

Summer 2020

AP/EN 4573 3.0B (S1)

Victorian Ghosts

Course Director:

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Delivery Format:

Seminar

Time:

Seminar: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-5:30pm

Description:

The course considers the ghost story's tenacious hold on the Victorian popular imagination despite the period's empirical philosophy, growing medical, scientific, and technological knowledge, and devotion to industrialism.

Or was the vogue for these tales not despite, but because of the period's heavy standards of progress and materialism? What did the ghost stories “mean” to Victorian readers? Were they written and read chiefly for the sensations they produced in the reader? Or did different ghost stories mean different things? Indeed, what is a “ghost”? And in any particular narrative is the existence of the “ghost” “real”, “illusory” or “ambiguous”? To consider these qualities we will be focusing on the assigned ghost stories' formal qualities of theme, point of view, and mood and on their mode of publication and their intended audience.

We shall be examining 31 short works from Victorian Britain, beginning with a work from the 1830s and ending with a work from 1900. We shall focus on the ghost story's development within the genre of Gothic fiction and as a distinctive post-Romantic Victorian culture develops in the 1830s and 1840s. Thus the self-conscious relationship of the ghost story to the oral or folk tradition, valued by the Romantics, leads writers of Victorian ghost stories to use narrative strategies that mimic the oral tradition.

We shall consider the genre's persistence through the decades of high Victorianism, its reaction to Victorian imperial endeavours and its efflorescence at the end of the 19th century, parallel to and somewhat part of Decadent culture. Finally, what was the relationship of ghost stories to Victorian realistic fiction as embodied in the period's novels? We shall be considering works by writers who specialized in ghost stories and fantasy but also ghost stories by canonical novelists such as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James.

Category:

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Historical Requirement:

Period II (1700-1900)

Requirements:

2000-word essay (20%); 3500-word essay (36%); simple discussion question (3%); comparison discussion question (5%); discussion forum participation (36%)

Reading List:

selections from Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert, eds. *The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* (Oxford)
Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (Norton Critical)
selections from Vernon Lee, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales* (Broadview)
Pdf file posted on the English 4573 Moodle Website

Open To:

Year 4 Honours