

ENG 4936 "The Weird, the Eerie and the Uncanny"

Contemporary Narratives of Horror and Extinction

Section 1275 Class #13005



Instructor Name: Pietro Bianchi

Course meeting times: M,W,F Period 7 (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM) on Zoom (Meeting IDs and passwords on Canvas)

Office Hours: Wednesday morning (10 – noon) or by appointment (Zoom personal ID: 561 851 9876)

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu

Instructor Email: pietrobianchi@ufl.edu

What happens when the world ceases to be perceived as a substance but starts to appear as a shadow? What if another dimension of existence suddenly arises in the texture of reality but is unable to fully disclose? In 1919 Freud referred to this dimension as the *uncanny*: something

that, while being overly familiar, appears as weirdly out of place. Something – Mark Fisher would say almost a century later – that is at the same time frightening and promising another world.

This course will be an overview of the emergence of figures of weird, eerie and uncanny in contemporary imaginary: from David Lynch to *Shirley Jackson*; from the Lovecraftian literature of Thomas Ligotti to contemporary pessimist philosophers like Eugene Thacker. Our guiding question will be: why today it is easier to imagine horrors, supernatural creatures and human extinction instead of revolutionary social transformations?

Course Objectives

Through active and persistent engagement with course materials, activities and discussion in class students will:

- Become familiar with the Freudian concept of the *Unheimlich* (Uncanny) and with its theoretical implications
- Be able to conceptually contextualize the *weird fiction* genre and to reflect on the contemporary philosophical debate that surrounds it
- Develop advanced skills in reading and interpreting works of critical theory, philosophy, and horror fiction.
- Gain knowledge of basic philosophical lexicon and terminology
- Develop a method through which interpret, contextualize and analyze literary texts, films, visual media and art forms.

Required Readings and Materials

Three books will be read in their entirety and will have to be acquired either in paperback or ebook form:

Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (Penguin Classics, 2003 or any other editions)

Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (Repeater Books, 2016)

Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (Penguin Classics, 2006 or any other editions)

I encourage you whenever possible to buy from independent booksellers. If you choose to buy your texts online, I recommend sources such as Abebooks.com and Alibris.com that serve independent booksellers.

All other readings will be available on Canvas and while not being substantial in terms of number of pages they will have to be read and studied thoroughly and with extreme care: they

will be the subject of class assignments, in-class discussions and the three in-class quizzes. Reading will consist in horror and weird fiction short stories and novels, articles or excerpts from theory or philosophy books. There will be weeks in which some of these readings will be highly theoretical and philosophical, and some of them will be considerably challenging: while every reading will be accompanied and thoroughly explained in class, you are expected to come to class prepared and to be able to faithfully summarize the content of every assigned short story, article or book chapter. If you will encounter particular difficulties with the reading, schedule an appointment with me or come to Zoom office hours.

Sometimes films will be assigned to watch before coming to class, and you will be asked to discuss them or give your opinions about them. Films are integral part of the assignment for the class and need to be watched with care and attention (avoiding breaking down the vision in parts, avoiding check the cell phone while watching them, always keep a notebook where to write down your impressions during the viewing etc.). Most of them will be available in streaming formats from the course's electronic reserves (Ares): in the rare case they will not, they can be easily found on all major streaming platforms (Amazon, Netflix, YouTube etc.). If you encounter problems in finding them, you should contact me by email at least 5 days before the assignment is due and I can provide a digital copy. Some films required for this course include scenes of menace, violence, and the deaths of humans and other living beings. Some of the films include nudity and scenes of sexual activity.

Organization of the Class

This is an entirely online class, with a combination of asynchronous and synchronous classes. Most Mondays (always check the schedule!) will be asynchronous: an activity will be posted online on Canvas and sent by email in the morning, and you will be asked to complete it by Midnight of the same day uploading your assignment on Canvas (instructions will follow). Most Wednesdays and Fridays will be synchronous, which means that we will meet on Zoom (IDs and passwords will be available on Canvas) at 1.55pm. Given that this is a discussion-based seminar, it is best practice during synchronous classes to have the camera of your computer turned on for the entirety of the class. If that will not be possible, I encourage you to get in touch with me.

Course Requirements

The requirements for this course fall under four categories:

Attendance and Participation (10%)

The core of this class will be the discussions in Zoom during synchronous classes, where your active participation will not only be graded but will be a fundamental component for the success of the class. I firmly believe that more than an individual performance, a university class is a collective effort to increase the knowledge of everyone and regarding which we should all be

considered responsible. Please be an active participant of this class! Also, be aware that discussions during synchronous classes will often include review of materials not among the assigned texts or films. For these reasons, your presence in class is essential and attendance is mandatory.

