

English 258: American Popular Culture: A History of American Horror
Section 2: CRN 82152. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 2:30-3:20, Clark Hall 317.

Professor Jeff Yeager
Office: Colson Hall G3
E-Mail: jwyeager@mix.wvu.edu

Office Hours:
MWFs 1:30-2:20
and by appointment.

Course Description:

Literary scholars have long distinguished between high art, art that stands out for its own sake, art that exudes genius without needing to pander to the demands of the literary marketplace, and low art, texts that can be either too political, too sensational, or too emotional, art that panders to the masses. In a dichotomy, think Ernest Hemingway as the true artist versus Michael Bay as the director who makes billion dollar earning Transformers movies riddled with explosions. The long tradition of American horror has long been associated with the latter category, resulting in dime novels and a long tradition of cheap B films lacking the big budgets of other films. Despite literary scholars having long ignored American horror, the genre persists, and famous practitioners like Edgar Allan Poe are still read in literature courses. And, despite it all, what scholars have classified as serious literature or works from other genres like detective fiction has long borrowed themes from the horror tradition, including a long fascination with themes like violence, sexuality, and race.

As a class on American Popular Culture, this course will act as a survey of both horror fiction and films from primarily the American tradition, looking at the genre from a big picture view. We will study fiction as varied as the dime magazine stories of H.P. Lovecraft to Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road*. We will look at films as popular with audiences as *The Exorcist* and *The Shining* to cult classics adored by critics but shunned by popular audiences such as *The Thing*. With both literature and film, we will look at texts from a large variety of periods, including the present moment, with an eye toward reading them as literature and figuring out something about American identity along the way. We will ask what scares audiences in any given period, asking questions about these texts concerning issues of race, class, gender, the environment, political ideology, and many more.

Texts

1. *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. G.R. Thompson. New York: Norton, 2004. (I ordered the text for the bookstore. You may read Poe's stories online to save money, or out of your Am. Lit 1 text, if you prefer.)
2. *Tales of H.P. Lovecraft*. Ed. Joyce Carol Oates. New York: Harpercollins, 2004.
3. Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*. 1959. NY: Penguin, 2006.
4. Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 1988.
5. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*. NY: Vintage, 2006.
6. Max Brooks, *World War Z*. NY: Broadway, 2006.
7. Additional Readings on eCampus.
8. Various Films, more details below.

The schedule is subject to change, with reasonable additions or subtractions announced ahead of time. Also please note that we will be reading several works in electronic form that I will post to eCampus—be attentive as to when these readings happen and feel free to bring those readings to class in any way you see fit, whether by printing them or by bringing them in with laptops or tablets. Unless we have to cancel a class, I expect to adhere rigorously to this schedule (alas, we have little choice), by which I mean that we will at least begin the discussion of each work you are to read on the date specified.

A Note on the Reading: please note that the nightly reading load varies. With the more challenging material, I tried to break the reading into twenty or thirty pages. With the novels, I might ask you to read 60-100 pages for a class sitting, depending on the difficulty of the prose. I will often either give a quiz or a short writing assignment to test that the reading has been done. With that said, questions I will give will be oriented more toward broad themes rather than miniscule details. I encourage you to read the longer pieces ahead of time and try to stay on course rather than get behind on the material.
Dictum sapienti sat est!—a word to the wise is sufficient!

A Note on the Films: Two of the main media sources we will cover will be literature and film. You will be responsible for viewing the film before the time a film is scheduled for class. I will work on putting up the films on eReserves so that everyone does not have to pay for them. Beyond that, if you would prefer to watch the films on a TV screen, we'll be watching films for about a month, and a Netflix DVD subscription plan is fairly cheap for two films out at a time to keep up with the place. You can also rent these films from Amazon Prime; some may be available for Netflix or Prime streaming, but the availability of titles on the streaming sites always fluctuates. I plan to have optional film nights after class meetings when we may cover one or two films as well to give everyone a chance to see them on a fairly big screen.

Assignments:

LITERARY ANALYSIS FINAL PROJECT: rather than an exam, I will ask for a final project this semester. It takes two parts: the first will be an abstract where you propose, in one to two pages, the argument you plan to make and the evidence you plan to use to support the argument, along with an annotated bibliography of at least five scholarly sources about your topic.

The second part will be the paper itself, where you will make a unique argument about some aspect of the text or texts you choose through a unique critical perspective. We will work on sharpening our literary analysis skills all throughout the course. At any time, I encourage everyone to run an idea by me if one strikes.

MIDTERM CLOSE READING PAPER: At midterm, I will ask you to take a short passage from one of our literary texts and perform an intensive close reading of the passage and its relationship to the larger whole. An important note: I will allow you to revise this paper for a better grade once you receive it back the first time. More details later!

