



## THE USES OF HORROR

TTh 1:30-2:45pm; 3-4:15pm  
classroom: TBA

Dr. Mande Zecca

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“We live in Gothic times.” –Angela Carter

“When you’re writing, you’re trying to find out something which you don’t know. The whole language of writing for me is finding out what you don’t want to know, what you don’t want to find out.” –James Baldwin

“How can I tell what I think ’til I see what I say?” –attributed to  
E. M. Forster

### I. COURSE OVERVIEW

In a conversation with Stephen Colbert, comedian and filmmaker Jordan Peele referred to his 2017 horror film, *Get Out*, as a “historical biopic.” His claim that “the movie is truth” invites us to reflect on the relationship between horror and history – between fictional and filmic fantasies that terrify us and our own lived realities. In this course, we’ll think about what makes horror cohere as a genre, how its aesthetic qualities operate on the mind of the observer or reader, and what kinds of social and cultural commentary might we discover in a genre that’s often been dismissed as frivolous. The

readings for this course – and our responses to them – will help us think through some key questions: How do we explain our cultural preoccupation with the macabre? How might our engagement with terrifying works of the imagination help us think in new ways about the world in which we live? While these questions are relevant to (and potentially answered within) a range of disciplines – from sociology to psychology to neuroscience, and beyond – our primary sources in this course will be works of fiction and film.

In our first unit, we'll read a range of short stories (by Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Joyce Carol Oates, Carmen Maria Machado, Mariana Enriquez, and others), paying particular attention to how they express anxieties about the unknown and the irrational and how they serve as allegories for psychic and social realities. We'll also think about how the 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century authors riff on and subvert the conventions of their 19<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors. In the second unit, we'll examine the role that paranoia plays in the horror genre by way of another classic-contemporary pairing: Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* and Peele's *Get Out*. We'll read several theoretical sources that will help you think (and write) about how novella and film operate as allegories. For the third unit, you'll have the opportunity to write a research paper about a primary source (or sources) of your choice: horror film, Gothic novel, short story, etc. Our shared sources for the unit will provide a broader sense of the genre and some of its key questions and concerns. These sources will serve as springboards for your independent research.

### **The course is organized into the following three units:**

**Unit 1: Horror and Gender** In our first unit, we'll read a range of short horror stories – both classic and contemporary – by Edgar Allan Poe (“Ligeia”), Nathaniel Hawthorne (“Rappaccini’s Daughter”), Angela Carter (“The Lady of the House of Love”), Joyce Carol Oates (“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”), Viet Thang Nguyen (“Black-Eyed Women”), Mariana Enriquez (“The Dirty Kid”), Carmen Maria Machado (“The Husband Stitch”). Your first essay will give you the opportunity to practice one of the most essential skills in academic writing: posing an analytical question and engaging in a close analysis (of a primary source) that argues for an answer. Our questions will concentrate on representations of women in the horror genre: innocent victim, empowered “final girl,” love/lust object, femme fatale, etc. We'll also consider how the 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century authors on the syllabus riff on and subvert the conventions of their 19<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors.

**Unit 2: Horror and Paranoia** Your second essay will build on the work of the first, but this time you'll be making a *comparative argument*, framing your own interpretation of a primary source (film or novella) through the lens of another source (a theory, though you'll have the opportunity to compare two primary sources if you wish). We'll read a classic work of horror: Henry James's 1898 novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, which its author once described as “a ghost story, plain and simple.” We'll discuss what makes it much more than a simple ghost story and what allows us to read it as a psychological and social allegory – paying particular attention to its “paranoid” narrator. We'll also

watch Jordan Peele’s 2017 horror film *Get Out* and read several theoretical sources that help us think about how Peele updates the trope of gothic paranoia to address race relations in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S.

