

Senior Seminar: American Gothic

Professor: Jason Richards
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Course: ENGL 485.01
 Semester: Spring 2010
 Time: MW 3:00-4:15pm
 Room: Barret 216

While America was conceived as a land of hope, light, and liberty, it has its dark side of persecution, brutality, and moral decay. From the horrors of Indian massacre to the Salem Witch Trials to the institution of slavery and beyond, America has all too often fallen short of its ideals. America's troubled past has long furnished writers with material for an extreme literature known as American Gothic, a genre that pulls back the veneer of wholesome society to expose the hypocrisy, corruption, and secrets beneath. Such writing is distinguished from the Gothic literature of Europe, where the genre originates. Though populated by haunted houses and sorrowful landscapes, American Gothic substitutes the mysterious castles and cathedrals, the malevolent aristocrats and lecherous monks of European Gothic with its own cultural phenomena, giving voice to its own nightmares--nightmares that disrupt, mock, and ghost around the American dream.

This course offers an intensive study of some of the finest literature in the American Gothic tradition. Over the semester, we will explore what is distinctively "American" about this genre, absorb its many conventions, and appreciate the Gothic, which has been disparaged as empty and escapist, as a mode of social criticism. The first part of the course will expose you to a variety of literary texts and important critical works within the field of American Gothic studies. In the latter part, you will develop research projects focused on a particular text within the American Gothic tradition.

Course Texts (required in the edition listed)

Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street* (Harvard)
 Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (Penguin)
 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Gold-Bug and Other Tales* (Dover)
 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Penguin)
 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage)
 Joyce Carol Oates, *Zombie* (HarperCollins)

Grade Breakdown

Participation/Professionalism	10%
Short Paper (3-4 pages)	10%
Seminar Paper Proposal (2-3 pages)	10%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Seminar Paper Presentation	10%
Seminar Paper (20-25 pages)	50%

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80; **C+** = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

Evaluation: Papers are evaluated on the following criteria: 1) significance of your thesis; 2) quality and quantity of your textual analysis; 3) quality and quantity of your textual support; 4) quality and quantity of your research (when applicable); 5) clarity, style, focus, specificity, and organization; 6) grammar, spelling, mechanics, and so on; 7) appropriate documentation; 8) strength of your conclusion; 9) overall integrity of your argument.

Participation/Professionalism: While I will often begin class with a lecture, this course relies heavily on discussion. You are expected to have all the readings done for the day they are assigned and come prepared to discuss them, and you must always bring the text(s) we are discussing to class. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Finally, know that a lack of professionalism (e.g., not following course policies, rude behavior, inattentiveness, checking your cell phone, and so on) will negatively affect this portion of your grade.

Short Paper: Using criticism read in class, this paper will analyze how a particular Gothic convention operates in *Edgar Huntly*, our three Poe stories, or *The Scarlet Letter*.

Seminar Paper Proposal: Think of your proposal as a kind of blueprint for the seminar paper. Your proposal should explain your argument; state how you are making an original, scholarly contribution to American Gothic studies; elaborate which primary and secondary sources you plan to use; offer evidence that will support your argument; and, to ensure that you've thought comprehensively about your project, estimate the outcome of your argument.

Annotated Bibliography: For this assignment, you will critically summarize six scholarly sources that will likely appear in your seminar paper. Each entry must be brief but comprehensive and explain how the source will function in your project. **Note:** you must include at least one interlibrary loan for this assignment.

Seminar Paper Presentation: This will be an oral presentation of the final results of your project. Although you will still be in the process of revising your paper, you will have already submitted a complete first draft, and your argument, and all the research that supports it, will be substantially in place.

Senior Seminar Paper: Your final project for the semester is a thoroughly researched paper that offers a fresh, provocative, and original analysis of some Gothic dimension of an American Gothic literary text. While you may work with literature we've read in class, you are welcome to examine a text (provided it falls within the American Gothic tradition) that we have not read. Remember, this is a research paper, which means you must assemble a variety of scholarly perspectives to help build an original, argumentative analysis. **Note:** In the latter part of the semester, you will develop your paper through a series of drafts and workshops. Your final paper grade will, in part, reflect how seriously and energetically you undertake this process.

Mode of Submission: Assignments are due at the beginning of class. All assignments must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins on the top and bottom and 1.25-inch margins on the sides. Please use printer ink that produces a copy dark enough to be easily legible. Place your name, instructor's name, course number, and date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number should appear in the upper right-hand corner of all pages. Do not include a title page. Place your title above the text on page one and double space above and beneath it. Your title should not be underlined. Be sure to staple your assignment. You may lose points for not following these guidelines. **Note: I do not accept assignments by email.**

Late Work: All work must be turned in on time. If you will not be in class when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. A late assignment will lose one percentage point for each day it is late (e.g., 84% becomes 83%, and so on).

