

# American Horror Stories:

## *Fear of the Unknown and the Familiar in American Literature*

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AML2070-0481: MWF Period 6, NRN 0184

**Instructor:** Sarah Kniesler  
**Email:** smkniesl@ufl.edu

**Office:** TUR 4335  
**Office Hours:** M & W Period 5 and by appointment

### Course Description

The recent popularity of FX's *American Horror Story* testifies to America's pervasive fascination with horror. Cycling through familiar horror and/or Gothic themes, the show sensationalizes our fear of the unknown, emphasizing how often that fear is, in all actuality, a fear of the familiar.

What has caused the widespread and long-lasting American fascination with horror? And what does this genre reveal about American cultural anxieties? In this course, we will begin by examining supernatural hauntings, then explore mysteriousness of urban crime, and conclude by analyzing the mind's potential for horror. We will consider how the horror genre has been used to address American circumstances and anxieties such as national sins, capitalism/consumerism, and American masculinity/femininity. Combining these overarching ideas with discussions about the attributes of horror and its affect on readers/viewers, we will analyze the importance of the horror genre to American culture.

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities, and it also contributes 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing.

### Required Texts to Purchase

*(in reading order)*

- Access to a Netflix account
- Jackson, Shirley. *The Haunting of Hill House*. Penguin Classics (ISBN: 0143039989)
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. Harper Perennial. (ISBN: 0062357255)
- Miller, Frank and David Mazzucchelli. *Batman: Year One*. DC Comics (ISBN: 1401207529)
- Highsmith, Patricia. *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. W. W. Norton & Co. (ISBN: 9780393332148)

### Required Texts Available on E-Learning

*(in reading order)*

- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Haunted."
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Giant Wistaria."
- Wharton, Edith. "The Eyes."

- Wharton, Edith. "Afterward."
- Dickinson, Emily. "One need not be a Chamber."
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Gray Champion."
- James, Henry. "The Real Right Thing."
- O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man is Hard to Find."
- Lovecraft, H.P. "The Horror at Red Hook."
- Wright, Richard. "Kitchenette."
- Buntline, Ned. *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*. (excerpts)
- Thompson, George. *City Crimes*. (excerpts)
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Fall of the House of Usher."
- Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily."
- Melville, Herman. "Bartleby the Scrivener."
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper."
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Black Cat."
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Tell-Tale Heart."
- King, Stephen. "The Woman in the Room."

*Additional scholarly criticism or critical theory may be added throughout the course of the semester.*

### Goals

By the end of the semester, you should...

- Gain an appreciation for the literary significance of horror/supernatural fiction and the cultural work done by this genre
- Be able to engage in scholarly conversations about American literature, American culture, and horror/supernatural fiction
- Be able to make historical, literary historical, critical, or theoretical statements about the texts you have read and should be able to support those statements.
- Refine basic writing skills, including drafting, proofreading, editing, and composing a polished final product
- Employ proper MLA documentation requirements

### Grading Scale

This course adheres to [UF grading policies](#). has recently instituted minus grades.

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899
B	3.0	83-86	830-869
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799

C	2.0	73-76	730-769
C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
D	1.0	63-66	630-669
D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
E	0.00	0-59	0-599

### Course Credit Policies

You must pass this course with a “C” or better to satisfy the CLAS requirement for Composition (C) and to receive the 6,000-word University Writing Requirement credit (E6). You must turn in all papers totaling 6,000 words to receive credit for writing 6,000 words.

PLEASE NOTE: a grade of “C-” will not confer credit for the University Writing Requirement or the CLAS Composition (C) requirement.

### Assignments

#### **Critical Reading Responses: 3 entries in total, 500 words each, 20%**

You will engage with a critical question about each of the novels that we read and construct a brief argument in answer to that question. These responses should show that you have read the works assigned and critically analyzed them. In each response, you will cultivate an argument that responds to the prompt provided on Sakai. Five hundred words is a small space in which to make an argument, so have a critical eye toward concision and clarity. These assignments will allow you to receive my feedback on critical interpretation and composition skills.

#### **Textual Analysis: 1,500 words, 20%**

You will construct a formal textual analysis of one of the texts read in Unit One. This assignment will allow you to elaborate on your first critical reading response and/or engage further with a text *or* critical theory you are interested in. This paper will not cite outside research; instead, it should be a detailed close reading of *one* text. Textual analyses (close readings) require the reader/writer to identify the various parts of a text and then to consider how these pieces work together to create a whole text. Your textual analysis will focus on a specific element (character, setting, motif, or conflict) and will use *a few* (2-3) examples of that element to support your argument. Your argument should consider the major themes or overall effect of the text.