**Unit 3:** Finally, for our third unit, you’ll have the opportunity to write a research paper about a primary source (or sources) of your choice: horror film, Gothic novel, short story, contemporary or classic. As we get closer to unit 3, we’ll review some possible pathways for your research. For now, keep in mind this preliminary “food for thought” from the course trailer:

- o Those of you interested in **philosophy** might want to pursue the question of horror’s aesthetic and emotional appeal in the course’s research unit. Noël Carroll’s book [\*The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart\*](#) would be a great place to start.
- o Those of you considering a concentration in **psychology** or **neuroscience** might investigate the physiology of fear and why we find certain kinds of terror pleasurable. Here’s a 2013 *Atlantic* interview to get you started: [“Why Do Some Brains Enjoy Fear?”](#)
- o Interested in **film & media studies** or the **history of science**? You might focus your research on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century “phantasmagoria” shows that served as predecessors of the modern horror film. Here’s a short piece from *JStor Daily* to get you started: [“The Magic Lantern Shows that Influenced Modern Horror.”](#)

As you can see, the course topic opens itself up to many different types of research projects. And in the first two units, you’ll hone the skills you’ll need to write the most effective, convincing research paper you can—skills like textual analysis, evaluating other scholars’ arguments, and working with different kinds of sources.

These three sequences of instruction – and their accompanying texts – are designed to help you hone some important writing skills and develop habits of mind that will be useful to you both within and beyond Expos 20. Over the course of the three essay units, you’ll learn how to analyze and evaluate sources, develop your thinking with evidence, and structure clear and persuasive arguments. Each unit builds on the ones before it, asking you return to and sharpen these (and other) core writing moves as you tackle several important versions of the academic essay: the close analysis paper, the comparative analysis paper, and the multi-source paper that sets up a “conversation” with and around a primary text. The response paper assignments within each unit build on each other as well and are designed to help you develop the skills you will need to write your essays.

Some of our writing goals will change unit by unit. Other goals will remain our focus throughout the entire course: developing your sense of what you do well and challenging yourself to grow as a writer; expanding your repertoire and practice of revision techniques; and increasing the complexity and originality of your analysis as well as the effectiveness and elegance of your prose. One of the most exciting things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops; one doesn’t

“arrive” at being a good writer, but rather continually becomes one. With these goals in mind, we begin with these important premises:

**Writing is a process.** As you’ll see on our calendar, each essay unit is approximately four weeks long. During each of these four-week blocks, you’ll read carefully, take notes on your reading, write and revise response papers that help you focus your ideas, draft a full-length essay, and revise that draft in conversation with me and with your peers. This continued process of drafting and revision is the primary work of this class, and is the main way your ideas evolve and your writing grows stronger. While inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned – in other words, when you have dedicated *sustained effort to that process* of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising. This course will also ask you to be *reflective* about that process and about what you want to accomplish in each assignment: in your cover letters about each essay and in your Writer’s Letters at the beginning and end of the term.

**Writing is thinking.** In Expos 20, we approach writing not as a static recitation of what you already know but as a means of thinking about *what you don’t know* – a means of inquiry.

Writing is one of the best ways to *figure out* your ideas and you should expect these ideas to evolve throughout the writing process. You may find, for example, that what you *thought* was your thesis when you started your draft is less compelling than a point you make much later on in your paper – one you’ve written your way toward. Your revision, then, will involve making that compelling point – the one you may not have realized you were building toward but “Eureka!” there it is on p. 5 – central to your paper. The frequency with which writers (both students and professionals) experience this “Eureka!” moment suggests that our best ideas come often come *through* and *in* our writing. “*How can I know what I think ’til I see what I say?*”

## II. HOW THE COURSE WORKS

### Required Texts & Materials

- I will hand out hard copies of Unit 1’s short stories. Scanned PDFs will also be available on our Canvas site.
- Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw: A Norton Critical Edition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999. ISBN-10: 039395904X. Please be sure to purchase this edition of the novella, which will be available at the Coop (though you should feel free to order it online in advance of the semester). It’s important that we’re working with the same edition so that 1.) we can all be on the same page (literally and figuratively) during class discussions and 2.) you can easily access any short secondary readings contained in the Norton Critical.
- I will distribute any other readings in class and on our course Canvas.

