

Note to prospective Spring 2019 students: Below is the syllabus for the course **as it was taught last year**. I will be making changes to it before the start of the new semester, but it will likely remain similar to what is below.

Re: Course content

\* Please note that this is a comparative literature course focused on literary/aesthetic representations of haunting. We will be reading between 50-80 pages a week, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to Gothic and Surrealist texts, to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a challenging novel that blends a variety of genres and (post-) modernist techniques.

The course is **\*not\*** focused on the paranormal, horror films, or other forms of the uncanny in contemporary popular culture or social practice.

Re: Enrollment

\*\* If the course is full and you would like to be added to a waitlist, please email me and attend the next class session. If and when spots open up, I will admit new students on a first-come, first-served basis, *provided that those students have attended at least one class session, show a willingness to engage productively with the course material and their classmates, and agree to catch up on any missed work within a reasonable time.*

## **University of Southern California**

**GESM 120 Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry**  
**Section 35353 (Spring 2018)**  
**T/Th 12:30-2:00 in SOS B37**

**Prof. Guilan Siassi**  
**Email: [gsiassi@usc.edu](mailto:gsiassi@usc.edu)**  
**Office: Taper Hall 153**

---

### **The Uncanny and the Otherworldly:** *Ghosts and Haunting in World Literature Across the Ages*

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This seminar centers on narrative representations of otherworldly figures that intrude upon familiar worldly realms and the attendant aesthetic experience that marks such a blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction, clarity and madness, truth and lies, waking life and dreams. The *uncanny* is a term that describes the sense of “disquieting strangeness” that arises when we encounter such representations. Characterizing the uncanny as a fundamentally aesthetic phenomenon, Sigmund Freud proposed that this sense of the unknown and the illicit disrupts the intimate spaces we most closely associate with “home.” Simultaneously frightening and fascinating, the experience of the uncanny finds expression in the language of haunting, as ghostly traces of the past, hidden truths in the present, or fears about the future intrude upon ordinary life.

By focusing on figures of the dead, the supernatural, and the otherworldly in literary and cinematic texts, we will explore the generic forms and literary devices that give rise to the uncanny as a psychic and aesthetic experience. We will further consider the psychological, moral, social, and political implications of haunting. For instance, we will consider how the visitation of a ghost can bring to the surface repressed memories or violent histories that are encrypted in the individual and collective unconscious, thus exposing truths that would otherwise remain hidden. From this perspective, a turn to the uncanny can make possible new perspectives on the past, as ghosts speak for those who have been forgotten or denied a voice in official historical narratives.

We will approach our texts from a variety of perspectives, paying close attention to both their socio-historical/ cultural contexts, and their formal literary aspects. In reading these works, you are encouraged to think comparatively, interrogating the relationships of these texts to their own time, to each other, and to our world today.

#### **Learning objectives:**

In this course, you will explore thematically-linked works in a variety of genres (poetry, plays, novels, short stories, films) and from a range of national traditions and historical periods, as the basis to develop your critical analysis and writing skills.

Over the course of the semester you will:

- Improve your critical reading skills and gain an understanding of how historical and personal traumas find expression in literature and film.
- Engage with major works of world literature to reflect on human experience throughout time and across diverse cultures.
- Develop greater awareness of the historical and cultural contexts from which these texts emerge.
- Construct coherent, well-structured arguments about complex issues related to human experience across cultures and time.

- Reflect on the act of storytelling as fundamental to the human experience and to the understanding of what it means to be human.

### **TEXTBOOKS:**

**REQUIRED:** The following titles are all available at the USC bookstore. Please purchase the editions listed below.\*

- Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ISBN: 9780743477123)
- Maupassant, *The Horla* (ISBN: 976140748)
- Hedayat, *The Blind Owl* (ISBN: 9780802144287)
- Morrison, *Beloved* (ISBN: 9781400033416)

**RECOMMENDED:** The MLA Handbook for Writers (8<sup>th</sup> edition)

**\*\* Shorter texts will be distributed in class or uploaded to Blackboard. You are expected to print out and bring to class hard copies of all readings posted online.\*\***

### **EXPECTATIONS:**

This course is discussion-based and it is therefore imperative that you come to class prepared to discuss the text(s) for that day in a meaningful and thoughtful manner. **I expect that you will come to class on time and with text in-hand, having completed the readings, and ready to contribute to our discussions.** Participation is not simply a matter of talking in class but also of respectfully listening and engaging with your peers. Your contributions can and should include relevant questions as well as observations and interpretations of the texts.

As this class meets only twice a week, any missed classes will be detrimental to your progress. **More than one unexcused absence will negatively impact your classwork score**, which counts toward one quarter of your final grade. If you must miss a class, please let me know as soon as possible and contact one of your peers (not me!) to see what you have missed. For details on what constitutes an excused vs. unexcused absence, please see the attendance policy below.

In order to track your preparation and check your comprehension of the texts, I will occasionally administer **reading quizzes** or ask you to submit in-class activities related to the material assigned for discussion that day. These quizzes and in-class activities will count toward your classwork grade.

Please note that **no laptops, tablets, or cellphones are to be used in class.** Take notes in a notebook and in your copies of the novels.

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

The assignments required in this class are meant to encourage you to engage with the course material in a variety of ways, both individually and collaboratively.

Each week, you must post at least one thoughtful comment or response to the **class discussion board** on Blackboard. These posts are meant to be informal and short (approx. 150 words) and may address a topic of your choice or be written in response to another student's posting. Comments on the discussion board must be posted by 10:00AM on the day that your chosen text will be discussed in class (either Tues or Thurs). These postings will be counted but not graded.

