"'Tis so appalling – it exhilarates"

U.S. Gothic Short Fiction

from Washington Irving to Stephen King

Course number: ENP.01028UB

Room and time: Seminar Room 34.D2 (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor) · Wed, 11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.

UniMeet link: https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/bra-syi-xfj-jcv (in case we need to go online)

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · **Email**: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Office Hours: Thur, 4:00-6:00 p.m. (https://moodle.uni-graz.at/course/view.php?id=24980)

Course tutor: Georg Gruber (georg.gruber@uni-graz.at)

Beschreibung/Description: "'Tis so appalling – it exhilarates." In her famous poem, Emily Dickinson describes how the thrill of horror can be both terrifying and exhilarating. This essence is what was once known as "the literature of terror" and is now referred to as "Gothic." Readers are fascinated by horror texts precisely because they are aware that they are works of fiction and not real life. When a reader immerses themselves in a spooky text by Edgar Allan Poe, they have no reason to fear for their safety.

However, Gothic fiction is also a reflection of our cultural and individual anxieties about the darker aspects of life. By exploring the limits between the familiar and the uncanny, representations of horror can help us understand our fears of the unknown, supernatural, and irrational. Gothic fiction has dealt with the hidden and suppressed aspects of the human psyche since its inception in the 18th century, exploring themes such as victimization, sexuality, loss of identity, and the blurring of boundaries between self and other, reason and madness, civilization and barbarism, and good and evil.

This course will explore classic American horror texts by authors such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Shirley Jackson, Joyce Carol Oates, and Stephen King. Through an analysis of the aesthetic strategies that make Gothic literature such a popular genre, we will investigate the appeal of the thrill of Gothic tales.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forums on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Students will organize *expert sessions* for each meeting, using questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work as didactic tools.

Materials: All relevant texts will be made available in excerpts on Moodle. Be prepared to purchase a few books for further investigation.

Aims: Providing an overview of key texts of American Gothic short fiction from the beginnings until today (with references to their composition, background, and reception).

Assessment:

A.) *Regular attendance* (no more than 2 absences!), **active participation**, and at least **six substantiated entries** in the **Moodle discussion forum (1/3)** (not including your own session);

B.) *Expert Session, Handout,* and *Revised Presentation* (to be held in class and then uploaded onto the Moodle course site in a *revised*, *adapted*, and *extended form*) **(1/3)**;
Important: For the correct mode of citation, follow the style sheet on Moodle.

C.) *2-page research proposal* plus *12-15-page final paper* (5,000 – 6,000 words, including title page, table of contents, and bibliography). Please use templates on Moodle! **(1/3)**.

Note: You need to pass each section to pass the whole course.

A.) REGULAR ATTENDANCE, CLASS, PARTICIPATION, AND MOODLE DISCUSSION FORUM

Regular attendance and *active participation* in class sessions are crucial to the success of the course. *Absences* must be explained in writing, preferably prior to class. No more than two absences are allowed. You are expected to be present in our meetings, not only having read the assigned material, but also prepared to fully engage with the material, ask questions, offer perceptive interpretations, and even argue for your way of reading the text at hand. Note: There might be *pop quizzes* (i.e., unannounced tests at the beginning of a session) to check whether you have read the materials.

You need to *post at least six substantial entries* in the *Moodle discussion forum.* Make sure you are well informed *before* answering the three discussion questions: Read the required text. Conduct some *additional online research* according to your own research interests. When making an entry, refer to useful materials you found on the internet (clips, articles, etc.). Ideally, you will also *respond to other entries* already uploaded by other students.

B.) EXPERT SESSION, REVISED PRESENTATION, AND HANDOUT

As an expert, you will prepare *three short questions* for the discussion forum, focusing on composition, background, and effect in the main text (to be uploaded 6 days in advance), potentially together with links to *clips* or *images*. Show your discussion questions to me 1 week before your session (or send them to me via email)!

In class, you can start with some *essential information* on the topic (look at the keywords on the syllabus first), then pose questions to trigger a *lively discussion*. Choose *examples* related to the topic of the session that you can discuss in class (for example, in group work). Be *interactive*. Show images and clips, launch a game, pick up questions. Do not stick to your schedule *too much*!

Revise, adapt, and extend your PPT carefully after the session (answering all questions brought up in the expert session) and *upload it* together with a *handout* (3 pages) on Moodle *within one week after the session*!

C.) RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND FINAL PAPER

The *research proposal* (2 pages), containing a basic outline for your final paper, is due ==May 31, 2023==. The form for the research proposal is available on Moodle. Fill it out and upload it together with an *editable Google docs version* or *OneDrive version* of that same document in the 'upload section' for research proposals on Moodle. *Insert the link to the Google docs version in the <u>comment function</u> to your post on Moodle. (Do not put it somewhere in the document itself!)*

Important: *Consult the secondary texts on the Moodle website! (Search for your topic under the respective session.)*

The *final paper* (max. 15 pages, including title page, table of contents, and bibliography, 5,000 – 6,000 words) should be uploaded (together with an *editable Google Docs version* or *OneDrive version*) in the respective forum on Moodle.

