Theme Course: The Gothic

Giles Whiteley

Whether you're currently binge-watching *Game of Thrones* or *The Walking Dead*, or grew up on a diet of Stephanie Meyer or Sookie Stackhouse, one thing is certain: the genre of the Gothic has come to dominate contemporary popular culture. But what exactly is the Gothic and how has it managed to continually reinvent itself throughout the years? By reading a series of canonical and non-canonical texts and films, this course will follow this history of Gothic literature from its pre-history in Renaissance literature, through to its origin ‘proper’ in Romanticism, its refashioning during the late Victorian period, and its continual reworkings throughout the twentieth century. Through the course, students will gain skills in thinking through the complex relationships between text and context, between literature and history, and develop a subtle critical lexicon drawing on the insights of narratology and psychoanalysis. The Gothic, replete with its focus on death, the supernatural, sex and violence, will be revealed as a genre which constantly puts itself in the service of the contestation of received truths and social conservatism: a radical genre which deconstructs the ideological presuppositions it supposedly reflects.
Course aims

At the end of the course, students should

- have acquired a broad knowledge about and understanding of the gothic as a genre and the characteristics of gothic literature, as represented by the readings for the course.
- have acquired a critical perspective on the analysis of literary texts by reflecting on the literary works in conjunction with historical and critical perspectives encountered during the course.
- have developed his or her ability to present such analyses in written or spoken English, using the appropriate concepts and making the appropriate references.

This is what we aim for. The means for this is conscientious preparation for each seminar, active participation in seminar discussion, focused responses to given assignments, and the independent production of written work.

By conscientious preparation for each seminar, students are expected not only to read and reflect upon the set texts, but to supplement this reading with additional material, such as that listed in the section on ‘Further Reading’ in the Course Bibliography.
Course requirements

To achieve the goals of the course, and be given a passing grade, you will be required to:

- Attend the seminars. That is, attendance is compulsory. Notify the course co-ordinator and the seminar instructor by e-mail ASAP if for some reason you will be/have been absent. For each seminar you miss you will be given an extra assignment to make up for your absence, but you are only allowed to miss two seminars. If you miss more than two seminars you will not be able to receive a grade for the course.

- Prepare for the seminars by reading the assigned texts in a critical and active manner. Ideally, buy (or in the case of handouts, print) a hard copy of the text and annotate it, or annotate it digitally. Also prepare by carrying out any other tasks that you have been assigned.

- Participate actively in class discussion. Come well prepared and be ready to contribute to constructive and critical exchanges. Since at each seminar you will communicate your main findings and questions to others, it is important to be prepared for this task.

- In addition, each student will during the semester be responsible for preparing an introduction to some or all of the set material for one of the seminars. As an additional responsibility, students will be expected to take an active role in leading the discussions during that seminar.

- Write and hand in responses to assignments given by each instructor.

Contact Info

Course co-ordinator: Giles Whiteley. Office: E896. giles.whiteley@english.su.se
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 1st September 13.00-14.00</td>
<td>Introductions: Some Motifs of the Gothic</td>
<td>Freud’s ‘The Uncanny’ (online at: <a href="http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/uncanny.pdf">http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/uncanny.pdf</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 5th September 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>The Gothic before the Gothic</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s Macbeth (1611)</td>
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<td>Monday 12th September 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>Gothic Origins</td>
<td>Selection of poems from the ‘Graveyard School’ (handout); Walpole’s Castle of Otranto (1764)</td>
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<td>Thursday 22nd September 9.00-10.00</td>
<td>Romantic Gothic</td>
<td>Excerpts from Byron’s Manfred (1816-19) (handout); Shelley’s Frankenstein (1811)</td>
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<td>Monday 26th September 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>Fin de siècle Gothic</td>
<td>Extract from Ruskin’s ‘The Nature of the Gothic’ (handout); Baudelaire’s ‘Spleen II’ (handout); Stoker’s Dracula</td>
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<td>Monday 10th October 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>American Gothic</td>
<td>Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ (1839); H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Statement of Randolph Carter’ (1920) and ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ (1928)</td>
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<td>Monday 17th October 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>Modernist Gothic</td>
<td>Blanchot’s Death Sentence (1948)</td>
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<td>Monday 24th October 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>The Gothic and Science Fiction</td>
<td>Herbert’s Dune (1965); Scott’s Alien (1979) (film)</td>
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<td>Monday 7th November 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>Gothic Feminisms</td>
<td>Austen’s Northanger Abbey (1817); Carter’s ‘The Bloody Chamber’ (1979) (handout)</td>
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<td>Monday 21st November 13.00-15.00</td>
<td>Postmodern Gothic</td>
<td>Danielewski’s House of Leaves (2000)</td>
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<td>Monday 5th December 13.00-14.00</td>
<td>Conclusions: Gothic and Ideology</td>
<td>Nolan’s The Dark Knight (2008) (film)</td>
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<td>Friday 9th December 13.30-17.00</td>
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<td>Exam</td>
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Reading Lists

Set Reading:

Please buy the following books in these editions. It will be difficult if we don’t have the same editions of the texts.


You may use another edition of *Macbeth* should you want to, but make sure it has act scene and lines numbers, rather than simply page numbers, so we can easily discuss the text.

In addition, students are also expect to view the following films:


Further Reading:

The best way to fully develop your own critical voice and to experience the pleasures of the literature you are reading is to read widely around the set texts. The following list is not exhaustive, but suggests some valuable texts to help you begin to think through the Gothic.

General works of secondary literature:


**Works on specific set texts:**


**Useful theoretical works:**
Assessment

You will be continually assessed according to your performance in class, and according to the quality of your submitted assignments and performance in the final examination: written assignments (50%), exam (30%), seminar work (20%). The seminar work refers to both the seminar introduction which the student is responsible for producing as part of a group, and the student’s individual engagement and participation during seminar discussions on a regular basis.