No more than three unexcused absences for personal reasons will be tolerated. Each additional unexcused absence will reduce your total final grade by 3 percentage points (for instance, if your final grade is 91% and you have 5 unexcused absences, your final grade will be 85%). **More than 6 unexcused absences will result in the automatic failure of the class.**

For every other absence (for medical reason or family emergencies) you should provide documentation as soon as possible, and make up the material covered in class, which includes viewing films and getting notes from class discussion. Absences for religious reasons do not require written documentation, but students should inform me timely so that they reflect credit for attendance. **I will take attendance at the beginning of class. If you are not there when I call your name, you will be counted as absent. Regarding asynchronous classes, if you will not upload your assignment before the deadline, you will also be counted as absent.**

Requirement for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies>

Posts on Canvas and 2 short introductions to the class discussion (10% + 5% + 5%)

1. Every Wednesday (even though in the first week, it will be on Friday September 4), you will be asked to post a short paragraph (around 150 words) on the Discussion section of Canvas with a short reflection and/or a few questions regarding the reading or the film assigned for the day. The purpose of this assignment is not to test your knowledge (you do not have to summarize the readings!) but ask you to share with the class what you believe are the most interesting problematics and questions that emerge from the texts. This can also have the form of a question or a series of questions. An original post or a response to someone else's post will equally be counted (discussions are encouraged!). The deadline of the posts on Canvas is **Wednesday at 8:00 am** (if you're in late, Canvas will not allow you to upload your post). You have the possibility to skip this assignment once in the semester without penalty. After that, every post uploaded after 8:00am of the due date will not be considered and receive a failed grade.

2. Twice in the semester you will be asked to give a **5 minutes presentation** where you will share your reflections on the assigned reading with the class and open up the discussion with the class. Every Wednesday, after my introduction, class will be opened by two or three of you who will introduce and present the reading (a calendar will be given in the second week).

Short Quizzes (15% + 15% + 15%)

Three times during the semester there will be a short quiz based on three/four open-ended questions that you will be asked to expand and to reflect on. They will cover general topics related to the readings and to the discussions held in class. They will be held on Zoom.

Final Research Essay of 6-7 pages (25%)

The final research paper has to be 6-7 pages long (Times New Roman 12, double-spaced) on a research topic related to the ones covered in class. The paper is a research project, wherein you will have the opportunity to further expand upon, analyze in more detail, or take in new directions the material covered in the seminar. You may want to explore in more depth one of the works we read; make connections between the readings; examine a specific theme or issue that emerges in a number of different works; apply one of the critical approaches; compare and contrast the arguments of different scholars; or try something else altogether. All paper topics must be approved in advance by the instructor (either coming to office hours – which is strongly encouraged – or by email) and submitted before the Thanksgiving break. The essay is due the last day of class.

Evaluation

Evaluation method in this course is consistent with UF's policies on grading

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)

Grades are calculated on a numeric scale, as below:

A 90–100	A- 87–89	
B+ 84–86	B 80–83	B- 77–79
C+ 74–76	C 70–73	C- 67–69
D+ 64–66	D 60–63	D- 57–59

A grade of 56 or below is a failing grade (E). A minimum final grade of C is required for General Education Credit.

Cell phones and Computers

This is an entirely online course. The use of personal computers and other electronic devices in class is acceptable only for purposes related to class discussion and collaboration. Casual web browsing, emailing, chatting, texting, etc. unrelated to class activities will not be tolerated.

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of the intellectual works of others, including published and unpublished material from the web or friends, as well as purchased papers or other research materials. Every form of cheating will result in a letter grade F for this course and in a report of misconduct to the Dean of Students Office.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester and contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Statement on Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sexual, racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination and sexual harassment.

