

ENGL 310: Horror and the Middle Ages

Summer 2017 – Summer Session 2

MTW 1:00-3:10

Building 7E12, Room LL21

Gina Dominick

Gad256@nyu.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 9-12,
Monday and Wednesday by appointment
244 Greene St.
Room 510

Course Description: This course will use a selection of medieval texts and modern cinema to interpret the influence and endurance of medieval culture and aesthetics in the genre and affect of horror. In 1992, Carol J. Clover published *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, a definitive text in film and horror scholarship, which founded the theory of the “final girl”—the character that represents at once the heroism, moral compass, eroticism, and catharsis of the horror genre. What motivates this course, however, is Carol, the author. Clover, Professor Emerita of rhetoric, film, and Scandinavian at the University of California, Berkeley, is also a medievalist. Entertaining this odd and somehow oddly unsurprising pairing of research interests, this class asks the following: What does medieval literature tell us about the experience of horror in the Middle Ages? How have medieval texts influenced elements (from tropes to identity politics) of the contemporary horror film? How have medievalisms like the Gothic novel shaped modern perceptions of medieval aesthetics and affects? What can texts, as seemingly disparate in tone as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. late 14th century) and *Ash vs Evil Dead* (2015), say to each other?

We will read a variety of medieval texts (including saga, romance, and devotional/meditative literature), look at some foundational film theory, and cover basic vocabulary for discussing/writing about the conventions of cinema. In addition to attending class meetings and completing assigned reading, students will be required to watch several horror films and produce an original piece of scholarship.

Requirements: This course requires consistent class participation through discussions with your colleagues and instructor and weekly posts to the class blog. Each week, a student(s) will add to the blog and facilitate an online discussion through a post of **200-400 words each**. This student(s) should post to the NYU Classes site by no later than **9pm Wednesdays**. The remaining students will respond to the post (**150-300 words**) by **9pm Fridays** to allow enough time for the class to read and consider comments before class the following Monday. *You have one “pass” to be used any week during the session when you do not write a blog response.* Your contributions to the class blog will be considered as part of the class participation percentage of your grade. These shorter writing exercises are in addition to two essays: one of 3-5 double-spaced pages to be read aloud in class and another of 8-12 double-spaced pages to be turned in at the end of the semester. It is likely, though not mandatory, that you extend in some way the content of your oral argument into this more complex and refined final essay.

Attendance: Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory. More than 2 absences will result in a grade reduction of 1/3 a letter grade.

Laptops, Phones, and Other Devices: Laptops and/or tablets for note taking, reading, and other course related intellectual errands are okay. However, please come to each meeting attentive and prepared to contribute—having brought assigned reading and any notes you may have prepared. Use of cellphones (including texting) is not permitted during class time. Please also refrain from eating (drinks and small snacks are fine and encouraged on movie days).

Final Grades:

Participation in class discussion and on class blog, 30%.

Oral argument, 20%

Final essay, 50% (the same grade reduction for absences applies to the final for every day late)

The Moses Center: Students with disabilities should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor; tel. 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. I must also be notified at the beginning of semester for special accommodations regarding assessment and assignments.

The Writing Center: You are encouraged to use the resources of NYU's Writing Center, where tutors can give you one-on-one help with your written assignments.

http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/object/writing_center (check summer hours)

Plagiarism: Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. **Plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense: it will result in failure of the course and will be reported to your dean.** Plagiarism, as defined by the *MLA Style Manual*, is “using another person’s ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source.... [T]o plagiarize is to give the impression that you wrote or thought something that you in fact borrowed from someone [in conversation or online, anywhere – not just in a book].... Forms of plagiarism include the failure to give appropriate acknowledgment when repeating another’s wording or particularly apt phrase, paraphrasing another’s argument, and presenting another’s line of thinking.” For specific guidelines and policies, see the College of Art and Science’s “Statement of Academic Integrity”: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>

Required Texts: The following can be found at NYU’s bookstore.

Byock, Jesse, trans. *Grettir’s Saga*. Oxford University Press, 2009. 9780192801524

(Optional) Clover, Carol. *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*.

Princeton University Press, 1993. 9780691166292

Fulk, R.D., trans. *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and The Flight at Finnsburg*.

