English 421 091  
Poe and Other American Horrors

Instructor: Steve Marsden  
Department: English and Creative Writing  
Class Hours: TR 2:00-3:15

Classroom: FERG 183  
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ENG 421 in subject line.  
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Course Description
Advanced study and research in American literature, which may focus on particular periods, genres, and/or authors. Prerequisite: twelve semester hours of English. This course is a study of American horror, gothic, weird, and ghost short stories from the early 19th Century to the late 20th.

Course Outcomes
By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Read a wide variety of American gothic, weird, and ghost stories, and speak about the various traditions embodied there
- Demonstrate a command of terminology necessary for talking about short fiction, using narratological terms
- Demonstrate functional familiarity with some literary-critical approaches to the subject of the course
- Place American gothic, horror, and weird short fiction into a continuum of authors, movements, and ideas
- Demonstrate familiarity with some of the major and minor short fiction writers in the American tradition of horror, weird, and ghost tales.

Program Outcomes
This course should help serve the following official outcomes for the English major and minor:

- The student will demonstrate the ability to read complex texts, closely and accurately.
- The student will demonstrate the ability to comprehend both traditional and contemporary schools/methods of critical theory and apply them to literary texts to generate relevant interpretations.
- The student will demonstrate knowledge of literary history in regard to particular periods of World, British and American literature.
- The student will demonstrate ability to effectively conduct literary research.
- The student will demonstrate the ability to write clear, grammatically correct prose for a variety of purposes in regards to literary analysis.
Required Textbooks

Bierce, Ambrose. *Ghost and Horror Stories of Ambrose Bierce*. Edited by E. F. Bleiler. Dover, 1964. (All available in other and probably better-proofread editions, but this is the cheapest with everything we’re apt to read.)

Straub, Peter, editor. *American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from Poe to the Pulps*. Library of America, 2009. (This will be a primary text for the course—please purchase it first).

Some works and background information may also be assigned through online copies or links. You’re responsible for reading and keeping up with these.

Course Policies

Phones
If you have a cell phone, please turn it off during our course. If I need you to use your phone for searching, I’ll let you know. If you must receive calls due to some developing emergency, please set the phone to a silent setting. If you must talk on your phone due to some earth-shattering emergency, please leave our classroom to do so. If we have in-class exams, please keep phones off and out of sight.

Eating, Drinking, Sleeping and So On
Feel free to drink coffee or eat anything that's not loud, messy, and/or smelly. Please clean up after yourself, however. If you sleep in class, you will be woken up. At least feigning attention and interest is very important: please don't read the newspaper, listen to an ipod, or send instant messages during class.

Reading, Participation, and Note Taking
This course is reading intensive, and some of the works we will be studying will be quite difficult. Budget your time and read ahead when necessary. Take notes as you read and write out questions about your reading for use in class. Mark up your books. Reread when necessary. Talk about your reading outside of class. Ask questions in class. If you find anything particularly impenetrable and need help, feel free to drop by my office hours to chat about it. My job is to help you understand this stuff.

This course is taught largely as a dialogue—I ask and answer questions. The students who get the most out of the class are those who participate well in class discussion. If you can answer, do.

Contact by Email
Correspondence relating to this course must use your titan email account. The subject line must be ENG 421. I am not certain to respond to emails with any other subject line, especially if they
resemble spam. I never accept assignments by email unless I have asked for them that way, and emails with attachments will not be opened.

**Plagiarism**
I take plagiarism very seriously. According to SFASU Policies and Procedures:

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp)

If I find papers with plagiarized passages, I will meet with the student who produced them. Consequences may include an un-revisable score of 0 on the assignment and / or an F for the course. In addition, an Academic Dishonesty Form will be filed. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or fear you may not have properly cited something, please talk to me immediately.

**Recycled Papers**
All assignments turned in for this course must be written specifically for this course to receive credit. Please do not turn in papers that were written in whole or in part for other courses or purposes.

**Attendance and Absences**
Regular attendance is required for success in this course. Lectures and discussions will highlight what sorts of things will be on the tests, there will be frequent short writing assignments and frequent reading quizzes will be given at the beginning or the end of classes. Please arrive on time. No homework or in-class assignments may be made up unless your absence is excused or has been pre-arranged with me at least a full day in advance. If you miss a class for a university-excused reason, you must (by the second day you return to class) present me with a typed memo explaining the reason for your absence, and you should attach any documentation (such as a note from your doctor) to this memo.

Regardless of the reason for your absence, you are responsible for all information and work covered in class. If you missed homework or in-class assignments during an excused absence, it is your responsibility to find out what you’ve missed and arrange with me to make it up.