PREQUEL/SEQUEL/REMAKE EVALUATION: many of the horror films we will watch have become franchises. For this paper, I ask you to look at a particular prequel, sequel, or remake, and evaluate it. What thematic similarities exist between it and the original? What works? What doesn't work? More details later!

SHORT WRITINGS/QUIZZES: We will often begin periods by either writing for about five minutes on some aspect of the day's reading assignment or taking a quiz to test for reading knowledge. If you have read attentively, you will have no trouble with these mini-essays. Unless otherwise announced, these are closed-book assignments. If you miss a short writing or quiz, you may not make it up (except for college-sponsored activity absences), but I will drop two of these when I calculate grades. Failure to get some sort of credit on at least 60 % of these assignments will result in failure of the course.

TWITTER: I have created a Twitter account for our class, called AmHorrorWVU. You will need to follow me. Feel free to create a separate, "school safe" Twitter account for this purpose. For each reading, you will tweet some commentary about what you've read—in 140 characters or less. Feel free to be creative: you can tweet discussion questions, something funny, create memes, or engage in debate with one another: the possibilities are endless and open. Feel free to tweet to the class during discussion as well to make our class an interactive experience (especially if you're shy and feel hesitant about raising your hand.)

To tweet, write your message @AmHorrorWVU. Write your tweet, and once you are satisfied with it, use the hashtag #ENGL258. So, you'd write your tweet @AmHorrorWVU and end it with hashtag #ENGL258. I will count only two tweets per class meeting to make sure everyone stays engaged all throughout the semester, but more than two a day are welcome for overall participation if not the tweet count. Tweets will be graded as follows: 30+ Tweets=A, 24-27 Tweets=B, 21-23 Tweets=C, 18-20 Tweets=D, Less than 18 Tweets=F.

Grades: Grades will be calculated as follows: Midterm Close Reading, 15%; Final Project, 25%; Proposal for Final Project, 5%; Quizzes/Short Writes, 20%; Participation 10%; Sequel/Prequel Evaluation, 15%, and Twitter Participation 10%. I anticipate that 90-100 will be an A; 80-89.9 a B; 70-79.9 a C; and beyond that all is darkness.

Midterm Literary Close Reading Paper (3-5 pages): 15%

Sequel/Prequel Evaluation Paper (3-5 pages): 15%

Literary Analysis Final Project (5% of which is the Proposal/Annotated Bibliography) (6-7 pages): 30%

Reading Quizzes/Short Writes: 20%

Participation: 10%

Twitter Participation: 10%

Course Policies:

Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism: Plagiarism is described in the student handbook. I have a particular set of skills, skills which make me a nightmare for plagiarists. I have a strict Zero Tolerance policy for plagiarists, no matter how low the stakes of any particular assignment. If you plagiarize accidentally, it might be forgiven once. If you plagiarize purposefully, I will not hesitate to file sanctions up to an unforgivable F for the course. The

same can be said about any other sort of cheating, including on quizzes.

Attendance: Because our class sessions are short, I will not take attendance; however, you are expected to attend all class meetings. Something you need to be familiar with will be discussed each day, and if you miss it, there will be a hole in your education. To hold you accountable for attendance and doing the readings, I will offer either a random quiz or short writing periodically that cannot be made up later. As far as tardies go, please be courteous and don't disrupt the class if you come in late. Please don't be disruptfully late either: as in showing up twenty minutes into the class or more.

E-Mail: my e-mail is listed. It's not necessary to e-mail me if you miss class, as I will drop the two lowest grades in case you miss a quiz. If you have questions relating to anything not on the syllabus, feel free.

Office Hours: I will be in my office for about a hour before class each day. If you're having difficulty with the readings or would like to come by and chat about anything, feel free. My office is in Colson G3, right across the street from our classroom in Clark.

Participation: Except for a few brief points in which I lecture to establish historical context, this will be a discussion class in which my role will be to facilitate conversation. This class will not be a lecture class where I will give a Powerpoint or write key notes for you to memorize for a test; rather, I hope that we will all learn something by reading the text and discussing it as a collective class. I want everyone to think about the material, not regurgitate it. Thus, the success or failure of the class largely depends on everyone reading and participating. For this reason, participation will figure importantly in your grade.

Social Justice: be adults. I will have a Zero Tolerance Policy for disparaging remarks on race, gender, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, or appearance.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented learning disability, a serious hearing or vision problem, or any other special need that might affect your performance and participation in class, please inform me. Also, please be aware of the support services available to you through the Office of Accessibility Services in Suite 250 at 1085 VanVoorhis Rd (beside Applebee's and across from the Mountaineer Station transportation center). The phone number is 304-293-6700, and email is access2@mail.wvu.edu. Access the website at <http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>.

