

EN 3008 Horror Stories  
Spring 2015  
Stokes S476: Tues. 3-4:45

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Stokes S487, 2-3702  
office hours  
T 11-12:30 Stokes S487  
W 11-12:30 Stokes S450

However supernatural or extreme, Gothic fiction is always about our human selves. This one-credit course will explore human/post-human ideas in three novels about “monsters”: R. L. Stevenson’s Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), Anne Rice’s Interview with the Vampire (1976), and Alden Bell’s The Reapers are the Angels, a recent (2010) novel described by one reviewer, approvingly, as “like Flannery O’Connor with zombies.” We’ll consider contemporary ideas about what the Victorians are obsessing about in the Jekyll-Hyde concept, aided by a comparison with Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), then turn to what post 1960’s Americans are responding to in Rice’s influential development of the vampire, and last, debate what things might be fueling the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s fascination with the “zombie apocalypse.”

The first seven meetings, up until spring break, will consider these course texts: in an eighth meeting, a week or two after spring break, students will report to each other on individually self-chosen Gothic novels. Film and TV texts are possible choices instead of novels; consultation on the self-chosen Gothic texts will take place before spring break. Two short papers.

#### **Schedule of readings, writings, discussions**

Tues. Jan. 13: introduction... writing/discussion -- why do we read these kinds of stories anyhow? Pop culture genre and its mixes: “terror” and “horror.” Two short stories: Ray Bradbury’s “Marionettes, Inc.” (1951, attached to this email), Harlan Ellison’s “Bleeding Stones” (1975, to be read and discussed/compared in class).

Tues. Jan. 20: read for discussion the first two sections of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, up through “Doctor Lanyon’s Narrative.” Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” to be handed out in class. (Sign up for brief get-acquainted conferences.)

Tues. Jan. 27: read for discussion the last part of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and, for discussion and comparative purposes, Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” **First paper due in class**...4 pages on something that interests you in the Stevenson or Gilman story – or on a comparison or contrast between the two.

Tues. Feb. 3: read for discussion the first two parts of Interview with the Vampire, which takes place both in America and in the “old world” of the vampire. **Share out some research and/or discussion topic responsibilities for next week’s class.**

Tues. Feb. 10: read for discussion the last two parts of Interview, **after initial small group meetings on research/discussion topics, then discussion becomes general.**

Tues. Feb. 17: read for discussion the first ten chapters of The Reapers are the Angels. **Share out some research/discussion topics to help facilitate discussion on zombies in the next class. Sign up for conferences about potential ‘texts’ for your final reading and writing assignment.**

Tues. Feb. 23: read for discussion the last six chapters of *Reapers* and present topics: handout of suggestions and cautions about the final 4 page paper. **Conferences about last reading and writing assignment, final text choices due.**

(spring break)

Final class, Tues. March 3 or Tues. March 10 (?): conversations among us all about your chosen texts, and the **3-4 page final paper** that centers on it. Bring to class your final paper, or a draft or outline of it. **Final paper due in person to me in my office, Stokes S450, on Friday March 13.**

### **Things to keep thinking about from the critical tradition....**

'How happens it then,' said Mr. S—"that objects of terror sometimes strike us very forcibly, when introduced into scenes of gaiety and splendor, as, for instance, in the banquet scene in *Macbeth*?"

"They strike, then, chiefly by the force of contrast," replied W--; "but the effect, though sudden and strong, is also transient; it is the thrill of horror and surprise, rather than the deep and solemn feelings excited under more accordant circumstances and left long upon the mind...Though deep pity may mingle with our surprise and horror, we experience a far less degree of interest."

"That may be," said Mr. S--, "and I perceive you are not one of those who contend that obscurity does not make any part of the sublime." "They must be men of very cold imaginations," said W--, "with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the second contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime...And where lies the difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?" **Anne Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," 1826**

The three types of terror: the Gross-out: the sight of a severed head tumbling down a flight of stairs, it's when the lights go out and something green and slimy splatters against your arm. The Horror: the unnatural, spiders the size of bears, the dead waking up and walking around, it's when the lights go out and something with claws grabs you by the arm. And the last and worse one: Terror, when you come home and notice everything you own has been taken away and replaced by an exact substitute. It's when the lights go out and you feel something behind you, you hear it, you feel its breath against your ear, but when you turn around, there's nothing there. **Stephen King, *Dance Macabre*, 1981**

My own concern is that if the uberfigure of the Gothic, the vampire, has changed from the articulate and merciless count of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, one obsessed with hierarchy and battle and little prone to love, to a softhearted and mumbling boy quite capable of love (enter Edward Cullen), then we have no great monster but a little romance. ...Doesn't the Gothic need to stay a *bête noir* that pounces, tears, and dashes away, rather than a tame little thing that sits and broods?" **Daniel Olson, *Twenty-first Century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels Since 2000*, 2011**