#### **Contextual Analysis: 1,500 words, 20%**

You will choose a text or theory from Unit Two and write a contextual analysis. This assignment will allow you to elaborate on your second critical reading response and/or engage further with a text *or* critical theory you are interested in. This paper *must* cite outside research. Contextual analyses work to fully understand a literary text by considering the work’s social, cultural, and/or political contexts. You will create an argument about the relationship between your selected text and its contexts. Some productive questions to initiate your contextual analysis are: How is this text a *product or reflection* of its historical or cultural context? How does the text *comment* upon recent history or *influence* future historical events/inspire social change? Ultimately, you will want to think about whether this text is conservative and confirming the status quo *or* progressive and challenging the status quo. *Avoid basing your entire argument on the author’s biography.*

### **Comparative Analysis: 1,500 words, 20%**

You will compose a detailed comparative argument that engages with a text from Unit Three and a text from Unit One/Two *or* a text from Unit Three and one outside text. If you choose to use an outside text, *I must approve it*. This assignment will allow you to elaborate on your third critical reading response and/or engage further with a text *or* critical theory you are interested in. You are *not* required to include outside research. Comparative analyses require you to compare or contrast the qualities of specific elements in each text. You might want to consider key differences in two texts that are typically thought to be similar or consider important similarities in two texts that appear to be very dissimilar. Be selective about what you include; limit your comparison (or contrast) to the most notable points.

### **Participation: 20%**

Participation includes completing assigned readings, conferences, homework, in-class writing activities, presentations, and discussions. I expect you to come to class prepared to actively participate in class discussions and other in-class activities. This means having completed any reading or homework assigned for that day. Our classroom acts as a safe environment where you can air your opinions and consider those presented by your classmates, so take advantage of this and see how something you are thinking of writing a paper on, for instance, flies in general discussion.

*If something prevents you from actively participating in class, please schedule a conference with me early in the semester to make other arrangements.*

### General Assessment Rubric

Here is the meaning behind the grades I assign to your papers (all papers are graded on a letter scale, not points); you can use these statements to determine how you might work toward a higher grade:

**A-range papers—Insightful:** Your paper is thoughtful, carefully developed, and clearly presented. You demonstrate strong comprehension of the materials under discussion, clear engagement with course themes and contexts, and offer a sustained reading that successfully illuminates the text or texts under discussion. A-range papers are well-organized, well-supported, and well-developed. They are written in an engaging, polished, and clear prose style.

**B-range papers—Proficient:** Your paper is solid, competent, and capable; it would clearly benefit from **either** more complex development, fuller explanation or examples, stronger organization, increased risk-taking (including subtler or more original examples), **or** clearer presentation (structure, prose style, grammar/mechanics).

**C-range papers—Satisfactory:** Your paper is passable, even promising, but has **multiple** key areas that require **considerable** improvement: a more rigorous topic, a stronger thesis, stronger development of ideas, improved focus (in identifying the issue or guiding the reader through your analysis), fuller explanation of examples, increased risk-taking (including subtler or more original examples), **and/or** clearer presentation

(structure, prose style, grammar/mechanics).

**D papers—Poor:** Your paper is not yet adequate. D papers are often off track, superficial, have a non-viable thesis (or struggle to narrow down a viable topic), or they struggle to organize and sustain a persuasive reading in readable prose.

**E papers—Fail:** F papers fail to meet the basic criteria of argument, organization, and mechanics, or they fail to respond in a meaningful way to the assignment, or they contain passages that are plagiarized.

### Course Policies

#### **Attendance**

Attendance is *required*. You are allowed three absences without any direct effect on your grade. Your final grade will drop by 5 points with each subsequent absence after your first three. If you reach six absences, you will automatically fail the course. If you are facing unusual circumstances that affect your ability to abide by these expectations, please schedule a conference with me.

Absences for events and obligations recognized by UF as excused absences are not counted against your attendance record for this course. When possible, please discuss such absences with me *prior* to the date that will be missed. This course complies with [UF's official attendance policies](#).

If you are absent, it is your responsibility to be aware of all due dates/classwork. If absent due to a scheduled event, you are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Tardiness will not be tolerated. Three tardies will be considered as an absence.

#### **Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the [Student Honor Code](#). The Honor Code prohibits and defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism. A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

a.) Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.

b.) Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.