Technology: I encourage you to bring readings on laptops or tablets, especially on eCampus reading days. Taking notes on them is fine, but know that I frequently walk around the room and can tell if you're listening to the conversation or not. I encourage you to use our class Twitter to make our classroom interactive, especially if you're shy to raise your hand, to help your participation grade. I am not even banning cell phones for this class, so long as you're using them for classroom purposes. If your device is becoming distracting because you are using them for lamentable ends, I reserve the right to tell you to put it away and then dock participation.

University Counseling Services: The Carruth Center provides resources to help manage stress, improve relationships, make healthy lifestyle choices, and face new challenges and transitions. The Center is in the newly constructed Health and Education Building, 390 Birch Street, located on the Evansdale campus adjacent to the Student Recreation Center. Its website is <http://well.wvu.edu/ccpps>, and its phone number (answered 24 hours) is 304-293-4431.

Schedule of Readings for each Class:

*Subject to Change According to Progress

Part 1: Early American Horror Writers & Psychological Horror

M Aug 17: Syllabus discussion, course policies, Lecture: American Horror vs. British Horror

W Aug 19: READ: Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (**eCampus**)

F Aug 21: Poe, "The Man in the Crowd" (232-39); "The Black Cat" (348-55); "The Imp of the Perverse" (401-407)

M Aug 24: Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" & "William Wilson" (199-216)

W Aug 26: Poe, "The Masque of the Red Death" & "The Pit and the Pendulum" (299-316); "The Cask of Amontillado" (415-21)

F Aug 28: Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"; "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" (**eCampus**)

M Aug 31: Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*, Chs. 1-3 (1-67)

W Sept. 2: Jackson, *Haunting*, Chs. 4-5 (68-120)

F Sept 4: Jackson, *Haunting*, Chs. 6-9 (121-82)

M Sept 7: Labor Day: No Class!!!

Part 2: Lovecraft & The Cthuhlu Mythos

W Sept 9: Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthuhlu" (52-76)

F Sept 11: Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror" (101-36)

M Sept 14: Lovecraft, "At the Mountains of Madness" sections 1-5 (137-79)

W Sept 16: "Mountains of Madness" VI-XII (179-222)

F Sept 18: Lovecraft, "Shadow Over Innsmouth" (222-74)

Part 3: Late 19th. Early 20th Century Examples:

M Sept 21: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (eCampus)

W Sept 23: Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" & Steinbeck, "The Snake" (eCampus)

F Sept 25: O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (eCampus)

Part 4: American Horror, 1960-Present: Films with Literary Interludes

M Sept 28: READ: "How to Write about Film" & Lecture (eCampus)

W Sept 30: Film: *Psycho* (1960)

F Oct 2: Film: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) **MIDTERM PAPER DUE!!!**

M Oct 5: Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*, Chs. 1-15 (1-111)

W Oct 7: Harris, *Silence*, Chs. 16-30 (112-191)

F Oct 9: Harris, *Silence*, Chs. 31-45 (191-281)

M Oct 12: **Fall Break: No Class!**

W Oct 14: Harris, *Silence*, Chs. 46-61 (281-367)

F Oct 16: Film: *Silence of the Lambs* (1993)

M Oct 19: Film: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

W Oct 21: Film: *The Exorcist* (1973)

F Oct 23: Film: *Alien* (1978)

M Oct 26: Film: *The Lost Boys* (1987)

W Oct 28: Film: *The Shining* (1980)

F Oct 30: Film: John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978)

M Nov 2: Film: *The Evil Dead* (1981)

W Nov 4 Film: *The Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn* (1987)

F Nov 6: Film: John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982)

M Nov 9: Film: *The Babadook* (2014)

W Nov 11: Film: *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012)

F Nov 13: Film: *It Follows* (2015) **PAPER PROPOSAL W/ ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE BY 5 PM on eCampus!!!**

Part V: Post-Apocalyptic Narratives:

M Nov 16: Brooks, *World War Z*, "Introduction" to "The Great Panic" (1-131)

W Nov 18: Brooks, *World War Z*, "Turning the Tide" and "Home Front USA" (132-230)

F Nov 20: Brooks, *World War Z*, "Around the World, and Above" (231-331)

SEQUEL/PREQUEL/REMAKE PAPER DUE BY 5 PM on eCampus!!

Nov 23-27: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Week!

M Nov 30: READ: Brooks, *World War Z*, "Total War" to "Goodbyes" (332-419); **McCarthy**, *The Road* (3-79)

W Dec 2: READ: McCarthy, *The Road* (80-156)

F Dec 4: McCarthy, *The Road* (156-221)

M Dec 7: McCarthy, *The Road* (221-87); SEI Distribution

W Dec 9: FINAL PAPER DUE BY 11:59 PM on eCampus