After four unexcused absences, every additional unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 5 percentage points from your total grade. Usually, that total will already be quite low due to missed quizzes and poor test preparation.
According to university policy, after six absences (the equivalent of three weeks of missed class) for **any reason whatsoever**, you may automatically fail the class. Please keep an eye on your absences.

**Make-up Exams**
If you have a university authorized excused absence on the day of one of our tests, you must inform me of this fact in a typewritten memo within two days of your return to class. We will then schedule a make-up exam at a later date. Make-up exams will be substantially different in format than the exams given in class.

**Late Papers and Free Homework Late**
Each student has one (1) free late **homework** assignment: to use it, write “Oops” clearly at the top of the completed assignment and turn it in within one week of the assigned due date (and before the last day of class). Other than this “oops” assignment, no late homework will be accepted without a university-approved absence or a very compelling excuse (my judgment) in writing, detailing your reasons and providing evidence as necessary.

Major papers turned in after the beginning of the class period on which they are due will be considered late, and will have one full letter grade (10 percentage points) deducted from their final grade. Another full letter grade will be deducted for each weekday that passes. The easiest way to receive a very poor grade in this course is to turn things in late. Do not turn in papers under my office door or with office staff without arranging it with me in advance via email. I am not responsible for the loss of papers turned in that way, or your subsequently lower grade.

Major papers require an online submission via drop box on d2l. In that case, both the d2l submission and paper turn in must be accomplished by the beginning of class.

**Extra Credit**
Several times during the semester, I will announce extra credit assignments. Extra credit will only be assigned in class (it will not be posted on the website). Please do not ask me for individual extra credit. Any extra credit assignments I given will be applied to the homework / quiz total, and will be offered to everyone. With extra credit, the daily work score will top at 100%.

**Accommodations for Disabilities**
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

**WH Grades**
I do not grant withheld grades lightly. According to university policy, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the
WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

Assignments and Grade Determination

Grade Breakdown
Quizzes, written responses, daily work, annotations, online quizzes, etc.: 15%
Two story comparison / influence or contrast 20%
Story screencast / presentation: 15%
Term paper proposal 5%
Term paper annotated bib 10%
Term paper 20%
Final exam: 15%

Percentage Grade
90-100 A
80-89 B
70-79 C
60-69 D
0-59 F

Tests
There will be a midterm and a final in this course, which may include multiple choice, ID, and essay components. An online or take-home exam is probable. More details will be forthcoming.

Short Responses
Often, I'll have you write some relatively informal response to the readings for a day. These should be about a page in length, should be typed, and will have other requirements as posted. The intention is to get you thinking and recording what you think about the works, and to prepare you for class.

5 = Excellent, flawless: Very insightful, and otherwise dazzlingly good. I think "wow! I wonder if I can get a copy to teach with next semester!" This is a rare score.
4.5 = Very good: Accomplishes everything needed with style and economy, reflects a strong understanding of the subject matter, and has no very significant errors. I think "good!"
4 = Good: Does the work expected, and contains only errors that might be expected of the average careful student at this point in the semester. I think "okay."
3.5 = Needs some work: Ideas may be incomplete or unfocused, organization may be sloppy. May be "off" in tone or style. I think "well, okay, I guess."
3 = Needs a lot of work: May be unclear in spots, or have numerous, embarrassing, or unprofessional errors. I think "well, maybe next time."
2 = Unacceptable: Fails to accomplish some aspect of the assignment, or has a variety of unprofessional errors. I think "maybe he or she had a high fever or something."
1 = Token effort: Wrong assignment or shows very little work. Accomplishes little of what the assignment asks. Reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the assignment or a deficit of effort or skill. I think "why did I ever get into this line of work?" A paper with a name on it and a
sentence, turned in on time.  
0 = Didn't turn paper in: I think "hmm, I wonder if he or she has dropped the course?"

**Reading Quizzes**  
Often, at the beginning or end of the class period, I will ask one question, answerable by one well-constructed sentence, about something we've read. They will be graded on a three point scale, as follows:

0 You weren't there to take the quiz or didn't put your name on it.  
1 You have your name on the paper, and what you have written is indeed a sentence.  
2 Your answer represents a good attempt, and shows that you've read the work with some care, but isn't entirely correct.  
3 The sentence answers the question and indicates that you've read well and attentively.

I don't intend these to be hard or trick questions, but they will require that you read, understand, and remember what you have read. If you have an excused absence on a day when we have a reading quiz, you must bring a memo to me within two class periods explaining your absence and providing what documentation is possible. Then I will ask you another question about that day's reading. If you come in late and don't turn in a signed paper, or you have an unexcused absence and miss a quiz, you will receive a 0.

