in advance of passages that you found striking or questionable, formulating discussion questions, or highlighting a recurring image or aesthetic choice that has appeared in multiple works. If there is a conversational lull, these are great things to bring into the discussion with your peers; seeing how others respond to the texts will allow us to examine the structures of bias or the social issues that are at play. If you plan to be absent, you will be asked to send some thoughts about the text to me *before* the class period has commenced. **Up to three**

absences, with accompanying thoughts about the text, will be allowed before your grade is affected.

20% - Lead Two Discussions. You will be asked to engage in either a close reading of a passage *or* a historical/social analysis of the context of a work. This will require you to speak (either scripted or extemporaneously with notes, up to your preference) for 5-10 minutes on the text we read for that week, and then create a list of 5 questions to lead the class in a discussion based on your short presentation. Sign-ups will go out in Week One.

10% - Close Reading Paper. You will demonstrate the close reading skills we are building via a *strictly one-page* paper on a gothic/horror text of your choice, from within or outside of the course. No secondary sources are permitted.

15% - Research Paper. You will develop and demonstrate your research skills, incorporating secondary sources and broader analysis into your essay writing. 4-6 pages. Prompts and guidelines will be available two weeks before the due date.

30% - Final Paper. You will produce a final paper of 7-10 pages, including at least three secondary sources. Prompts and guidelines will be available three weeks before the due date.

Policies and Other Information:

Content Warning – Students in this class will study a series of horror texts in their original historical context. Some of these texts will be shocking or upsetting. The fact that a reading is on the syllabus does not mean that I, as your instructor, share the views stated or implied by that reading. The fact that you, as students, study and learn from the material does not mean that you should endorse their perspectives either. All students are encouraged to read all course material critically. In particular, please be aware that most of the texts for this course contain references to the physical and symbolic violence of conquest and colonization, sexual assault, and racial discrimination, along with gruesome and disturbing scenes. Some of the texts and images in this class may be troubling to everyone, but especially to those who are experiencing or have experienced trauma in their lives. *If you are interested in this topic, but do not feel equipped to enroll in an entire course with such a content warning at this time, feel free to email me and I can provide you with a reading list that is somewhat more curated, for you to read on your own time.* As a final note, please be aware of Stanford student resources, such as [community centers](#), [well-being services](#), and [sexual violence support](#).

Technology – You will need to have a device that connects to the internet so that you can access email and Canvas. All course details and materials will be posted on our Canvas course site. Students can borrow equipment and access other learning technology from [the Lathrop Learning Hub](#). For tech support, see [Student Tech Resources and Support](#).

Honor Code – You will be evaluated in this course as an individual and are expected to cite sources and individuals from whom you have learned and borrowed as a display of academic, intellectual, and creative integrity. Failure to do so is a violation of Stanford’s Honor Code and is a serious offense, even when the violation is unintentional. Conduct prohibited by the Honor Code includes all forms of academic dishonesty, among them unpermitted collaboration and representing others’ work as one’s own. Please review [Stanford’s Honor Code](#) and [documentation and citation resources](#) from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking.

ChatGPT – While you are allowed to dialogue with ChatGPT or other generative AI services as a form of brainstorming, you are not permitted to copy text from generative AI services or ask it to generate text for you that you plan to use in class, even in a modified form. Essentially, you should not be using generative AI services to the extent that the text written, had it been found in an academic article, would need to be cited.

Course Privacy Statement – As noted in the university’s [recording and broadcasting courses policy](#), students may not audio or video record class meetings without permission from the instructor (and guest speakers, when applicable). If the instructor grants permission or posts videos herself, students may keep recordings only for personal use and may not post recordings on the Internet or otherwise distribute them. These policies protect the privacy rights of instructors and students, and the intellectual property and other rights of the university. Students who need lectures recorded for the purposes of an academic accommodation should contact the [Office of Accessible Education](#).

Academic Accommodations – Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oe.stanford.edu. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so I may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course. Student athletes who anticipate challenges in being able to participate in class or submit assignments on time should speak to me as soon as possible about available alternatives or allowances.

Campus Resources – I have included links to various campus resources you may find helpful in your journey through Stanford.

- [Writing tutors](#) from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking, to sharpen your essay-writing skills.

- [Academic coaches](#) from the Center for Teaching and Learning, to help you manage your time and work effectively.
- [Study halls](#), organized by the Center for Teaching and Learning, to work and learn in quiet companionship with other students.
- [Study Tips and Tools](#), from the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- [Undergraduate Advising Directors](#), Academic Advising.
- [Well-Being services](#), including [well-being coaches](#), Vaden Health Center.
- [Subject Matter Tutoring](#), Center for Teaching and Learning.
- [Language Conversation Partner Program](#), Center for Teaching and Learning.
- [Tutoring for Student Athletes](#), AARC.
- [Student Tech Resources & Support](#), includes support for personal devices and Stanford services.

Course Schedule / Readings:

Week One:

- Monday: Syllabus Day; Readings from Julia Kristeva, Edward Said, and Jerrold E. Hogle to be read and discussed in-class.
- Wednesday: “The Apparition of Mrs. Veal” by Daniel Defoe; “Sir Bertrand” by Anna Barbauld

Week Two:

- Monday: “Montmorenci, a Fragment” by Nathan Drake; “Raymond; a Fragment” by Juvenis
- Wednesday: “The Vindictive Monk or The Fatal Ring” by Isaac Crookenden; “Priory of St. Clair; OR Spectre of the Murdered Nun” by Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson

Week Three:

- Monday: “The Vampyre” by John Polidori; “The Spectre Bride” by William Harrison Ainsworth
- Wednesday: “The Tapestry Chamber” by Sir Walter Scott; “The Transformation” by Mary Shelley

Week Four:

- Monday: “Berenice” by Edgar Allan Poe; “Ligeia” by Edgar Allan Poe
- Wednesday: “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe; “The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether” by Edgar Allan Poe
- **Friday, 5pm: Close Reading Paper Due**

Week Five:

- Monday: “The Old Nurse's Story” by Elizabeth Gaskell; “Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter” by Sheridan Le Fanu

- Wednesday: “The Body-Snatcher” by Robert Louis Stevenson; “The Death of Halpin Frayser” by Ambrose Bierce; “A Vine on a House” by Ambrose Bierce

Week Six:

- Monday: *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu (this is our longest text for class – start early!)
- Wednesday: “The Yellow Wallpaper and Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; “Canon Alberic's Scrapbook” by M.R. James

Week Seven:

- **Sunday, 5pm: Research Paper Due**
- Monday: “No. 252 Rue M. le Prince” by Ralph Adams Cram; “The Lame Priest” by Susan Morrow Jones
- Wednesday: “Luella Miller” by Mary Wilkins Freeman; “The Room in the Tower” by E.F. Benson

Week Eight:

- Monday: “The Outsider” by H.P. Lovecraft; “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” by Flannery O'Connor
- Wednesday: “Good Country People” by Flannery O'Connor; “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl

Week Nine:

- Monday: “The Possibility of Evil” by Shirley Jackson; “Jerusalem's Lot” by Stephen King
- Wednesday: “SCP-3008”; “SCP-1425”; “The Russian Sleep Experiment”

Week Ten:

- Monday: “BnB in Bloem” by Mohale Mashigo; “Ghost Strain N” by Mohale Mashigo
- Wednesday: “The Boy Who Cried Hanged Man” by Juyla Ou; “Dark Home” by Nnedi Okorafor
- **Final Paper Due**