I will also assign reading from:

- *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*, available online at <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>
- *Exposé* (now called *Key Terms*) the magazine of student writing (available online or as handouts in class)

Since Expository Writing courses generate a great deal of paper – response papers, in class writing exercises, drafts – I strongly recommend that you purchase a three-ring binder for this course. Each assignment builds on the next, and this will help you to keep those assignments (and my comments on them) organized for later reference.

### **Classes and Conferences**

Class time is an essential part of this course, so please come to class ready to contribute. You are expected to engage in lively conversation about the readings, as well as to provide constructive criticism during workshops of writing assignments and, most importantly, of drafts. Much of what you learn in the course will occur to you in class discussions as you listen to each other's ideas and enrich each other's thought. One of the benefits of *Expos* is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in the class; as in any seminar, you learn much more from formulating, articulating, and questioning your own thoughts than from simply listening to what others have to say. Put simply: class is a joint endeavor, and in everything we do this semester your participation is essential.

Conferences – individual tutorial sessions – are an extension of class, and in conference we will discuss your essays and work together to improve them. You will have at least three draft conferences with me over the course of the semester, and you should come prepared to talk about both process and product: What you've struggled with as you've drafted your essay and what has come more easily; what the draft at hand is doing well and what you feel needs work. Toward this end, you'll submit a cover letter with each essay draft.

### **Grading**

You will develop each of your essays through a guided process of prewriting, drafting, and rewriting. At the end of this process, I will grade the final essay. Ideally, your essays should:

- Develop a fresh, insightful **thesis** and **argue** for that thesis in a logical and interesting way.
- Explain the **stakes** of your thesis (i.e. trace its implications to a larger, more important topic).
- Thoughtfully and thoroughly reason with **evidence**.
- **Analyze** evidence convincingly. By **analysis**, I mean: going beyond observing or summarizing your data (i.e. evidence), taking it apart, grappling with its details, drawing out any significance or implication not apparent to a superficial view.
- **Structure** your paper logically with a clear beginning, middle, and conclusion and a progression of evidence and analysis that is more than simply a list of examples or series of restatements of

the thesis (i.e. “Macbeth is ambitious: he’s ambitious here; and less ambitious here; and he’s ambitious here, too; thus, Macbeth is ambitious.”).

- Work with **sources** accurately and effectively, avoiding plagiarism.
- Address your readers respectfully in a clear, graceful **style**.
- Express your thoughts in prose that correctly uses the conventions of grammar, usage, and punctuation.

I will evaluate your work by these standards:

A-work creates an impression of excellence in all the listed criteria.

B-work creates an impression of excellence in most of the listed criteria, and competence in the others.

C-work is average but creates an impression of competence in all the listed criteria.

D- or F-work is below average and is deficient in one or more of the listed criteria.

The majority of your grade comes from your three essays, according to the following breakdown:

Essay 1: 20%

Essay 2: 25%

Essay 3 Annotated Bibliography: 10%

Essay 3: 35%

Engagement: 10%

In addition to being prepared for and contributing to class discussion, engagement in the course consists of: completing and submitting response papers, drafts, and essays on time; responding to peers’ drafts in peer review and workshop; responding to discussion questions or discussion threads on Canvas; doing the reading thoughtfully; and preparing for and contributing to conferences.

The standard for each essay also becomes more demanding as we progress (since you are building on certain fundamental skills and techniques with each essay). At the end of the course, you will turn in your final Writer’s Letter so you can assess your own progress over the semester (so save all your work!).

### **Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance**

The Writing Program attendance policy is intended to make sure that you get everything you can out of your Expos course. Because Expos has fewer class hours than some other courses; because the course is largely discussion-based; and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential to your learning in the course.

