

University of North Texas

Spring 2019

MRTS 4530/5430: Gender & Sexuality in the Horror Film

MRTS 184, Tuesdays 5-8:50 pm

Instructor: Dr. Harry M. Benshoff, MRTS 234, email: benshoff@unt.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-5, and by appointment.

www.turnitin.com: Class ID is 20000753; enrollment key is "GSHF"

Teaching Assistant: Blake Wahlert (blakewahlert@my.unt.edu)

From its roots in the gothic novel to the violent excesses of 21st-century "torture porn," the horror film has always been obsessed with issues of sex and death—and frequently sex made deadly through the queering of its circumstances. How and why spectators responded historically (and continue to respond) to such a ghastly array of narrative events and images has frequently been the concern of genre critics. In this class we will examine and attempt to theorize a range of possible spectatorial responses to the genre—from masochistic identification with generic victims, to sadistic investment in the monster's vile deeds—while maintaining a consistent focus on issues of gender and sexuality as they are defined and activated within the genre. This class is also designed to be a historical survey of the American horror film, and the cultural and industrial forces which helped to shape it. Towards that end, the course's required materials will include readings on the cultural history of the American horror film, as well as more theoretical work on gender and sexuality within the genre.

Objectives: Students completing this class will:

- Learn the historical and industrial contexts of the American horror film.
- Explore how various methodologies including psychoanalysis, feminism, and queer theory have been used to study the horror film genre, and how horror impacts "reality."
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills.

Students who are unwilling to explore issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality within an educational framework should consider enrolling in another class.....Any form of academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and possible further sanctions at the university level.....Use of electronic equipment in class is only permitted for note-taking purposes.

Required Readings: (available for purchase at the bookstore and also on reserve at Willis Library)

Harry M. Benshoff, ed., *A Companion to the Horror Film* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014)

Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet* (Manchester UP, 1997)

Barry K. Grant, ed., *The Dread of Difference, Second Edition* (UT Press, 2015 [1996])

Miscellaneous Hand-Outs

Required Work:

Attendance and participation	10%
One midterm examination (in class)	30%
One final examination (in class)	30%
One 8-10 page term paper—OR—3 screening quizzes	30%

Attendance is mandatory, although everyone gets one free unexcused absence. Excused absences are acceptable with extenuating circumstances—talk to me. Each absence after your free one will result in the loss of 1 percentage point from your final grade. For example, missing 6 classes will cause you to lose 5 percentage points (half a letter grade). You do not need to notify me if you miss class, but it is up to you to get the lecture notes from another student, and/or view the assigned film(s), (most of which will be available at the Chilton Media Center within a day or so after the class meeting).

Attendance will be monitored with sign-in sheets; it is each student's responsibility to mark themselves present at the start of each class. Sheets will be available for several minutes into the start of each session, at which point they will be removed. Late arrivals will be marked as absent. It is courteous to other students and the professor to come to class **ON TIME**.

In-class participation will also be used in determining your final grade.

Multiple Choice Exams will be based on lectures, screenings, readings, and discussions. The final will not be cumulative.

The Written Assignment will be a research paper on a related topic (8-10 pages). Details will follow in a separate hand-out. *Late papers will be penalized 2/3 of a letter grade per day.* **You may also opt to take three extra screening quizzes in lieu of the term paper.**

Your Final Grade will thus be based upon two in-class examinations, one written assignment (or three screening quizzes), attendance and participation. **You must complete each of these components in order to pass the class.** Students expecting to do well in this class should **read the assigned materials**, attend and **take notes** on all components of the class, including discussions and screenings. **I can almost guarantee you will not pass this class if you skip the assigned readings and/or continue to miss lectures and screenings.**

Standard UNT Disclaimers:

ODA Statement: The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Acceptable Student Behavior: Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.deanofstudents.unt.edu

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, & Assault: UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. UNT's Dean of Students' website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs: <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources>. Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT's Student Advocate and she can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at 940-565-2648.

Policy on Student Attendance and Religious Holidays: If you plan to miss class due to observance of a religious holiday, notify me in writing by the next class day.

