



Film and Television Program

COLLEGE OF ARTS & MEDIA

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **DENVER**

Horror in Western Culture and Cinema FITV 1115

Fall 2018

Instructor's name: Jake Sabot

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Office Hours: by appointment

To schedule an appointment contact me by email

Class meets Mondays 5:00-8:40 pm

Location: Tivoli BLDG 139H

University Course Catalog Description:

This course is designed to analyze the history, practice and creation of the horror film. By examining the horror genre, students analyze how cinema is both a reflection of the time it was produced as well as its impacts on art and society.

Course Description:

"Horror in Western Culture and Cinema" introduces students to the study of horror film – which is far different from merely watching horror films. The course will look at definitions of horror, the characteristics of the genre, the range of subjects addressed by horror films and the meanings of horror films. Both form and "content" are important, and the course will help students develop the analytical tools to study film in a serious way.

Critical thinking – and its expression in speech and writing – are paramount, and will involve seeing the social and cultural implications of the films. The cinematic genre of horror serves a significant social function. Like other genres of film, horror is a social barometer signaling and measuring a range of social and personal anxieties. Horror typically presents taboo or disturbing subject matter, and therefore can be socially revealing in important ways. The course will also look into the social and cultural dimensions of fear and will examine how the experience we label "horror" is socially and culturally determined.

This course will explore the following essential questions:

- what is horror?
- how is horror represented in film?
- what are the personal, social and cultural implications of horror film?
- and ultimately, why do we ‘like’ horror?

This course fulfills the credit towards the **CU Denver Core Curriculum in the Arts Knowledge** category. It was approved by the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee in March, 2015.

Course Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Credits: 3 credit hours

Course Communication:

Email: The instructor will communicate with the class via email. It is the responsibility of students to check their university email accounts regularly.

Canvas: The course Canvas site is available through <https://ucdenver.instructure.com/login>. Updates to the syllabus and other course materials will be posted on Canvas, so please check the website regularly.

Important dates:

Papers due: September 17, October 8, October 29, November 26

Quizzes: We will have short reading quizzes at the beginning of most classes.

Midterm: October 15

Final exam: December 10

Class schedule:

***Note-** the class schedule, including movie selections, is subject to change*

Standing assignment for every class meeting. Know what film(s) the class will screen that night. Know the name of the director, the release date of the film and the two lead actors – commit this information to memory. This information will help us in class discussions.

Week 1) August 20

Screening: [*Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens*](#) (Murnau 1922)

Introduction to the course. What is horror? Beginning the definition.

Essential Questions:

- Why do people watch horror films?
- Why do you like horror films?
- Difference between watching movies and analyzing films

Syllabus and Writing Basics

Reading for next week: Worland pages 1-24- “Undying Monsters”

Week 2) August 27

Scenes from [*Dracula*](#) (Browning 1931)

Screening: [*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*](#) (Mamouljian 1932)

Golden Age of Horror Films . Production Code and the beginnings of Censorship.

The Monster is in all of us

- Jungian Archetypes: The Hero vs The Shadow

Reading for next week: Worland 25-74- “Short History of the horror film to 1945”

Week 3) September 3

-----**Labor Day**-----

Week 4) September 10

Screening: [*Let Me In*](#) (Reeves 2010)

Resurgence of classic horror films and redefining horror monsters. Hammer Films and its importance to the horror film industry.

Home viewing: Any vampire film you want to see.

Paper due next week: Two to three pages. Compare the film you watch out of class to *Nosferatu* and *Let Me In*. How does the meaning of the figure of the vampire differ in each of the films? How and why has the vampire figure evolved? How is each a representation of the era that produced it? Use specific examples from each film.

For all papers in this course, refer to the “[Critical Thinking and Writing Rubric](#)”. It is a crucial

guide for your work. Papers will be submitted to Canvas on or before the due date.

Week 5) September 17

Screening: [*An American Werewolf in London*](#) (Landis 1981)

Evolution of the horror film and the use of (and sometimes reliance on) special effects.

Discuss films watched in the last few weeks:

- What did you watch?
- How were these films similar to and different from the films we have watched so far in this class?
- Do older films “hold up” in comparison to more recent horror films?
 - If so, what about them helps them stand the test of time?

Reading for next week: Worland 76 – 117 – “Horror Film 1945 to the Present”

Week 6) September 24

Scenes from [*Night of the Living Dead*](#) (Romero 1968)

Screening: [*Train to Busan*](#) (Yeon 2016)

Zombies, zombies, everywhere. Special effects and pragmatic aesthetics.

