

HNRS 201: Exploring and Defending The Value of Horror Comic Books

Instructor Information

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- Office hours by appointment

Course Information

- Co-requisite or prerequisite: none
- Face-to-face class meeting days and times: TBD
- Class room number and building: TBD
- Course description:

As long as we've made up stories, we've had stories to scare, thrill, and mystify the audience. Every time we've come up with a new medium to convey stories, we've inevitably come up with ways to make horror with them. Why do people like horror? What does a comic book add to this genre that we don't get from traditional books or film? What is the value of studying a niche genre in the context of a niche medium?

In this course we will dive into the fantastic world of horror comic books. Together, we will explore the narratives, historical contexts, and unique storytelling mechanisms of horror comic books. We will read and discuss seminal works in horror comic books together, watch selections from horror movie, and read scholarly analyses. By the end of this course, you'll have been exposed to some fantastic art and built valuable reading, analysis, argument, and writing skills in the process!

Course Overview

- Students will engage with seminal works in horror comic books and critical scholarship on those works
- Students will write three papers articulating their stances with well developed thought and evidence
- Students will engage in debates on contentious points surrounding horror comic books and build ability to engage in stimulating and respectful intellectual discussions

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- Develop persuasive arguments
- Write analytically
- Properly reference scholarly sources
- Appreciate horror as a genre
- Appreciate comic books as a medium
- Articulate concepts related to taste, aesthetics, and genre
- Debate the merits of transgressive media

Course Requirements

Class Participation

As a seminar-style course, your participation is crucial to your learning and the instructor's ability to assess your growth. Speaking up in class can be difficult for some people, and for this reason there will also be opportunities to participate digitally through surveys and discussion boards.

Each class day will consist of a discussion of the readings followed by an exploration of the topic for the week. This means your participation grade hinges on your ability to complete the readings. A plurality of the reading list is comic books, albeit works that the instructor has determined to have literary value. At minimum, you are expected to come to class having read the comic books, which should be fun and easy to a point. The assigned scholarly works may be extraordinarily dense, and the expectation is that you will make a good faith effort to read these, with the knowledge that a portion of class time will be dedicated to explaining the points of these readings.

Position Statement

This 2-3 page paper is due in the second week of class and is an opportunity for you to share your opinions and beliefs about horror and comic books. Cited sources are not required but encouraged if relevant. This paper should answer the following questions:

1. What do you think of horror and comic books? Do you like one and not the other? Why or why not?
2. Why did you choose to take this class?
3. What are you hoping to gain from this class?

This paper is an opportunity for me to assess your writing ability as well as your interests, so take it seriously! I will be using these papers to tweak the course and identify areas for growth for you all.

Response Paper

This 3-5 page paper is due in the middle of the semester and is an opportunity for you to sum up what you have learned in class thus far, or what you are struggling with. Cited sources are required as I expect you to cite books or papers we have read in class. External sources are also encouraged but not required. This paper should answer the following questions:

1. What have you learned so far in class? What has been most interesting to you?
2. Are there any topics or ideas that have been confusing or tricky for you? What questions do you have that we haven't addressed yet?
3. Do you have any ideas for your final papers?
4. Have we covered anything in class that you've found objectionable? Why do you think this is?
5. Are you enjoying the class? What can we do to make the course better for you?

This paper is an opportunity for me to assess what you are getting out of the class so be honest! You will not lose points for admitting that something is confusing or objectionable. I will be using these papers to tweak the course as needed, and also to assess whether you are getting anything from the class.

Term Paper

This 7-10 page paper is due at the end of the semester. This paper is an opportunity for you to take what you have learned in class and apply it to a topic of your interest which is in line with the course material. This is a research paper and as such I expect you to cite multiple sources, both from class and externally, in order to support an argument. This paper should answer these questions:

1. What is a topic of interest to you based on the class material?
2. Why is this topic interesting to you? Why should other people care about that topic?

3. What is the background of this topic? What do we need to know in order to talk about this topic?
4. What insight/argument do you have regarding this topic that the reader should take away from your paper?
5. What evidence do you have to support your argument?
6. Are there scholars who refute your argument? How would you address them?
7. After reading your paper, what should the reader think about? What kind of paper would follow this one?

In-Class Presentation

You must do an in-class presentation for this course. This presentation must:

1. Be based on a topic or book that you are interested in
2. Give us the history and context of that topic/book
3. Effectively argue that this topic/book has value when considered in the broad context of our lives

These presentations must be 5-10 minutes in length. You are discouraged from using slideshows. I encourage you to present by way of telling a story about yourself. Your classmates will have the opportunity to ask you questions for up to 10 minutes.

This presentation will be graded based on how coherently you presented your topic. I will not be evaluating your public speaking skills. If you are uncomfortable with public speaking, you may also pre-record a video, but you will still have to answer questions above.

In-class Debates

There are four debate days in this course. All debates are in-class and meant to be an opportunity for you to engage critically with the text and your classmates. You do not need to do any additional preparation for these debates, but it may be helpful to review and revise your notes from class beforehand. You must participate as a debater at least once to get credit for this assignment. You will not be graded based on whether your team “wins” but rather based on the sophistication of thought and engagement with course material exhibited.