While I of course encourage you to be present every day in class, you are allowed two unexcused absences for the semester with no consequence. Some absences (religious holidays and medical situations) are automatically considered excused; some family circumstances may also be counted as excused absences. If you miss two unexcused classes, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss any issues that may be keeping you from attending, and to advise you on your plan for catching up on the missed work. If you miss a third class, you will be required to meet with your Resident Dean about those absences, so that your Dean can give you any support you may need to help you get

back on track in the class. Missing four classes—the equivalent of two full weeks of the semester—puts you at risk for missing crucial material necessary to complete your work. Unless there is a medical or other emergency issue preventing consistent engagement with the class, students who miss four classes will receive a formal warning that they are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours; you should also copy your Resident Dean on that message. In the case of extended illness, you may be required to provide medical documentation. Absences because of special events or extracurricular involvement are not excused absences. If such circumstances lead you to want to miss more than two unexcused absences, you must petition the Associate Director of the Writing Program for permission.

### **Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you are unable to complete your work on time due to medical or family issues, please contact me before the deadline to discuss both the support you might need as well as a possible new arrangement for your deadline. Communication about your situation is essential so that we can determine how best to help you move forward. If we have not already discussed your situation and you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and asking you to meet with me and/or your Resident Dean to make a plan for catching up on your work. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and if you have not documented a medical problem or been in touch with your Dean about other circumstances, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you think you will require some flexibility in deadlines or participation in the course for reasons of a documented disability, please schedule a meeting with me early in the semester so we can discuss appropriate accommodations. (To be eligible for such accommodations, you need to have provided documentation to the [Accessible Education Office](#) ahead of time. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with that process.) The Accessible Education Office works closely with Expos courses, and we will develop a plan that is appropriate for your needs. Please note that it is always your responsibility to consult with me as the need for those accommodations arises.

### **Policy on Electronic Submissions**

You will submit your work electronically this semester (through our Canvas site). As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document **in a form compatible with Microsoft Word** (.doc or .docx files only). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

### **Policy on Collaboration**

As in many academic situations, our Expos class will be a setting that involves frequent collaboration--we will develop ideas together through class discussion, peer review, and draft workshops. The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). It is a form of academic integrity to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay; you can do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, "Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

### **Policy on Feedback and Conferences**

Feedback is central to Expos. As spelled out in each assignment, you will receive either substantive written feedback, a conference about your draft, or both. My feedback isn't exhaustive, but rather calls attention to what I think are the main strengths and the areas most in need of further development. I think of feedback not as a checklist, but as a guide and a prompt -- as one side of a conversation. To some extent, my feedback is meant to correct errors, but more than that it's meant to help you push *your* thinking further, consider new evidence or think about evidence you're already using in a new light, etc.

Every writer benefits from having an attentive reader respond to their work, and one of my roles as your preceptor is to provide that response: identifying the strengths of a draft; noting questions and reactions to help you develop your ideas further; and offering clear assessment of your revised work. There are educational reasons for the types of feedback I'll give you: they complement one another throughout the writing process and help you think about receiving feedback from different audiences at different stages of writing. Each form of feedback will help you think about another way you can ask for and receive feedback in future writing circumstances. (Feedback throughout the course also comes in other forms, such as peer review or principles from workshop that you apply to your own essays.)

There are also educational reasons for the amount and timing of the feedback I as your instructor will offer. The goal of all my feedback is that you learn to incorporate the principles I'm identifying into your *own* thinking and your revision, so that eventually you are making more independent decisions in your essays about what a reader needs to understand or what the most effective

structure might be. If I as your instructor were to read a draft multiple times, offering several rounds of feedback, I would then in effect be taking over some of those decisions for you, and you would not be gaining the autonomy as a writer that you need to achieve this semester; that dynamic would shortchange the learning that you can accomplish in the course. I do accept a few thoughtful questions by email about specific instances in your revision-in-progress: a follow-up question about whether a thesis is now clearer, or whether some added sentences of analysis make your explanation of evidence stronger. In those instances, you are taking the important step of identifying what in your writing and thinking is *most* in need of targeted feedback, and you are using the Elements of Academic Argument to articulate the specific question you have about something you've tried out in the paper. (When you do want additional feedback, the [Writing Center](#) is a very helpful resource. Here too, you will use that resource better when you arrive with specific and targeted questions.)

