

Fall/Winter 2019-2020

AP/EN 3330 6.0A (Y)

Haunted America: The Origins of U.S. Terror Fiction and its Legacy

Course Director:

Brett Zimmerman
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Delivery Format:

Seminar

Time:

Fridays 2:30 - 5:30 pm

Description:

This course broadens and deepens students' understanding of American literature and culture by demonstrating how a young nation's early writers took a tired literary genre, terror fiction, and transformed and thereby rejuvenated it by substituting its conventions (props, settings, characters) to reflect the geographical, demographical, and sociological realities of the United States. In other words, Gothic fiction, imported to the New World from Europe around the turn of the nineteenth century, changed in the hands of American authors who knew that some of the paraphernalia of Old World tales of terror—medieval monks; decaying architectural structures such as castles, dungeons, and abbeys; high-born villains, heroes, and maidens; and the Inquisition—were inappropriate in a uniquely American literature. America had no castles, no medieval past, no aristocracy, and no ancient Catholic tradition. In part by following their patriotic impulses, U.S. writers created a new sub-genre of terror fiction.

The condition of America provided its authors with its own sources of terror. Beneath the cosmic optimism of the young republic's citizens was a fear of those races that had been enslaved or dispossessed and partially exterminated by white Americans. Several authors—such as Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Harriet Jacobs, Hannah Crafts, and Richard Wright—document the tensions between black Americans and their white oppressors; while Charles Brockden Brown, Mark Twain, and Ambrose Bierce write of the terrifying continental wilderness by substituting forests, caves, pits, and murdering aboriginals for the castles, dungeons, and villains of European terror fiction. Drawing upon America's Puritan heritage, Nathaniel Hawthorne filled his forest with devils and witches; he also made literary use of the Salem, Massachusetts, witchcraft scare of 1692, as did Arthur Miller. Another subcategory of the tale of terror concerns the psychological, and Poe and Brown drew upon the new science of abnormal Psychology to explore not only external sources of fear but also the dark perversities of the human mind. This impulse was taken up by later U.S. writers including Charlotte Perkins Gilman and, closer to our own time, William Faulkner, Shirley Jackson, and Robert Bloch.

Category:

C

Historical Requirement:

N/A

Requirements:

Participation:	12 %
Attendance:	10 %
JSTOR research assignment:	3 %
First-term test:	20 %
Second-term test:	20 %
First-term essay:	15 %
Second-term essay:	20 %

Reading List:

Bierce, Ambrose. "Chickamauga." (in course kit)
Bierce, Ambrose. "A Tough Tussle." (in course kit)
Brown, Charles Brockden. *Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker.* (Penguin)
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." (in course kit)
Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Alice Doane's Appeal." (in course kit)
Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Young Goodman Brown." (in course kit)
Irving, Washington. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." (in course kit)
Jackson, Shirley. *The Haunting of Hill House.* (Penguin)
Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* (Dover)
Mather, Cotton. *Magnalia Christi Americana.* (selections in course kit)
Mather, Cotton. *On Witchcraft* [selections from *The Wonders of the Invisible World*]. (Dover)
Melville, Herman. "The Apple-Tree Table." (in course kit)
Melville, Herman. "Benito Cereno." (Dover)
Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Black Cat." (in course kit)
Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (in course kit)
Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket.* (Dover)
Rowlandson, Mary. *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration...* (in course kit)
Turner, Nat. "The Confessions of Nat Turner." (in course kit)
Wright, Richard. *Native Son.* 1940. (Harper)
Zimmerman, Brett, ed. *Haunted America: The Origins of U.S. Terror Fiction and its Legacy* (in course kit)

Open To:

Year 3 or 4