The structure for debate days will be as follows:

1. 3-5 propositions will be presented to the class, for example “Horror adds no value to society”
2. The class will vote on which propositions they’d like to debate
3. 6 people will volunteer or be volunteered, and randomly assigned into the “Pro” and “Con” groups, meaning they will be arguing that the proposition is correct or incorrect, respectively
4. Each group will be given 5 minutes to prepare their opening statements
5. Each group will let the instructor know who is going first, second, and third
6. The first speaker on the “Pro” side will give their team’s opening statement (2-3 minutes)
7. The first speaker on the “Con” side will give their team’s opening statement (2-3)
 - a. During this statement, you should try to lay out your argument first, and not focus on rebutting the “Pro” side at this time
8. Both sides will get 3 minutes to develop rebuttals to their opponents’ opening statements
9. The second speaker for the “Pro” side will give their team’s rebuttal (2-3 minutes)
10. The second speaker for the “Con” side will give their team’s rebuttal (2-3 minutes)
11. Both sides will get 3 minutes to develop their closing statements
12. The third speaker for the “Pro” side will give their team’s closing statement (3-4 minutes)
13. The third speaker for the “Con” side will give their team’s closing statement (3-4 minutes)
14. This debate will be followed by a class discussion (15-20 minutes)

Extra Credit Presentation

You may choose to do an additional in-class presentation in any format (video, song, podcast, comic book, stand up comedy, etc.) for up to an additional 5% added to your final grade. If you wish to do extra credit but speaking in front of a class is not appealing, I am open to any suggestions. The only requirement for these presentations is that they must address a topic discussed in the class, you must inform me of your decision to do extra credit by Week 8, and your presentation must be accessible by your classmates during class time.

This project is graded based on sophistication of thought, not completion or effort. You will get between 1 and 5 additional percentage points based on the instructor's assessment of how much thought you put into your work.

Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
Position Statement	10%
Response Paper	5%
Term paper: Topic	5%
Term paper: Annotated Bibliography	10%
Term paper: First Draft	10%
Term paper: Final Paper	20%
In-class presentation	15%
In-class debates	15%
Participation	10%

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Points	Percent
A	4.00	92.5% and higher
A-	3.67	90.0 – 92.49%
B+	3.33	87.5% - 89.99%
B	3.00	82.5% - 87.49%
B-	2.67	80% - 82.49%
C+	2.33	77.5% - 79.99%
C	2.00	72.5% - 77.49%
C-	1.67	70% - 72.49%
D+	1.33	67.5% - 69.99%
D	1.00	62.5% - 67.49%
D-	.67	60% - 62.49%
F	.00	59.99% and lower

View Grades

Grades will be updated on Canvas regularly and finalized before the end of the semester.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Week 1	Introductions and Syllabus review	None	None
Week 2	Horror: what are its characteristics and what is its value?	<p>King, S. (1981). <i>Why we crave horror movies</i>. Short Essays for Composition, 524.</p> <p><i>Tomb of Dracula</i> by Tolagson Rodi CW: depictions of murder, gratuitous bloodloss, sexualization and objectification of women</p> <p><i>The Window Next Door</i> by Junji Ito CW: disturbing imagery of disfigured body</p>	Position statements
Week 3	A brief history of horror and comic books	<p><i>Phenomenology of Horror</i> by Dylan Trigg: Chapters 1 and 2</p> <p><i>Critical approaches to horror comic books: Red Ink in the Gutter</i> - Part 1</p>	Sign up for in-class presentation
Week 4	Physical, social, and psychological impacts of horror	<p><i>Creepshow</i> - Volume 1 CW: graphic imagery of blood and gut, murder, mild sexual imagery</p> <p>Martin, G. N. (2019). <i>(Why) do you like scary movies? A review of the empirical research on psychological responses to horror films</i>. <i>Frontiers in psychology</i>, 10, 2298.</p>	None
Week 5	Debate Day: Gore	None	None
Week 6	How does society treat horror?	<p>Foucault, M. (1977). <i>A Preface to Transgression. In Language counter-memory practice</i> (pp. 29–32). Cornell University Press.</p> <p>Yuhas, A. (2021, March 31). <i>It's time to revisit the satanic panic</i>. <i>The New York Times</i>. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/us/satanic-panic.html</p>	Paper topics
Week 7	What does horror teach us about ourselves?	<p><i>The Long Dream</i> by Junji Ito CW: potentially disturbing imagery of disfiguring body</p> <p><i>Phenomenology of Horror</i> by Dylan Trigg: Chapters 3 and 4</p>	Response papers
Week 8	<p>What do comic books add to horror?</p> <p>In-class activities: anonymous feedback</p>	<p><i>Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Madness</i> illustrated by Gris Grimly CW: potentially disturbing imagery of blood and murder</p> <p>Gross, J. (2011, July 4). <i>The medium is the message</i>. <i>Smashing Magazine</i>.</p>	Sign up for extra credit presentations