Harvard University Press, 2010. 9780674052956

Kinsella, Thomas, trans. *The Táin*. Oxford University Press, 2002. 9780192803733

Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. Edited by W.S. Lewis. Oxford University Press, 2008. 9780198704447

Winny, James, trans. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Broadview Press, 1992. 9780921149927

Agenda:

Mon., July 3 Introduction: locating horror as aesthetic, affect, and genre; Stephen King's *Danse Macabre* (1981); Cynthia Freeland's "Art Horror and Art Dread"

For Wednesday, July 5 Browse through syllabus to determine which material you want to be responsible for presenting to the class in your 3-5 page oral argument; read Longinus, *On the Sublime*; read Mary Carruthers's "Terror, Horror and the Fear of God, or, Why There Is No Medieval Sublime" (all readings are available on *NYU Classes*)

Tues., July 4 *No Class, Independence Day*

Wed., July 5 The evolution of horror: tragedy, the sublime, the fantastic, the uncanny, the abject

For Mon., July 10 Read selections from Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Divine Love* and Catherine of Siena's *The Orchard of Syon* (Middle English translation of Italian); read "Introduction" and "Living Blood Poured Out" in Carolyn Walker Bynum's *Wonderful Blood*; **optional** readings: Bynum's "Blood as Separated and Shed" and Jeffrey Hamburger's "To Make Women Weep: Ugly Art as 'Feminine' and the Origins of Modern Aesthetics"

Mon., July 10 Religious horror: the blood of Christ, wonder, and medieval contexts

For Wed., July 12 Read selections from *Piers Plowman* B-Text (Passus V-VI, IX, XIX and XX); the *Crucifixion* from the York Mystery Cycle; Eleanor Johnson's "Horrific Visions of the Host"

Tues., July 11 Film: *The Witch* (2015) 93 min.

Wed., July 12 Religious horror continued: Hell, the Devil, the Anti-Christ, martyrdom, the Passion, drama

For Tues., July 18 Read *Pearl*; Carolyn Dinshaw's "Ecology"; watch *Open Water* (2003) 79 min. (on reserve in Bobst)

Mon., July 17 *No Class*

Tues., July 18 Horrible nature: *kynde*, medieval science and medicine, *fortuna*

For Wed., July 19 Read *St. Erkenwald*; the *Debate between Body and Soul*; excerpt from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*; **optional reading** Sarah Kay's "Legible Skins"

Wed., July 19 Bodily violation, decadence, and decay

For Tues., July 25 Read through page 100 in *The Táin*; read Carol Clover's "Introduction: Carries and the Boys," "Her body, Himself," Gender and sexuality theory from Middle Ages in Handbook of Medieval Sexuality: "Western Medicine and Natural Philosophy," "Gendered Sexuality," "Contraception and Early Abortion in the Middle Ages"; **optional reading** "Hiding Behind the Universal Male: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages," "Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages," "Old Norse Sexuality: Men, Women, and Beasts," "Sex Roles and the Role of Sex in Medieval Literature"

Mon., July 24 Film: *Alien* (1979) 117 min.

Tues., July 25 "The Monstrous Female" (Gender and Sexuality) and the *Trotula*

For Wed., July 26 Finish the *Táin*; read Gina's short essay "Though it was the hollow of my own womb that howled": Prophecy and Animated Fetuses in *The Táin* and its *Remscéla*

Wed., July 26 The Monstrous Female cont.

Research/Writing Workshop

For Mon., July 31 Read *Legend of St. Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, and *Judith* from the *Beowulf* Manuscript; read selections from *Grettir's Saga* (TBD)

Mon., July 31 "Of Men and Monsters": The *Beowulf* Manuscript

For Wed., Aug 2 Read "The Physician's Tale," "The Prioress's Tale," "The Monk's Tale" (EChaucer website in Resources); read Lisa Weston's "Suffer the Little Children, or, A Rumination on the Faith of Zombies"

*Aug 1 *Students must have met with Gina at this point to discuss final essay*

Tues., Aug 1 Film: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) 91 min.

Wed., Aug 2 "Toward a Genre" and *The Canterbury Tales*

For Mon., Aug 7 Read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Mon., Aug 7 Medieval Romance, Medieval Gore, Comedy, and the Grotesque

For Tues., Aug 8 Read Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*; read Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry"

Tues., Aug 8 The Gothic Novel and other medievalisms

For Wed., Aug. 9 Read “Coda” from Carolyn Dinshaw’s *Getting Medieval*

Wed., Aug 9 Film: *Army of Darkness* (1992) 81 min.
Final Discussion

Final Essay Due (8-10 pages) Sunday, August 13 at 9am