

# English 159—American Gothic Fiction, Summer Session II 2024



**Professor Niles Tomlinson**

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**Day/Time: 1:10-3:05 MTWR**

**Office hrs: MW 3:05-4:00 and by appt**

In this course we will explore the haunted houses and woods of the American imagination. Through our study of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-Century American Gothic writers, we will engage the persistent question of why a country that values clarity, freedom, religious purity, inclusion, and progress, produces literature so often characterized by darkness, claustrophobia, madness, monstrosity, and haunting. Specifically, we will look at dialogues between the American dream and madness, between “normal” communities and maniacal individuals, between “The City on the Hill” and the “wilderness” beneath. Then, as we move into the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we will consider what these novels and short stories reveal about alternative narratives (especially narratives of otherness) that confront the dominant story of a “self-evident” culture. Among many questions we will address: What is the relationship between the distinctly interior notion of America as an idea (a dream) and the psychological nightmares expressed in many of these texts? What are the distinct forms of dominant culture paranoia that issue from nature spaces and urban spaces? Why might the American South be a repository for the Gothic and the grotesque?

## **Grades will be determined as follows:**

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| Presentation   | 15% |
| Participation and preparedness   | 20% |
| 5 discussion analyses of class readings  | 20% |
| Midterm paper (3-4 pages)  | 15% |
| Final paper (5-7 pages)  | 30% |
| Grading Scale: 100-92% A; 91-89% A-; 88-87 B+; 86-82% B; 81-79% B-; 78-77% C+; 76-72% C; 71-69% C-; 68-67% D+; 66-60% D; 59% |     |

## **Required Texts**

*Great Tales and Poems*, Edgar Allan Poe

*The Haunting of Hill House*, Shirley Jackson

*Psycho*, Robert Bloch

*Carrie*, Stephen King

## **Participation and Attendance**

Participation is an essential part of this course (and a significant percentage of your final grade), and entails not only showing up to class but also coming prepared.

You get two free absences. At three absences, a student's final participation grade will be lowered by one point, and each subsequent absence will incur the loss of another point. I realize, of course,

that a fully online course during a pandemic needs to offer flexibility since some of you will likely experience technology problems and life issues that may make it difficult for you to fully participate in a synchronous platform at times. I am happy to offer asynchronous participation workarounds (perhaps through added content to the Discussion board) when these issues occur. Just keep me informed so I can set up alternative methods.

### **Paper Formats and Deadlines**

Please share your two assigned essays as Google docs. Use twelve-point Times or Times New Roman fonts. All essays should include your name, the project #, the date, and a title.

### **Discussion Analyses**

The Canvas "Discussions" will be crucial component of your class experience and will offer you opportunities to develop your ideas and improve your argumentative writing skills. Think of this as an opportunity to generate ideas for your papers. You need to compose 5 responses in all and they should be spread out over all 5 weeks. The length of responses should be 300 to 500 words. As one of the goals of this exercise is to create a dialogue between you and your classmates outside of class, you are encouraged to also respond to other analyses that address a common reading.

While your writing style can certainly be less formal than in your essays, you should refrain from merely summarizing—that is, your close-reading should offer interesting, and substantial critical insights into the texts we are discussing in class. How does a particular passage resonate with a larger theme of the work? How does it identify a central tension? What figurative language does your chosen passage employ that serves as a key to unlocking hidden meaning? How does it reflect the concurrent cultural/historical moment? How does it complicate conventional readings of the text?

### **Presentations**

The purpose of these presentations is to provide you with an opportunity to develop a deeper, more expansive understanding of a chosen text and to connect this knowledge to some of the other cultural, scientific, philosophical issues we've been exploring. As a group, you will essentially run the class for 30-50 minutes according to a method that best allows you to communicate this knowledge. You'll want to provide an overview of your material (using Powerpoint, Google Slides, Prezi, etc.) to offer criticism and clarification, but you'll also need to plan a class activity or two that generates dynamic participation among the other students. These activities might include small group discussions, debate, close-reading activities, panel discussions, responses to Youtube clips or audio-recordings, role-playing, mapping, or other imaginative approaches. Inspire us, dazzle us!