There are also important reasons that I schedule one draft conference per student for each essay. Conferences are important opportunities for thinking together about questions in your argument and strategies for revision; during conference week I am meeting with all 30 students and attempting to offer the same level of intensive work with everyone. If I were to grant a second full conference to any student, for reasons of equity I would need to offer a second meeting with everyone, and it is not possible to schedule a second round of meetings in an already busy unit.

### **Policy on Academic Integrity**

One of the essential elements of the Expos curriculum is the work we do on effective source use, appropriate acknowledgement of sources, and expectations for citing sources in academic writing. In each unit, we will work on strategies for working with the ideas of other authors and sources, and how to develop your own ideas in response to them. Most forms of academic writing involve building on the ideas of others, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. This complex relationship with sources is part of our work through the whole semester, and you should always feel free to ask me questions about this material.

As we become familiar with the expectations of an academic audience, we will also work on strategies to avoid errors in citation and unintentional plagiarism. As with all your courses, the expectation in Expos is that all the work that you submit for this course must be your own. That work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

## **III. WRITTEN WORK**

### **Submitting Essays**

You will turn in drafts and revisions on Canvas. **Please be sure to check the Unit calendar (which will be the front page of our Canvas site) for details on when things are due and pay**

**careful attention to the general guidelines about format, etc. explained at the end of this syllabus.**

As stated in the “Policy on Electronic Submission,” when you are uploading documents to Canvas, you are responsible for submitting versions that I can open. (The document must either be in Microsoft Word or be easily compatible; your file should end in .doc or .docx.) It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

All work you submit to the course is for public readership – in other words, we will use essays and excerpts from the writers in the class (possibly yours!) as some of our texts this semester. If at any point you submit a draft or revision that you would prefer other students not read, please let me know that – but please don’t make that request about everything you turn in this semester.

### **Deadlines**

For many class meetings, you will have due a response paper or some other reading or writing exercise to help you develop the essay for that unit. Our work together in class will also often be based on those assignments. For those reasons, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time. Of course, even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances can arise – therefore each student in this section is allowed ONE 24-hour extension on a response paper, draft or revision during the semester. To use that 24-hour extension without penalty, you must: contact me *before* that deadline; submit the late work to Canvas; and be on time with the other work due on that day as well. Otherwise, the work will be counted as late. And beware: taking that one-day extension can mean that you’re crunched for time at the beginning of the next unit.

Other than that “wild card” extension, all deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I do not grant further extensions. Essay drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized a third of a letter grade (from an A- to a B+, for example) on the final essay for each day they are late. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to produce a note from HUHS; in the event of a family emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to ask your dean to contact me by e-mail or phone. In addition, please contact me as soon as possible so we can work out an alternative schedule.

### **Formatting Essays**

Following the guidelines below will ensure that I can focus on your ideas and your prose when I read your essays, rather than devoting time to issues of formatting, pagination, etc. The guidelines apply both to essay drafts and revisions. Forgetting to check your essays for these matters can result in a lower grade for the essay.

All essays should adhere to the standard format:

- double-space in Times New Roman or Garamond font, with one-inch margins
- number all pages and paragraphs
- include your name, the course title, my name, the date, the essay number and your essay title on the first page (don't use a title page)
- include your name on each subsequent page
- proofread thoroughly for typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors. Consistent errors will lower the grades on your essays.
- use the MLA in-text citation method to document your sources, and include a correctly formatted list of Works Cited. Consult the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* for the appropriate citation information.

Please consult the unit calendar for details on what needs to be submitted with each draft and revision,

### **Writing Center**

At any stage of the writing process—brainstorming ideas, drafting or revising—you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the “strength” or “weakness” of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's web site at <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/> to make an appointment.