Seminar Introductions:

• Each student will be assigned a group which will be responsible for preparing an introduction to the texts covered during an allocated seminar (running from seminars 2-10).
• It should be between 10-15 minutes in length. Do not, under any circumstances, exceed 20 minutes.
• This introduction should introduce both the texts and their contexts and MUST make reference to some form of secondary material on the texts in question from peer-reviewed and scholarly sources (not wikipedia, sparknotes, etc.): for suggestions, see the course Reading List.
• It should use some form of visual aid (handout or powerpoint) and is welcome to also make reference to other texts which deal with similar questions from the period which we have not spoken about, although it by no means needs to.
• Students should also be prepared to take the lead in discussing the texts during this seminar.
• A bullet-pointed version of this introduction (it doesn’t have to be continuous prose), complete with an accurate bibliography listing your sources, must be uploaded on Mondo (Forums), or attached to a post there, so that other students can access it when preparing for writing their essays.

Essay One: due midnight, Monday 3rd October.

• Write an argument essay (an essay arguing a case, driven by a thesis statement) discussing the cultural significance or importance of one or more of the literary texts

so far discussed (so not centred on Freud. although you are welcome to use him as part of your argument).

• You should make clear your understanding of the material so far studied and discussed and show DETAILED knowledge of BOTH the text AND its historical context. Good essays will also show the ability to analyse the text closely for its use of literary devices and explain not only which devices are used by WHY they are used.

• Length: 1750-2000 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography.

• Font: Times New Roman 12. Spacing: 2. Please do add page numbers!

• The essay must be uploaded on Mondo (Assignments) so that you can certify that the text is your own. All essays will be run through the university’s text-matching tool Turnitin to detect potential cutting and pasting from the internet. NO E-MAIL SUBMISSION!!

Essay Two: due date, Friday 2nd December.

• Write an argument essay (an essay arguing a case, driven by a thesis statement) discussing the cultural significance or importance dealing with AT LEAST TWO of the literary texts discussed in the course.

• You should make clear your understanding of the material so far studied and discussed and show DETAILED knowledge of BOTH the text AND its historical context. Good essays will also show the ability to analyse the text closely for its use of literary devices and explain not only which devices are used by WHY they are used.

• Length: 2000-2250 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography.

• Font: Times New Roman 12. Spacing: 2. Please do add page numbers!

• The essay must be uploaded on Mondo (Assignments) so that you can certify that the text is your own. All essays will be run through the university’s text-matching tool Turnitin to detect potential cutting and pasting from the internet. NO E-MAIL SUBMISSION!!

Examination: Friday 9th December, 13.30-16.30.

• The exam will be three hours long.

• Students will be faced with three questions: each question will comprise a passage, approximately 40 lines in length, taken from one of the set texts studied on the
course. Each passage will be accompanied by a leading question, which will identify the author of the text and invite a response.

- Students will choose TWO out of three of the given set texts to write on. Students will be awarded no extra credit for answering on all three passages, and only the first two will be examined.
- Students should write a practical criticism focusing on the language and thematics of the passage and the ways in which it is exemplary of the Gothic.
## Assessment criteria

### OUTSTANDING
For a grade of A the student should …
- Display wide-ranging knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a profound familiarity with the texts we have read.
- Show the ability, in written work and in active class discussion, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works in a manner that is on occasion innovative and often illuminating, consistently deploying appropriate critical concepts in an elegant way.
- Present his/her arguments in a persuasive and coherent manner, in correct, fluent and idiomatic English, in a consistently academic style of writing and spoken delivery.

### EXCELLENT
For a grade of B the student should …
- Display a broad knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a solid familiarity with the texts we have read.
- Show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works in a manner that is on occasion illuminating, with frequent and correct use of appropriate critical concepts.
- Present arguments in a solid and coherent manner, in correct and fluent English, in an academic style of writing and in an acceptably formal register of spoken delivery.

### GOOD
For a grade of C the student should …
- Display considerable knowledge of most of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as an adequate familiarity with the texts we have read.
- Show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works, with at least occasional and correct use of appropriate critical concepts.
- Present arguments in a coherent manner, in adequate English with only minor errors, with only some lapses from an academic style of writing and with a correct and fluent spoken delivery.

### SATISFACTORY
For a grade of D the student should …
- Display basic knowledge of most of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as some familiarity with the texts we have read.
- Show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with some, basic use of appropriate critical concepts.
- Present his/her arguments in a largely coherent manner, in adequate English with only minor errors, in a consistent, formal register of writing and with a largely correct and fluent spoken delivery.

### ADEQUATE
For a grade of E the student should …
- Display basic knowledge of some of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a basic knowledge of some of the elements of plots, characters, settings and narrative structure in most of the texts we have read.
• show some ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with at least a minimal employment of technical terms.
• present his/her arguments in an intelligible manner, in adequate English, in a largely formal register of written or spoken delivery, with some fluency and few errors.

**INADEQUATE**
A grade of F will be set if the student
• fails the attendance requirements or fails to hand in assignments in time.
• shows scant or no knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations; likewise shows very little or no familiarity with the texts we have read.
• fails to reach a satisfactory level of critical analysis in written assignments and in class discussion, a failure that includes inability to properly use critical concepts.
• fails to communicate adequately in English, with many errors and no sense of stylistic register.
   Any of these failures is enough for an overall fail.

**INCOMPLETE**
The Fx grade is set if the student has reached most of the Learning outcomes of the course, but must hand in revised or supplementary material in order to fully meet the requirements.