The four requirements are: 1) address your given theme; 2) reflect on the primary text we are currently studying; 3) present the arguments of the scholarly article or excerpt that I assign you; 4) make a connection to one additional source which may be another primary source (novel, film, short story, poem, speech, etc.), another secondary (scholarly source), a theoretical/philosophical source, or any kind of source that produces an "a-ha" connection.

### **Sexual Misconduct**

Georgetown University and its faculty and staff are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor or staff member in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty or staff member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator and no action will be taken without the student's awareness. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website:

<https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter>.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services: Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: [sarp@georgetown.edu](mailto:sarp@georgetown.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985

Additional resources are included below:

- Georgetown Self-Care Resource Guide:  
<https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/health-promotion/self-care/>
- Georgetown Wellness Wheel: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/hoya-wellness-wheel/>
- Georgetown Guide to Recognizing Students in Distress:  
<https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/studentoutreach/facultystaffresources/>

## Pregnancy Modifications and Adjustments

Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant students. At any point throughout their pregnancy students may request adjustments/modifications based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication or medical need. Students may also request accommodations following labor and delivery based on a complication or medical need.

To request pregnancy modifications, please complete the [SCS Pregnancy Modification Request Form](https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6): <https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6>

More information about pregnancy modifications can be found on the Title IX Georgetown University Website: <https://titleix.georgetown.edu/title-ix-pregnancy/student-pregnancy/>

## Course Schedule

(All readings marked [pdf] will be available on Canvas under “Files”)

### Week 1

#### **American Gothic Roots—Religion, Science, and the Haunting of “Paradise”**

Mon. July 8: Introductions. Syllabus. Gothic American Gothic images and key concepts. Origins of the American Gothic: English Gothic traditions and Puritanism.

Tues. July 9: Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* selection; Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”, “The Minister’s Black Veil” [all pdfs Canvas]

Wedn. July 10: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat”, “Murders in the Rue Morgue”, “The Masque of the Red Death”

Thurs. July 11: Tom Godwin, “The Cold Equations” [pdf Canvas]; Ray Bradbury, “The Veldt” [pdf Canvas]; **Presentation #1**

### Week 2

#### **Haunted American Houses and Minds**

Mon. July 15: Poe, “Fall of the House of Usher”, “Tell-Tale Heart”; Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts 1-3)

Tues. July 16: Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts. 4-6)

Wedn. July 17: Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chpts. 7-9); **Presentation #2**

Thurs. July 18: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” [pdf Canvas]; Marie Wilkin’s Freeman, “Old Woman Magoun” [pdf Canvas]

### Week 3

Mon. July 22: Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (pp. 1-100)

Tues. July 23: Bloch, *Psycho* (pp. 101-143); **Presentation #3**

#### **African America Gothic and the Haunted American South**

Wedn. July 24: Octavia Butler “Bloodchild” [pdf Canvas]

Thurs. July 25: Film clips from Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*. Midterm paper workshop.

### Week 4

Mon. July 29: William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily”; “Barn Burning” [both pdfs Canvas]

Tues. July 30: Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"; "Good Country People", "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" [all pdfs Canvas]

Wedn. July 31: O'Connor, "The Displaced Person" [pdf Canvas]; **Presentation #4**

**Urban and Suburban Gothic**

Thurs. August 1: H.P. Lovecraft "The Haunter in the Dark" [pdf Canvas]; Thomas Ligotti, "The Last Feast of Harlequin" [pdf Canvas]

**Week 5**

Mon. August 5: Stephen King, *Carrie* (Chpts. 1-7)

Tues. August 6: King, *Carrie* (Chpts. 8-10); **Presentation #5**

Wedn. August 7: Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener" [pdf Canvas]

Thurs. August 8: Paper Workshop. Evaluations.

***Final paper due Sunday August 11 by 5:00 pm (email it to me)***