(University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 15 Aug. 2007

<<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>>)

University of Florida students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the entire [Student Honor Code](#).

All the work submitted on Sakai will be passed through Turnitin.com, a website that compares your paper to other papers on the Internet, any published work, and the Internet itself. If you plagiarize, you will be caught, which could result in an automatic E for the assignment, the course, or a disciplinary measure from the university, depending upon the gravity and frequency of the matter.

### **Phones, Computers, etc.**

Out of courtesy for your fellow classmates, and myself, it is expected that you silence your cell phone/other gadgets off before class. If you are using a laptop in class, it should only be used for taking notes.

### **Classroom Civility**

Please keep in mind that you and your classmates come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class.

### **In-Class Work**

You will be expected to work in small groups and participate in group discussions, writing workshops, and other in-class activities. You must be present for all in-class activities to receive credit for them. In-class work cannot be made up. In general, you are expected to contribute constructively to each class session.

### **Paper Maintenance Responsibilities**

You are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the your responsibility to have and to make available this material.

### **Mode of Submission**

All papers will be submitted as MS Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) documents to Sakai **by 12:30PM**. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and pages numbered.

Papers are due at noon. **Late papers will not be accepted.** Failure of technology is not an excuse.

### **Students with Disabilities**

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Should you need any accommodation, contact the Students with Disabilities Office, Peabody 202. That office will provide you with documentation that you will then present to me when requesting accommodation.

### **Harassment**

Students, faculty, and staff are protected under [UF policies](#) that mandate an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment.

### **Grade Appeals**

You may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, Department of English. Appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower grade.

### **Instructor Evaluations**

You are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but you will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available at <http://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

### **\*\*Progress Conferences**

You are required to set up at least two (2) progress conferences with me—the first by February 25<sup>th</sup> and the second by April 8<sup>th</sup>—to discuss the writing assignments you are working on. The conferences will take place in my office preferably during my office hours. It is up to you to schedule your progress conferences by emailing me in advance. **These are required and count towards your Participation grade.**

## Tentative Course Schedule

*Reading is due the day it appears on the calendar.*

*\*\*This calendar **only** contains reading assignments and major deadlines. Additional scholarship will be assigned on an ongoing basis.*

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
<b>Unit One: Hauntings</b>			
Week One (1/5)	<b>No Class</b>	Syllabus	“Haunted”
Week Two (1/12)	“The Giant Wistaria” and “The Eyes”	“Afterward”	<i>American Horror Story: Murder House</i>
Week Three (1/19)	<b>No Class</b>	<i>The Haunting of Hill House</i>	<b>CRR 1 Due</b> <i>The Haunting of Hill House</i>
Week Four (1/26)	<i>The Haunting of Hill House</i>	<i>The Haunting of Hill House</i> and “One need not be a Chamber”	<i>House on Haunted Hill</i>
Week Five (2/2)	<b>Draft Due: Peer Review</b>	“The Gray Champion”	<b>Assignment 1 Due</b> “The Real Right Thing”
<b>Unit Two: Urban Crime</b>			
Week Six (2/9)	“A Good Man is Hard to Find”	“The Horror at Red Hook”	<i>Native Son</i> excerpts
Week Seven (2/16)	<i>Native Son</i> excerpts	<i>Native Son</i> excerpts	“Kitchenette”
Week Eight (2/23)	Excerpts <i>Mysteries and Miseries of New York</i>	Excerpts <i>City Crimes</i>	<b>CRR 2 Due</b> <i>Batman: Year One</i>
Week Nine (3/2)	<b>Spring Break</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>
Week Ten (3/9)	<b>Draft Due: Peer Review</b>	<i>Batman: Year One</i>	<b>Assignment 2 Due</b> <i>Batman</i>
<b>Unit Three: Psychological</b>			
Week Eleven (3/16)	“The Fall of the House of Usher”	“A Rose for Emily”	“Bartleby the Scrivener”
Week Twelve (3/23)	“The Yellow Wallpaper”	“The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”	<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>
Week Thirteen (3/30)	<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>	<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>	<b>CRR 3 Due</b> <b>No Class</b>
Week Fourteen (4/6)	<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>	<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>	<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i> (film)
Week Fifteen (4/13)	“The Woman in the Room”	<i>American Horror Story: Asylum</i>	<i>Psycho</i>
Week Sixteen (4/20)	<b>Draft Due: Peer Review</b>	Course Wrap-up	<b>Assignment 3 Due</b> <b>Reading Day-No Class</b>