Important: *Insert the link to the Google docs version in the <u>comment function</u> to your post on Moodle. (Do not put it somewhere in the document itself!)*

The final paper should show your name and email address, the course title, the instructor's name, the date of submission, and the number of words. Primary and secondary sources need to be cited according to the Uni Graz guidelines for style and format. The *deadline* for submission of the final paper is ==Monday, 17 July 2023==. A good paper is a finished paper. There is *no extension* of the deadline.

Important: *<u>Cite all sources according to the Uni Graz guidelines</u> (see style sheet on Moodle). (Do not use APA or other modes of citation.)*

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (15 March):   **Introduction to American Gothic Short Fiction**

Key topics: Definition of Gothic Literature; historical and cultural context of American Gothic short fiction; major themes and motifs in American Gothic short fiction.

Week 2 (22 March):   **Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819)** (reading required)

Session tasks: Analysis of the aesthetic strategies of Gothic fiction; discussion of the representation of the supernatural and the uncanny in the text.

Keywords: American Revolution; Folklore; Headless Horseman; Supernatural.

Week 3 (29 March):   **Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" (1835)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the story's plot, characters, and setting; exploration of the themes of sin, temptation, and corruption; comparison with other works of American Gothic short fiction.

Keywords: Allegory; Faith; Guilt; Hypocrisy; Puritanism; Sin; Temptation; Witchcraft.

Week 4 (19 April):   **Edgar Allan Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the story's plot, characters, and setting; exploration of the themes of torture and confinement; comparison with other works of American Gothic short fiction.

Keywords: Claustrophobia; Darkness; Fear; Imprisonment; Torture; Symbolism.

Week 5 (26 April):   **Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the story's plot, characters, and setting; exploration of the themes of death, illusion, and reality; comparison with other works of American Gothic short fiction.

Keywords: Death; Deception; Illusion; Irony; Nature; Realism; Time; War.

Week 6 (3 May):   **William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (1930)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the representation of madness and the grotesque in the text; discussion of the use of Southern Gothic elements in the story.

Keywords: Decay; Grotesque; Mental Illness; Patriarchy; Old South; Small Town Life; Tradition.

Week 7 (10 May):   **Shirley Jackson, "The Summer People" (1950)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the representation of the supernatural and the uncanny in the text; discussion of Jackson's use of ambiguity and psychological horror.

Keywords: Ambiguity; Class Conflict; Isolation; Psychological Horror; Rural Life; Suspense; Uncanny.

Week 8 (17 May):   **Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the story's plot, characters, and setting; exploration of the themes of morality, religion, and violence; comparison with other Gothic works.

Keywords: Family; Grace; Morality; Religion; Southern Gothic; Violence.

Week 9 (24 May):   **Independent Study Unit**

Session tasks: Students will visit the library, conduct online research, and create their research proposal (due May 31), outlining a clear research question, a well-defined methodology, and their main objectives phrased in a key thesis.

Week 10 (31 May):   **Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (1969)** (required reading)

**DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

Session tasks: Analysis of the story's plot, characters, and setting; exploration of the themes of sexual violence, identity, and power; comparison with other works of American Gothic short fiction.

Keywords: Abduction; Adolescence; Foreshadowing ; Identity; Sexual Violence.

Week 11 (7 June):   **Stephen King, "The Bogeyman" (1973)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the representation of childhood fears and trauma in the text; discussion of King's use of horror tropes and the uncanny; comparison with other works of American Gothic short fiction.

Keywords: Childhood; Horror; Monsters; Supernatural; Trauma; Uncanny.

Week 12 (14 June):   **Cynthia Ozick, "The Shawl" (1980)** (required reading)

Session tasks: Analysis of the story's plot, characters, and setting; exploration of the themes of trauma, survival, and memory; comparison with other works of American Gothic short fiction.

Keywords: Holocaust; Imagery; Memory; Motherhood; Survival; Trauma.

Week 13 (21 June):   **Academic Writing Skills – Preparation of Final Paper**

Session tasks:

- to familiarize students with the key elements of academic writing.

- to discuss research methodology (research questions and design of a key thesis).

- to prepare for the final paper (overview of the requirements, including the topic, word count, and deadline).

Week 14 (28 June):   **Final Paper Workshop**

Session tasks:

- to workshop final papers in small groups (students will receive constructive feedback on their work and identify areas that need improvement).

- to discuss paper structure and content (key elements of a good academic paper will be highlighted: a clear introduction, well-structured body paragraphs, a concise conclusion).
- to provide feedback from peers and instructor.

   Important! *Bring a revised version of your research proposal to this session!*

- Have the following sections of your final paper prepared:
  Working title / Research Questions / Main Thesis

DEADLINE FINAL PAPER: MONDAY, 17 JULY 2023