How does humanity rise above the inhumanity of the apocalypse? Or does it?

Reading for next week: Giannetti Chapter 1 “Photography”

Week 7) October 1

Screening: [*Psycho*](#) (Hitchcock 1960)

Alfred Hitchcock and pushing boundaries.

Composition in film and its importance to our reaction to images and the overall films.

- Anticipating the plot, character evolution, and the scares.

Reading for next week: Giannetti Chapter 2 “Mise en Scène”

Paper due next week: Two to three pages. Of the films we have watched so far in class, which villain/shadow is the most effective in terms of scaring the audience? Identify and evaluate what in the film creates and sustains the scares. Does the villain/shadow commit any acts that are taboo to some? Does this affect our judgement of the character? Compare this villain/shadow to what you consider the scariest villain/shadow you have ever seen in a horror film. Isolate and analyze a couple of scenes from the films to examine in detail in order to support your reasoning.

Week 8) October 8

Screening: [*The Conjuring*](#) (Wan 2013)

New Breed of Horror directors. Manipulation of the audience and composition continued

Reading for next week: Giannetti Chapter 3 “Movement”

Week 9) October 15

Screening: [*The Blair Witch Project*](#) (Myrick and Sánchez 1999)

Low budget minimalism. Rise of the found footage film.

Midterm

Reading for next week: Worland 118 – 156 – “Monsters Among us: Cases of Social Acceptance” “Edges of the Horror Film”

Week 10) October 22

Screening: [*The Exorcist*](#) (Friedkin 1973)

Monsters Among us. God save us all.

- Importance of something more powerful than the evil

Reading for next week: Worland Pgs 157 – 193- “Hollywood Expressionism” and “Lewton, Freud, and Suggestive Horror”

Paper due next week: Four to five pages. **Read the chapter from Worland first!** Following the depth of analysis offered in Chapter 6, analyze a horror film of your choosing. Note: do not choose a film we have watched and discussed in class. Make sure you consider aspects beyond the narrative of the story. How are the scenes filmed? Composition? Lighting? Angles? For what purpose? What motifs or symbols are prominent in the film? Contextualize the film in terms of when it was made and evaluate how the film is a reflection of the time period when it was made. Use specific examples from the film to illuminate your thinking.

Week 11) October 29

Screening: [*Alien*](#) (Scott 1979)

A different figure of women in a horror films. Science fiction fantasy vs. personal fantasy. The monster in horror film – one version. Horror film and politics.

Reading for next week: Giannetti Chapter 4 “Editing”

Week 12) November 5

Scenes from: [The Invasion of the Body Snatchers](#) (Siegal 1956)

Screening: [The Thing](#) (Carpenter 1982)

Social Anxieties, the Cold War and modern fears

- Historical context of films

Reading for next week: Worland 194 – 208 “The Age of Anxiety”

Week 13) November 12

Scenes from: [The Texas Chainsaw Massacre](#) (Hooper 1974)

Screening: [Silence of the Lambs](#) (Demme 1991)

Reality based and Psychological horror. Mainstream horror films.

Slasher films- beginnings of the sub-genre that dominated the 80s.

Reading for next week: Giannetti Chapter 5 “Sound”

Paper due after Fall Break: Four to five pages. Discuss at least four films seen in class. The subject of this paper is the *effectiveness* of special effects, not the flash and dazzle, but the effectiveness with respect to creating horror in film. Consider, for instance, the relatively primitive but touching effects in the 1933 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as compared to *An American Werewolf in London*, the advanced monster effects of *Alien*, the transformation of Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*, and the in-camera effects used in *Nosferatu*. What is the value of effects in the films you choose to discuss? What do effects add to (or detract from) the creation of horror? Compare how and why some films avoid special effects. Identify examples of films using presence (threats/violence seen on screen) to create horror, while other films use absence (threats/violence hidden off screen).

Week 14) November 19

-----**Fall Break**-----

Week 15) November 26-- Double Feature Night

Screenings: [Friday the 13th](#) (Cunningham 1981), [Cabin in the Woods](#) (Goddard 2012)

Slasher films continued

Reading for next class: Worland 208 – 242 - “Slaughtering Genre Tradition” and “The Shape of the Slasher Film”

Week 16) December 3

Scenes from: [*Evil Dead II*](#) (Raimi 1987)

Screening: [*Tucker and Dale vs Evil*](#) (Craig 2010)

Combining horror and humor. Connection between the two and why we sometimes need the humor

Reading for next class: Worland 243 – 252 “Slapstick Horror”

Week 17) December 10**Final Exam**

Course Learning Objectives (essential learning outcomes in italics)

A major purpose of this course is for students to develop their skills in critical thinking, which means learning to analyze and synthesize ideas from multiple sources- for example, to express an understanding of a film that incorporates the film itself, analysis of the film's visual dimensions, its genre, outside comment on both the specific film and theory, along with knowledge of the history of the time in which the film is made.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

Identify:

1. Define terms of art specific to the process of filmmaking and storytelling.
2. Describe the basic elements of narrative structure in horror film (as art),
3. Interpret themes and major concepts found in the films presented.