Online Course Evaluation Process

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

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc> and 392-1575

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

Course schedule

Section 1: Introduction

M - August 31 (Synchronous)
Presentation of the course

W - September 2 (Synchronous)
Introduction

F - September 4 (Synchronous)
Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, pp. 8-13
Discussion post #1

M - September 7
Labor Day (no class)

W - September 9 (Synchronous)
Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)
(2 short presentations)
Discussion post #2

F - September 11 (Synchronous)
Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

Section 2: The Uncanny

M - September 14 (Asynchronous)
Freud, *The Uncanny*, Introduction (pp. vii - lx) + Section 1 (pp. 123-134)

W - September 16 (Synchronous)
Freud, *The Uncanny*, Introduction (pp. vii - lx) + Section 1 (pp. 123-134)
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #3

F - September 18 (Synchronous)
Freud, *The Uncanny*, Introduction (pp. vii - lx) + Section 1 (pp. 123-134)
E.T.A. Hoffman, *The Sandman*

M - September 21 (Asynchronous)
Freud, *The Uncanny*, Section 2 and 3 (pp. 135 - 162)

W - September 23 (Synchronous)
Freud, *The Uncanny*, Section 2 and 3 (pp. 135 - 162)
(2 short presentations)
Discussion post #4

F - September 25 (Synchronous)
Freud, *The Uncanny*, Section 2 and 3 (pp. 135 - 162)
Shirley Jackson, *Haunting of Hill House* (Ch. 1,2,3,4)

M - September 28 (Asynchronous)
Shirley Jackson, *Haunting of Hill House* (Ch. 5,6,7,8,9)

W - September 30 (Synchronous)
Shirley Jackson, *Haunting of Hill House* (Ch. 5,6,7,8,9)
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #5

F - October 2 (Synchronous)
Shirley Jackson, *Haunting of Hill House* (Ch. 5,6,7,8,9)

M - October 5 (Asynchronous)
The Innocents (Jack Clayton, 1961)

W - October 7 (Synchronous)
The Innocents (Jack Clayton, 1961)
(2 short presentations)
Discussion post #6

F - October 9 (Synchronous)
Quiz #1

Section 3: The Weird

M - October 12 (Asynchronous)
Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, pp. 14-59.

W - October 14 (Synchronous)

H.P. Lovecraft (*The Call of Cthulhu*, [The Colour Out of Space](#), [The Dunwich Horror](#))
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #7

F - October 16 (Synchronous)
H.P. Lovecraft (*The Call of Cthulhu*, [The Colour Out of Space](#), [The Dunwich Horror](#))

M - October 19 (Asynchronous)
Thomas Ligotti *Autopsy on a Puppet: An Anatomy of the Supernatural*

W - October 21 (Synchronous)
Thomas Ligotti *Autopsy on a Puppet: An Anatomy of the Supernatural*
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #8

F - October 23 (Synchronous)
Thomas Ligotti *Autopsy on a Puppet: An Anatomy of the Supernatural*

M - October 26 (Asynchronous)
Eugene Thacker, *Clouds of Unknowing*
Eugene Thacker, *Nine Disputations on Theology and Horror*

W - October 28 (Synchronous)
Eugene Thacker, *Clouds of Unknowing*
Eugene Thacker, *Nine Disputations on Theology and Horror*
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #9

F - October 30
Quiz #2

M - November 2 (Asynchronous)
Thomas Ligotti (*Vastarien*, *The Clown Puppet*, *The Frolic*, *Purity*, *The Sideshow and Other Stories*)

W - November 4 (Synchronous)
Thomas Ligotti (*Vastarien*, *The Clown Puppet*, *The Frolic*, *Purity*, *The Sideshow and Other Stories*)
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #10

F - November 6 (Synchronous)
Thomas Ligotti (*Vastarien*, *The Clown Puppet*, *The Frolic*, *Purity*, *The Sideshow and Other Stories*)

M - November 9 (Asynchronous)

Ray Brassier, *Foreword* to Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*
Thomas Ligotti *Thinking Horror*

W - November 11
Veterans Day (no class)

F - November 13 (Synchronous)
Ray Brassier, *Foreword* to Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*
Thomas Ligotti *Thinking Horror*

M - November 16 (Asynchronous)
Mullholland Dr. (David Lynch, 2001)

W - November 18 (Synchronous)
Mullholland Dr. (David Lynch, 2001)
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #11

F - November 20 (Synchronous)
Mullholland Dr. (David Lynch, 2001)

Section 4: The Eerie

M - November 23 (Asynchronous)
Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, pp. 60-128.

W - F November 25-27
Thanksgiving Break (no class)

M - November 30 (Asynchronous)
Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir, 1975)

W - December 2 (Synchronous)
Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, pp. 60-128.
(3 short presentations)
Discussion post #12

F - December 4 (Synchronous)
Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir, 1975)

M - December 7 (Synchronous)
Quiz #3

W - December 9 (Synchronous)
Conclusion

Final research paper due