BREAKDOWN BY WEEKS AND CLASS MEETINGS

- 1 (1/15) **Introduction: (Queer) Theories of Horror**
Read: *CHF* Chapters 2 & 3; Hand-Out by Robin Wood
Screen: *THE VVITCH* (2016, dir. Robert Eggers, 92 min.)
- 2 (1/22) **A Pre-History of the Genre; Silent Film Precursors**
Read: *CHF* Chapter 12; *MIC* "Introduction;" *DOD* Chapter 17.
Screen: *DRACULA* (1931, dir. Tod Browning, 75 min.)
- 3 (1/29) **The Classical Hollywood Horror Film, Part One**
Read: *CHF* Chapters 13 & 8; *MIC* Chapter 1; *DOD* Chapter 18
Screen: *WEREWOLF OF LONDON* (1935, dir. Stuart Walker, 75 min.)
- 4 (2/5) **The Classical Hollywood Horror Film, Part Two**
Read: *DOD* Chapters 5 & 16. *CHF* Chapter 5.
Screen: *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935, dir. James Whale 75 min.)
- 5 (2/12) **World War II Horror** *Quiz # 1*
Read: *CHF* Chapter 14; *MIC* Chapter 2; *DOD* Chapter 15.
Screen: *CAT PEOPLE* (1942, dir. Jacques Tourneur, 73 min.)
- 6 (2/19) **1950s Drive-in Horror; The Alien Invasion Film**
Read: *CHF* Chapter 15; *MIC* Chapter 3.
Screen: *I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE* (1958, G. Fowler, 78 m.)
- 7 (2/26) **1960s Monster Culture; AIP and Hammer Lead the Gothic Revival**
Read: *CHF* Chapters 16 & 4.
Screen: *THE INNOCENTS* (1961, dir. Jack Clayton, 100 min.)
- 8 (3/5) **Midterm Exam**
(3/12) *No Class—Spring Break*
- 9 (3/19) **International Horror; Lesbian Vampires & Camp**
Read: *MIC* Chapter 4; *DOD* Chapters 19 & 2.
Screen: *THE BLOOD SPATTERED BRIDE* (1972, dir. Vicente Aranda, 100 min.)
- 10 (3/26) **The Rise of the Realist Horror Film**
Read: *CHF* Chapter 7; *DOD* Chapter 1.
Screen: *PEEPING TOM* (1960, dir. Michael Powell, 101 min.)
- 11 (4/2) **1970s Leftist Horror Auteurs** *Quiz # 2*
Read: *CHF* Chapter 17; *DOD* Chapters 9 & 11.
Screen: *MARTIN* (1977, dir. George Romero, 94 min.)
- 12 (4/9) **Reactionary Horror in the 1980s: The Slasher Film**
Read: *CHF* Chapter 18; *MIC* Chapter 5; *DOD* Chapter 3.
Screen: *SLEEPAWAY CAMP* (1983, dir. Robert Hiltzik, 88 min.)
- 13 (4/16) **Postmodern Body Horror**
Read: *DOD* Chapters 7 & 12.
Screen: *RE-ANIMATOR* (1985, dir. Stuart Gordon, 93 min.)

- 14 (4/23) **Audiences, Cults, and Trash** *Papers Due!*
 Read: *CHF* Chapters 6 & 27; *MIC* "Epilogue."
 Screening: *TROLL 2* (1990, dir. Claudio Fragasso, 95 min.)
- 15 (4/30) **21st Century Trends** *Quiz # 3*
 Read: *CHF* Chapters 19 & 20; *DOD* Chapter 13
 Screen: *HEREDITARY* (2018, dir. Ari Aster, 127 min.)
- 16 (5/7) **Final Examination 5-7 pm**

Time Line:

1870s-1900: Victorian-era gothic novels are popularized: Carmilla (1872), The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1887), The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), Dracula (1897).

1894-1896: Invention of Cinema. Hollywood is founded fifteen years later (1911).

1910s – 1920s: German Expressionist Cinema flourishes; many have horrific or gothic themes.

The 1920s: The Golden Age of Silent Cinema. Films of Lon Chaney, "Old Dark House" thrillers.

1929: Stock Market crash. Great Depression begins and lasts until US entry into WW2.

The 1930s: The form and style of Classical Hollywood Cinema is codified. "Classical Hollywood Horror Films" produced from 1931 to 1936. Universal Studios, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, etc.

1934: The Production Code, written in 1930, is put into effect with the "Seal of Approval" provision. Hollywood horror films are forced to tone down their sex, violence, and "perversity."

1941-1945: US involvement in World War Two. Val Lewton produces psychoanalytic "B" Horror Films at RKO, while Universal mixes and matches its classic monsters.

Late 1940s: Rise of film noir, cinematic realism, and social problem films. Universal's *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN* (1948) uses the classical monsters for comedy.

Early 50s: Red Scare and the Rise of horror-sci-fi hybrid films, AKA alien invasion films.

Late 50s: Rise of youth culture, drive-ins, and rock and roll. Teenage Monster Movies, Hammer Horror films start to arrive in the U.S.

1960: *PSYCHO* and *PEEPING TOM* change horror into something more psychological and realist.

1960s: Rise of the counterculture. "Monster Culture" is popularized. Hammer and AIP Films become increasingly campy. The Production Code is scrapped (1966) and replaced by a ratings system (1968).

1970s: B-movie leftist horror auteurs (Romero, Craven, Hooper, Cohen) vs. A-Hollywood and Satan. Science Fiction, sometimes with horror elements, surpasses the popularity of horror.

1980s: Neo-Conservative and/or reactionary politics and films. AIDS and the rise of the slasher film. Postmodern horror films.

1990s: Postmodern horror continues; self-aware slasher films (*SCREAM* franchise). Big-budgeted Hollywood remakes. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Parodies of recent horror (*SCARY MOVIE* franchise)

2000s: Millennial and post-9/11 Horror. Torture porn, remakes of Japanese horror films and 1970s "classics." Straight-to-video horror for all tastes. Found footage horror. *Paranormal Activities?*

2010s: A new generation of independent "smart horror" films, directors, studios? Female filmmakers bring gender to the foreground.

Screening Quizzes:

- February 12: THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925, dir. Rupert Julian)
 DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1931, dir. Rouben Mamoulian)
 ISLAND OF LOST SOULS (1932, dir. Erle C. Kenton)
 DR. X (1932, Michael Curtiz)
 DRACULA'S DAUGHTER (1936, dir. Lambert Hillyer)
- April 2: CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1957, dir. Terence Fisher)
 HOUSE OF USHER (1960, dir. Roger Corman)
 TARGETS (1968, dir. Peter Bogdanovich)
 ROSEMARY'S BABY (1968, dir. Roman Polanski)
 THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES (1971, dir. Robert Fuest. 94 min.)
- April 30: THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE (1974, dir. Tobe Hooper)
 THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (1975), dir. Jim Sharman)
 HELLRAISER (1987, dir. Clive Barker)
 BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1992, dir. Francis Ford Coppola)
 THE AWAKENING (2011, dir. Nick Murphy, 107 min.)