**Major papers**  
Detailed prompts and rubrics for major papers will be made available in advance of their due date.

**Two Story Comparison**  
This brief paper will compare and contrast two stories written by different authors. At least one of them must be from our course materials. The other can be from our books, or any work of short fiction you can bring me to read. You should pay attention to the structural, social/historical, and stylistic differences. Look at the comparative venue of publication (where did each story first appear). Pick two that, considered together, highlight an interesting issue in form, theme, social pressures at work, or the like.

**Story Screencast / Presentation**  
Modern literary analysis for popular audiences often includes more than academic papers, and academic paper writing fails to teach some communications skills that are valuable in the world of teaching, business, and cultural production. Working either alone or in a group of 2-3, you will pick a single story that fits the subject matter of the course, and make an informative, enthusiastic, and possibly humorous screencast, podcast, or video that sells the awesomeness and interest of the story to a wider non-academic audience while incorporating comprehensive research and the fruits of close reading, to be released into the wilds of the internet on Youtube. You’ll turn in the presentation and a brief paper from participant each detailing the process. The process, documentation of research and sources, and individual contributions will constitute 20% of the grade, the final product 80%.
Term Paper Proposal
Your term paper proposal will be a brief document (maximum of two pages) explaining the area you plan to work in for your term paper and what you would like to accomplish with it. It will include what works you plan to deal with, and as much explanation about the question you plan to answer, the approach you plan to take, and the themes you plan to engage as you can. A brief list of secondary sources should show that you have begun exploratory research. It will be graded on mechanics and format, completeness, and rhetorical strength (how you prove to me that the topic will be excellent and you will do it well).

Term Paper Drafts
A full draft of the term paper is due at least one class period before its final due date. Other students will help by making comments and peer reviewing your work. If a complete rough draft isn’t brought in on time, your grade on the final paper will be reduced by 5 percentage points. The drafts and the peer edits will also count as daily work.

Annotated Bibliography for Term Paper
After you’ve gotten the go-ahead on your paper topic, you will find seven great possible sources for your term paper. One should be a biography or historical work, at least two should be written in the last 15 years, and all should be scholarly and relevant. You will write an annotated bibliography, using MLA style and good, complete annotations. A detailed prompt, example entry, and grading rubric will be coming soon.

Term Paper
The term paper is a 7-10 page paper. You may go over length if you feel it absolutely necessary, but seven full pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12, 1 inch margins, not including the required Works Cited page) are absolutely required. In this rather brief paper, you will engage one small, manageable aspect of a work or two we’re covering in the class, coming up with a thesis and proving it through careful reference to the specifics of the text(s). You must use at least four good, relevant, scholarly (no web-only) outside sources to bolster your argument or to argue against. You will be graded on your analysis, your writing skills, your ability to incorporate quotation and outside evidence, and your conformity to standards of grammar, punctuation, and format.

Final Exam
A take-home essay exam, answering big-picture issues.

Important Dates
Two story comparison—Thursday, March 7
Story screencast / presentation--Thursday, April 4
Proposal due—Tuesday, April 16
Annotated bib due—Tuesday, April 30
RD of term paper due—Tuesday, May 7
Final draft of term paper due—Thursday, May 9
Final Exam—Take-home, due Tuesday, May 14 – 1-3pm.

Reading Schedule
An extremely tentative reading schedule for the first weeks follows below. I’ll present the reading list as it works out on D2L. Expect the readings to be tuned for reading speed, time
available, and student interest: this is a rough schedule for those who have the time to read ahead. Each class period may also have secondary sources or handouts attached, and theoretical or historical work may be assigned and quizzed over.

The daily posts on D2L will be the authoritative source for reading and homework assignments.


**Week 2**:
The “Sensation” story, “the terror of Germany” and the terror “of the soul.” Poe: “The Black Cat” The Fall of the House of Usher” “The Masque of the Red Death” “Berenice”

**Week 3**
“The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” “The Man in the Crowd,” “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

**Week 4**

**Week 5**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 1 of Straub, with additional readings online
**Week 6**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 1 of Straub, with additional readings online
**Week 7** Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 1 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Two story comparison—Thursday, March 7**

**Week 8**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 1 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Week 9**: Spring Break

**Week 10**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 1 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Week 11**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 1-2 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Screencast/ Podcast due: Thursday, April 4**

**Week 12**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 2 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Week 13**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 2 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Proposal due, Tuesday, April 16**

**Week 14**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 2 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Week 15**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 2 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Annotated Bib due, Tuesday, April 30**

**Week 16**: Stories, selected chronologically from Vol. 2 of Straub, with additional readings online

**Tuesday, May 7 : Full rough draft of paper due.**
**Thursday, May 9: Final draft of paper due.**
**Final Exam: Take-home, due Tuesday, May 14 – 1-3pm.**