Differentiate:

4. Understand the characteristics of the horror film genre and the elements within,
5. Draw purposeful connections between form (story structure, cinematography), content (characters, script) , and meaning (cultural relevance).

Contextualize:

6. Analyze the impact of venue, presentation, and audience on the experience and interpretation of a the horror film.
7. Understand the historical significance these films represent

Evaluate:

8. Describe, analyze, interpret and judge a film as an art form.
9. Determine how the film(s) reflect or reject the major values or concerns of a historical era or culture.

10. Respond analytically and critically to films.
11. Begin to look at this genre beyond pure entertainment so as to develop critical thinking skills

Create:

12. Written assignments are designed to have students develop a thesis idea and support that idea.

Critical Thinking:

Assignments and assessments will develop the students' abilities in critical thinking and analysis, and will strengthen comprehension and substantive writing about the theory and practice of horror film. Aside from the in-class viewings, students will write five papers throughout the semester (detailed above in weekly calendar). The papers ask questions that require students to analyze the films from a perspective beyond their taste and unconsidered opinions. The instructor will ask students to take into consideration:

- Storytelling techniques (both narrative and cinematic)
- Sociological and cultural events (from both the time the film was produced and the present)
- Societal impacts (both past and present)
- Changing conventions and technologies of the medium
- Styles and construction of visual images

These elements must be well thought out and your writing should have a clear line of thinking that forms coherent and convincing ideas. Students will not review films because understanding is the issue and not taste. One's taste is a minor aspect of one's understanding.

Method of Instruction:

Each class will include screening of both complete films and clips from horror films with historical, stylistic and cultural significance. I will also show interviews with filmmakers and short videos of critics discussing films and film production. Students will be required to think critically (*see above for description of critical thinking*) about these films through discussion and writing assignments. **Education is not a spectator sport**; it is imperative that students engage in the class discussions and put forth their best effort when completing writing assignments. The course will establish that serious film study is more than going to the movies with a friend. Critical analysis, involving examination of the films from all the perspectives mentioned, will be the unquestioned order of the day.

Required Texts:

1) *The Horror Film: An Introduction (New Approaches to Film Genre)* by Rick Worland
Published by Wiley-Blackwell; 1 edition (October 30, 2006).

This book will walk you through the chronology of the horror genre that will coincide with screenings and assignments.

2) Understanding Movies by Louis Giannetti (any edition 8-12)
Published by Prentice Hall (July 1988- January 31, 2010)

This second book will augment the first in that it discusses the art of film in an objective and general way. It is an excellent foundation for students starting to learn about film.

***NOTE-** Please feel free to buy an online or used copy of these texts.

Basic guidelines for the class:

1. Be here and be prepared. It doesn't matter if you've seen the scheduled film before. To study film, one viewing is only a beginning. There may be quizzes at the beginning of the class on information from the previous class, from the readings, or for the scheduled film. **If you miss the class, you may not make up the quiz.** Understand that people who attend class regularly consistently get better grades than people who do not.

2. Be on time. Class starts promptly at 5:00 p.m.

3. Take notes on lectures and films. **Do not take pictures of slides with your phone.** You will be responsible for the material covered in lectures and class discussions. You will also be expected to recall specifics of plot and image in the films. The act of writing is itself a help to your memory, so that you can learn to recall in some detail what happens in the films, and you can discuss specific shots and visual patterns.

4. **Read the syllabus.** Keep track of readings and written work. Know what is due when, and when you walk into class, know what film we're about to see.

5. Respect the class. Turn off your cell phone; don't talk during screenings; do not eat in the classroom; listen when other people speak; commit yourself to learning.

6. Don't be that guy (or girl). Please don't ruin the plot or twist of a film before we have watched it in class. Know which films we will watch in this class and when we will watch them and respect the people in class who have not seen the films.