You are also required to submit three **short (3-page) papers**, the prompts for which will be posted to Blackboard 1-2 weeks before each paper is due. These papers are meant to be focused, analytical responses to a given question pertaining to the text(s) studied in class during that section of the course.

**NOTE:** You are not expected to do outside research for these paper assignments; your “research” is your own informed, critical approach to the course materials. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and in MLA format. Late papers will not be accepted unless due to a valid absence.

At the start of the semester, you will sign up to do an **oral presentation** on one of the texts we will be discussing in class. In this presentation, you are expected to present your analysis of a scene, character, theme, or other aspect of the text and to initiate discussion for that meeting. Thus the presentation will focus on an aspect of the text that you find particularly interesting or critically important, referring to specific passages to illustrate your points. This presentation is NOT meant to be a “plot summary” (though you may *briefly* provide relevant contextual information). Rather, it should offer a thematic, contextual, stylistic, structural or other approach that furthers our understanding of a significant aspect of the text. I recommend that presentations end with a central question that will open up a broader class discussion.

Finally, you will write a **final paper** of 5-7 pages in response to an open prompt. The specific topic for the final paper will be your choice, but you must run your idea by me at least two weeks before it is due. During our last two class sessions, you will present an outline of your final paper to the class for peer feedback.

I encourage you to see me during office hours to go over any questions you might have about a paper, your presentation, or the like.

### **GRADING:**

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

25%	<b>Classwork:</b> attendance, participation, and preparation (including reading quizzes and other short assignments completed in class)
5%	Weekly Discussion Board posts
5%	Oral presentation
20%	Short papers (x3)
20%	Final Paper (5-7 pages)
5%	Final Paper Presentation
20%	Final exam ( <b>Wednesday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2-4pm</b> )

### **GRADING SCALE**

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	79-77	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-	60-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	0-59

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

General university policy states that students who can verify that they missed class or were prevented from completing assignments due to illness or religious holidays are permitted to make up the work they missed. Students who miss class because of performance in university-sponsored events, such as athletic

competitions, fine arts performances, ROTC activities, etc, can also make up work missed. The only other valid reasons for making up work are jury duty or death in the immediate family.

Personal reasons for missing class cannot be excused. These include personal trips to attend university-sponsored events as a spectator, to visit family, to attend weddings, to attend court (except for jury duty), and other personal reasons, even when plane tickets have been purchased.

It is your responsibility to provide documentation for all valid absences.

## **ACADEMIC CONDUCT**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

## **SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

*Student Support & Advocacy* – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

*Diversity at USC* – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

Tabs for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

*Center for Academic support* (STU-301) offers free learning assistance and tutoring  
<http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport>

Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

## Course Schedule :

NB: This schedule is indicative and may be subject to change.

### Week 1

Tuesday 1/9 Course presentation, introductions, questionnaire

***“The Time is Out of Joint”: Otherworldly Revelations of Worldly Truths***

Thursday 1/11 *Hamlet* Act I (pp. 3-69)

### Week 2

Tuesday 1/16 *Hamlet* Act II (pp. 73-119)

Thursday 1/18 *Hamlet* Act III (pp. 123-185)

### Week 3

Tuesday 1/23 Close Reading and Writing Workshop

Thursday 1/25 *Hamlet* Act IV (pp. 355-409)

### Week 4

Tuesday 1/30 *Hamlet* Act V (pp. 409-464)

***Genres of Haunting: The Gothic and the Fantastic***

Thursday 2/1 Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher”

### Week 5

Tuesday 2/6 **Short Paper #1 due**

Thinking About Genre: The Six-Word Story

Thursday 2/8 Maupassant, *The Horla*

### Week 6

Tuesday 2/13 Maupassant, *The Horla*

***Ghosts of the Unconscious: Psychoanalysis and Surrealism***

Thursday 2/15 Introduction to Key Concepts

Freud, “The Uncanny”

Berry, “The Sandman” (short film)

### Week 7

Tuesday 2/20 Freud, “The Uncanny” (cont.)

Class Activity: The Common Thread

Thursday 2/22 Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism”

Desnos, “I’ve Dreamed of You So Much” (poem)

### Week 8

Tuesday 2/27 *The Blind Owl* (pp. 17-62).

Thursday 3/1 *The Blind Owl* (pp. 63-116)

### Week 9

Tuesday 3/6 *The Blind Owl* (pp. 116-146 [end])

Thursday 3/8 *Coraline* (film)  
**Short Paper #2 due**  
*Coraline* (cont.)

**Week 10**            **No Class: Spring Break !**

**Week 11**

***Haunted by the Past: Ghosts of History***

Tuesday 3/20 *Beloved* (through p. 51)  
 Thursday 3/22 *Beloved* (through pp. 52-100)

**Week 12**

Tuesday 3/27 *Beloved* (pp. 101-158)  
 Thursday 3/29 *Beloved* (pp. 158-195)

**Week 13**            **\*Final paper topics to be discussed with me\***

Tuesday 4/3 *Beloved* (pp.199-241)  
 Thursday 4/5 *Beloved* (pp. 241-277)

**Week 14**

Tuesday 4/10 *Beloved* to end (281-324)

***Haunted by the Future: The Dystopian Uncanny***

Thursday 4/12 **Short Paper #3 due**  
*Children of Men* (film)

**Week 15**

Tuesday 4/17 *Children of Men* (film)

Thursday 4/19 Discussion of Film  
 Review of key course themes and concepts

**Week 16**

Tuesday 4/24 Final Paper Presentations  
 Thursday 4/26 Final Paper Presentations

**\*\*\*\*\* FINAL EXAM: Wednesday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2-4pm \*\*\*\*\***