		https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2011/07/the-medium-is-the-message/ <i>Critical approaches to horror comic books: Red Ink in the Gutter - Part 3</i>	
Week 9	Writing about writing: finding sources Presentation from librarian	<i>Types of academic writing</i> . The University of Sydney. (n.d.). https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/writing/types-of-academic-writing.html	Annotated bibliography
Week 10	Debate Day: Occultism	None	Paper outline
Week 11	Writing about writing: building arguments	Pirie, D. (1985). <i>How to write critical essays: A guide for students of literature</i> . London: Methuen.	None
Week 12	Revisiting the “why” of horror and horror comic books	<i>Critical approaches to horror comic books: Red Ink in the Gutter - Part 4</i> <i>Red Room</i> by Ed Piskor CW: highly disturbing imagery of the act of murder	First draft of term paper
Week 13	The boundaries of horror: what is too much, and what is too little?	<i>Plastic</i> by Doug Wagner CW: disturbing objectification of women and depictions of murder <i>Abandon the Old in Tokyo</i> by Yoshihiro Tatsumi CW: depictions of perversion and cruelty	None
Week 14	Debate day: Censorship	None	Final paper
Week 15	Looking forward - what’s next in horror comic books? In class activity: extra credit presentations In class activity: write letters to future students	<i>She Wolf</i> by Rich Tomasio CW: depictions of occult transformations and murder <i>Neonomicon</i> by Alan Moore CW: depictions of rape and violence <i>No Longer Human</i> by Junji Ito CW: depictions of rape, child molestation, and interpersonal violence	None

Course Materials

All readings will be shared in PDF form on canvas - you are not expected to purchase any reading material. If you prefer a hard copy of any reading, the Charles Library’s staff will be able to assist you.

Course Policies

Professionalism

College education should prepare you for a fulfilling professional life. Your ability to maintain a work life balance is crucial for that goal. For this reason, you are encouraged to read, write, and communicate with classmates and the

instructor only between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday. The instructor will only read and respond to emails during these hours, and may take, at minimum, 3 business days before responding.

Respect and Maturity

The reading material for this course can be considered inflammatory, disturbing, and offensive along many dimensions. This course is built on the foundation that studying these works will enrich your academic, professional, and personal lives. The ability to discuss such works is a protected activity vis a vis academic freedom.

You are encouraged to take personal inventory before committing to this course. It is your responsibility to ensure that you will be able to engage with these works meaningfully. Content warnings are provided, but it is unreasonable to expect that you will be allowed to forgo a substantial number of readings due to personal objections or triggers.

Discussions around these works may bring up emotional responses. Learning to hold mature forums in spite of these feelings is a key skill. You are expected to, at all times, critique only ideas, never people. Personal attacks, harassment, and insinuations will never be tolerated in this course, and are cause for referral to Student Conduct.

Attendance and Tardiness

Excessive and habitual tardiness, or failure to show up to class consistently will result in loss of participation points at the discretion of the instructor. There are precisely 30 class meetings during the semester and you are expected to be in attendance for at least 25. If you feel that you will be unable to meet this expectation, please reach out to the instructor by Week 2.

Late Assignment

All assignments are due at 5PM EST on Wednesday of the week they are listed under. Late assignments are accepted at the instructor's discretion only if they are notified by the preceding Tuesday by 11AM EST.

Incomplete Grade Policy

Incomplete grades will be granted only in rare circumstances and require the approval of the instructor. Students who have not completed all the requirements prior to the last day of class will need to talk with the instructor about how this will be rectified.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

You are expected to do your own work and any form of academic dishonesty—plagiarism and cheating—is as unacceptable in this course as it is across the University and throughout higher education. Plagiarism is defined in the Bulletin as “the unacknowledged use of another person's labor, another person's ideas, another person's words, and another person's assistance.”

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Acceptable uses of Generative AI (ex. ChatGPT, Snapchat AI, Midjourney, etc.) is limited to only the following cases:

- Ideation - you may use generative AI to develop or iterate on ideas. AI can be a wonderful way to find a starting point when you do not know how to approach an assignment, and I encourage you to do so when needed.
- Editing - you may use AI tools like Grammarly or Hemmingway, or even generative AI if desired, to improve writing you have already done
- Formatting - you may use AI tools if it is helpful to generate citations and assist with the visual presentation of your original works

AI may never be tasked with independently writing any part of any assignment. Doing such, even with attribution, constitutes academic dishonesty and will result in a failing grade.

Disability Disclosure Statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including special accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation by the end of the second week of classes or as soon as practical.

If you have not done so already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to learn more about the resources available to you. We will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities

Please refer to Temple University's Recommended Statement. The University's policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) can be accessed through at:
<http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?polycyno=03.70.02>.

Technology Usage Policy

Read Temple University's Technology Usage policy which includes information on unauthorized access, disclosure of passwords, and sharing of accounts. The [Temple University Technology Usage Policy](http://policies.temple.edu/PDF/84.pdf) can be accessed at <http://policies.temple.edu/PDF/84.pdf>