Guidelines for papers:

We will discuss the specifics for each paper in advance, but here are some essentials to keep in mind:

What you say must be supported. That means you must explain why you say what you say; what is your reason for your statement? What is your evidence? What is your proof? Why is your observation accurate or truthful? Why does it matter? You must use specific examples from the films themselves and from readings and lectures. You may be tired of hearing the phrase "critical thinking," but that is THE crucial skill to gain from an education. It's the ability to synthesize ideas and material, to analyze a situation or a film, to sort out a mass of elements and figure out what it might mean.

Many of us watch movies frequently. By taking this class you indicate that you like to watch films. But this class is not “Wednesday night at the movies.” It’s not like watching a movie with a significant other. For the purposes of film study, personal taste is a minor element. Liking or disliking a film gets in the way of understanding. This course involves taking film seriously as an art and knowing from the outset that film is meaningful and that it’s important.

Here are some other rules to follow:

1. Words banned from all writing assignments: *lifestyle, amazing, cool*. Banned phrases: *In this essay I will..., This essay will..., etc.* In other words, avoid empty, unexamined, careless phrases. You are a college student- please use vocabulary worthy of your education.
2. Please type and double-space your work. 12 point font (Times New Roman or similar).
3. **Proofread.** Spelling and punctuation errors, typos, sloppiness – these mistakes insult your work and result in poor grades.
4. Italicize film and book titles. For first references to a film, include the director’s name and the release date in parenthesis. Use character names, not actors, to refer to characters. For first references include the actor’s name in parenthesis.
5. The general idea is that if you want others to respect your work, you must present it as if you respect it also.
6. The clarity of your writing is crucial. If you don’t say it, it doesn’t get said. Simple declarative sentences have great value. They bring smiles to the faces of your readers.
7. Submit work on time. Late papers will be docked 10% per day.
8. Wikipedia is not an acceptable source of information for this class.
9. Academic honesty: Your work must be your own. I would much rather read a mediocre paper that is all you than a stellar paper that is plagiarized. If you cheat or plagiarize you’ll get an F in the class.
10. **Proper Citations:**
 - First references to films: *Title in italics* (Director release date)
 - EX: *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968)
 - First references to characters: Character name (actor name)
 - EX: Ash Williams (Bruce Campbell)
 - NEVER EVER refer to actors or directors by their first name. EVER.

Grades:

Grades are based on your knowledge and understanding of the material, as well as your ability to express what you know and understand. Merely completing an assignment does not guarantee any particular grade. An “A” indicates a thorough understanding of the material, which enables you to synthesize ideas and imagine/contemplate the next question, the step beyond. A grade of “B” indicates a solid but not spectacular control of the material. A “C” marks the ability to recall basic ideas and information. A “D” marks an inadequate level of recall or understanding, and an “F” comes with less than that.

Attendance is required. You will earn points each class you attend and lose points when you miss.

Class participation is expected and may be a helpful factor when a grade might go either way.

The quizzes and exams will be administered in class (unless otherwise stated) and will cover the material from the readings, discussions and viewings. I may also include quizzes which will be given at the beginning of class time each week. All will consist of short answer and multiple choice questions. Some will also include essay questions. Essay questions will emphasize critical thinking techniques as in the written assignments. Essays will ask students to compare and contrast, identify, or ask to provide extended definitions. These concepts are clarified below in the ‘critical thinking’ portion of the syllabus.

Exams **will be** cumulative and will consist of short answer, multiple choice and essay questions.

Assessment:

Each 2-page paper is worth 45 points, the four-page papers are worth 90 points each.

Small quizzes count for 10 points each (up to 13 total) worth up to 130 points

The mid-term and the final exam are 60 points and 70 points respectively.

That’s a total of 530 points.

Grading Scale:

A	=	94—100
A-	=	90—93
B+	=	88—89
B	=	83—87
B-	=	80—82
C+	=	78—79
C	=	73—77
C-	=	70—72
D+	=	68—69
D	=	63—67
D-	=	60—62
F	=	59 and below

Written Assignments as examples of Critical Thinking

A major component of this class will focus on expanding your writing abilities and your ability to think critically. You’ll notice that roughly 50% of your grade is based on the written

assignments.

Papers assigned in this class will challenge students to think about the films within the context of our culture as well as the genre of horror film. These papers are opportunities for serious critical thinking, analysis and comparison with other films in the genre, and are neither reviews nor statements of taste and opinion. The written assignments require students to support general and theoretical statements with concrete examples from the films and readings. Students will examine the films with an eye to interpreting imagery, metaphor and pertinent social contexts. This methodology will provide a path to understanding the richness, meaning and implications of the films under study.

Students will be asked to regularly a) **define** the historical context from the time the film was released and b) to **compare and contrast** ideas within the film to actual events and representations.