Submission of All Work: All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult me.

Attendance: While I expect you to attend every class, you are allowed two absences during the semester. After two absences, every additional absence will lower your final grade by one percentage point (e.g., 80% becomes 79%, and so on). If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course. **Note: If you do miss class, please don't contact me to ask what you missed. Instead, you should exchange contact information with other classmates and ask them what we covered in class.**

Tardiness: Please do not come late to class. Tardiness disrupts the flow of class and distracts other students. If you have a scheduling conflict, you are advised to drop the class. Tardiness will lower your participation grade.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities should meet with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In all cases, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Email Policy: The best way to address questions about our class is by meeting in person. I am always happy to talk with you during my office hours, by appointment, or after class. That said, I am available by email for **simple and succinct** queries. I typically respond to email once a day between 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. If you do need to email, here are some rules to follow:

- Email correspondence should be treated as formal communication
- Email is not the place to discuss grade concerns or negotiate any kind of special request
- Email is not the place to seek feedback on your writing or ideas; that must be done in person
- Do not email at the last minute (e.g., the night before an assignment is due) asking for help
- Do not email with a question that can be answered by our syllabus or College website
- Do not email if you plan to visit during office hours; I'll be there, unless otherwise stated
- Do not email about your absences, unless you are missing two or more classes in a row

Appointments: If you cannot meet with me during my office hours or after class, we can set up an appointment at a time that is mutually convenient. If you need to make an appointment, please plan to do so at least 24 hours in advance.

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1

Jan 13: Introduction to Course; Clips/Discussion: *Nightmare on Elm Street*

Week 2

Jan 18: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: No Classes

Jan 20: Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, Chapters 1-10 (pages 1-103); Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages ix-17)

Week 3

Jan 25: *Edgar Huntly*, Chapters 11-19 (pages 104-94); *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages 17-47)

Jan 27: *Edgar Huntly*, Chapters 20-27 (pages 195-285); *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages 47-68)

Week 4

Feb 1: Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (handout); Poe, "House of Usher"; *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages 69-121)

Feb 3: Poe, "Tell-Tale Heart" and "Black Cat"; Goddu, Introduction to *Gothic America* (handout)

Week 5

Feb 8: Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter*, "Custom House" and Chapters 1-4 (pages 5-70); Savoy, "Rise of American Gothic" (handout)

Feb 10: *Scarlet Letter*, Chapters 5-10 (pages 71-121); *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages 123-41)

Week 6

Feb 15: *Scarlet Letter*, Chapters 11-19 (pages 122-86); *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages 141-74)

Feb 17: *Scarlet Letter*, Chapters 20-24 (pages 187-228); **Short Paper Due**

Week 7

Feb 22: *Beloved*, Pages 1-67; Weissberg, "Gothic Spaces: The Political Aesthetics of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (handout)

Feb 24: *Beloved*, Pages 68-133

Week 8

Mar 1: *Beloved*, Pages 134-235

Mar 3: *Beloved*, Pages 236-324; *Nightmare on Main Street* (pages 174-79); Clips/Discussion:
Jeffrey Dahmer

Week 9

Mar 8: Oates, *Zombie*, Chapters 1-35 (pages 1-104); **Warning:** *Zombie* = Disturbing

Mar 10: *Zombie*, Chapters 36-57 (pages 105-81)

Week 10

Mar 15: Spring Recess

Mar 17: Spring Recess

Week 11

Mar 22: Proposal Workshop; Article Analysis

Mar 24: **Proposal Due**; Proposal Presentations

Week 12

Mar 29: Research Day; Optional Conferences: Office Hours: 2:00-4:15

Mar 31: **Annotated Bibliography Due**

Week 13

Apr 5: **Draft of 5 Pages Due**; Peer Feedback

Apr 7: Research Day; Optional Conferences: Office Hours: 2:00-4:15

Week 14

Apr 12: **Draft of 10 Pages Due**; Peer Feedback

Apr 14: Boyle, "Greasy Lake" (handout)

Week 15

Apr 19: Conferences: Office Hours: 9:00-12:00 and 1:00-4:15

Apr 21: Final Workshop

Apr 23: **Full Draft Due by 3:00pm (leave in my office mailbox)**

Week 16

Apr 26: Seminar Paper Presentations

Apr 28: Seminar Paper Presentations (class will run until 6pm)

Apr 30: **Final Seminar Paper Due by 3:00pm (leave in my office mailbox)**