Papers will be graded in within two weeks and comments will be given for each paper. Although, the emphasis is on *quality content*, the presentation cannot be ignored. Poor spelling and grammar does in fact detract from your work. If the paper is not written clearly, its grade will suffer. Also, hand-written papers will not be accepted.

NO writers get by with first drafts. It is expected that you will write, edit, and rewrite your papers.

Extra Credit: You can earn an extra five points per essay if you visit **the Writing Center** with a completed draft. It is not enough to simply bring in notes for your essay- you must have completed a full draft of your paper to the Writing Center in order to be eligible for the extra credit. You can either meet with them in person or make use of their dropbox service. Even if you are a talented and gifted writer, it is always beneficial to have your work looked at by experienced eyes. Use the link below, or search *CU Denver Writing Center*. Located in North Classroom Room 4014, and Campus Village Apartments North 3rd Floor Common room

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/CLAS/Centers/writing/Pages/TheWritingCenter.aspx>

Here are some things the instructor will be looking for when grading your papers.

- Your use of **examples** (such as specific scenes from films) and **comparisons** to demonstrate or “show” how horror works, or was intended to for the time period of the film in question.
- Your representation of the **contradictions** that horror both deals with and generates. We tend to think of things in monothematic ways – as essentially or inherently ‘good’ or ‘evil.’ The real world is much more messy. Students will be challenged to elaborate on how the horror film can be oppressive, scary, enlightening, standardized (and more) all at once?

- Papers will be double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman (or similar) font, one inch margins, and need to meet or exceed (within reason) the length.
- You will also be expected to consider the topics beyond the texts and class discussions. For a list of academic journals, you can go to the Society of Cinema and Media studies. Our library carries some listed here.
http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=resource_journals_af

Applicable Course Notices and Policies:

It is essential that you attend class for the screenings and not just watch them on your own. The discussions following the screenings are crucial to the learning designed in this class. So, if you've seen a film already, or you choose not to attend, this will affect your grade.

Roll will be taken at the end of each class and entered into Canvas. If you are not present when roll is taken, you are marked absent. If you wish to have your absence changed to a "tardy", it is your responsibility to ask me to do so after class. A total of 3 tardies will be considered one missed class.

For each day an assignment is late you will lose a letter grade (A becomes a B, B to C, etc). Missed tests may not be retaken without a doctor's note or some verifiable calamity. Tests will be given via Canvas and you'll have a window of time in which to take this test.
- No work will be accepted after the course has ended.

Use of cell phones and texting is not acceptable. Please turn off your phone during class. If you MUST take a call, please take it out of the class and be sure to have your phone turned to vibrate. If you ignore this, you may be asked to leave that day's class and it will impact the class participation part of your grade.

CU Denver policy on absences.

Attendance is expected and will be taken. Each student will be allowed three excused absences during the semester. Without a doctor's note there are no excused absences beyond this. If you miss more than five classes you may be withdrawn from the course. For university policy on student attendance:

http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/employees/policies/Policies%20Library/OA/StudentAttendance.pdf

If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining notes from classmates. Arriving more than 20 minutes late without approved prior notice constitutes an absence. Similarly, you will be marked absent if you leave early without prior notice.

Content Notification: This class involves a critical exploration of ideas, theories, art-making practices, and art movements that encompass such things as: the human body, sexuality, race, gender, religions, and cultures. This course can touch upon any of the above categories with an expectation that students will be open to viewing and discussing these adult topics with respect to one another. Throughout the course we may be looking at material that has been rated “R” by the MPAA. If you are uncomfortable with this sort of material, please confer with the instructor.

Student with disabilities: If you have not already done so, you will need to contact the Disability Services Office staff for their assistance in formally registering your disability (phone: 303-556-3450, TDD: 303-556-8484) so that appropriate accommodations may be discussed and agreed upon by faculty, staff and student.” The Director of Disability Services is Lisa McGill. Disability office is located in North Classroom Bldg, Suite 2514.

University wide policies that are relevant to the syllabus:

Student Code of Conduct

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/life/services/standards/students/pages/default.aspx>

Accommodations

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/student-services/resources/disability-resources-services/accommodations/Pages/accommodations.aspx>

Academic Freedom

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/policy/pages/academic-Freedom.aspx>

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/anschutz/studentresources/Registrar/StudentServices/FERPA/Pages/default.aspx>

Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/about/departments/HR/HRPoliciesGuidlines/Documents/Nondiscrimination.pdf>
<https://www.cu.edu/sexual-misconduct>

Grade Appeal Policy

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/policy/Documents/Process-for-Grade-Issues.pdf>