



## AMERICAN GOTHIC

English 205, Fall 2005

**PROFESSOR:** Laura Leibman (503 517 7329); leibman@reed.edu

**TIME:** Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:30-11:50 Library 203

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What was haunting America in the nineteenth century? Gothic literature stages the deepest fears and anxieties in a culture. It exposes not only the occult and mysterious, but also crosses the line between this world and the next, the known and the unknown, the speakable and the unspeakable. This course will explore the specters haunting America through the short stories and novels of Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Wells Brown, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, Kate Chopin, and Charles Chesnut. This course serves as an introduction to literary technique and narrative.

### REQUIREMENTS:

- Attend, Prepare for, and Participate as a Speaker and Listener in Conference
- Five one-page papers and One 2-3 page paper (see below).

### BOOKS:

- Reader (in bookstore)
- Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Blithedale Romance*
- Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno & Bartleby*
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- William Wells Brown, *Clotel*
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*
- *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, edited by Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (Recommended)

### PAPERS:

There are six short papers due approximately every other week. Since these papers are intended to enhance class discussion as well as to hone your writing and analysis skills, you will be asked to turn in the papers on the readings for specific days and to post them to the class via email at [english205@lists.reed.edu](mailto:english205@lists.reed.edu). Please see below for when your papers are due. You will be assigned to a Group the first day of class.

The six short papers will consist of either (1) a close reading of a short segment of the day's assigned readings, (2) an analysis of a narrative convention used in the day's assigned reading, (3) an analysis of the relationship between a culture context and the assigned readings, or (4) a genre analysis. Please see the syllabus below to see which type of paper is assigned for each day. For more information on each of these types of papers, see the end of the syllabus.

**All Papers are Due AT LEAST 36 hours before dates given below** (e.g. If you have been assigned to cover the readings for class on Thursday 9/15 your paper is due 10:30 p.m. Tuesday 9/13; If you have been assigned to Tues. 9/13 your paper is due Sunday 9/11 at 10:30 p.m, etc.). All papers must be distributed to the class via email [english205@lists.reed.edu](mailto:english205@lists.reed.edu). Do NOT send the paper as an enclosure, but paste it into the body of the email. Late papers will not be accepted. Other members of class should read at least two of the discussion papers before class begins. **Please note:** the following dates are **not** due dates, but the date your paper will be discussed in class and the readings it will cover:

**Group One:** 9.1 (Close Reading); 9.15 (Narrative Convention); 9.29 (Close Reading); 11.3 (Cultural Context); 11.10 (Narrative Convention); 11.30 (Genre 2-3 pages)

**Group Two:** 9.6 (Narrative Convention), 9.20 (Close Reading); 10.6 (Narrative Convention); 11.1 (Close Reading); 11.16 (Cultural Context) 12.2 (Genre 2-3 pages)

**Group Three:** 9.8 (Close Reading); 9.22 (Narrative Convention); 10.11 (Cultural Context); 11.8 (Close Reading); 11.18 (Narrative Convention), 12.7 (Genre 2-3 pages)

**Group Four:** 9.13 (Close Reading); 9.27 (Narrative Convention); 10.27 (Close Reading); 11.10 (Narrative Convention); 11.23 (Cultural Context); 12.7 (Genre 2-3 pages)

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS

### Week 1: EARLY REPUBLIC

T 8.30 *Introduction*

R 9.1 Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*.

Group One: Close Reading

### Week 2

T 9.6 Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*.

Group Two: Narrative Convention

R 9.8: Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*.

Group Three: Close Reading.

### Week 3

T 9.13 Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (Reader)

Group Four: Close Reading.

R 9.15 Washington Irving, "The Author's Account of Himself" & "English Writers on America," (Reader)

Group One: Narrative Convention (Please use "The Author's Account of Himself" & "English Writers on America" and determine what conventions Irving values and where he uses them.)

### Week 4

T 9.20 Edgar Allan Poe, "Fall of the House of Usher" & "Ligeia" (Reader)

Group Two : Close Reading

R 9.22 Edgar Allan Poe, "Imp of the Perverse," "Nathaniel Hawthorne"(Reader)

Group Three: Narrative Convention (Please use "Nathaniel Hawthorne" or "Imp of the Perverse" and determine what conventions Poe values and where he uses them in either "Fall of the House of Usher" or "Ligeia").

### Week 5 AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

T 9.27 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," "Rappaccini's Daughter" (Reader)

Group Four: Narrative Convention

R 9.29 Hawthorne, *Blithedale Romance*

Group One: Close Reading

### Week 6

T 10.4 Rosh Hashana (no class) Please use this day to read ahead in the *Blithedale Romance*

R 10.6 Hawthorne, *Blithedale Romance*

Group Two: Narrative Convention

**Week 7**

T 10.11 Hawthorne, *Blithedale Romance*

Group Three: Cultural Context

R 10.13 Yom Kippur (no class) Please use this day to get ahead in the readings!!

**October 15-23            Fall Break**

**Week 8**

T 10.25 Sukkot/Simchas Torah (no class) Please use this day to get ahead in the readings!!

R 10.27 Herman Melville, "Bartleby," (Bookstore) "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (Reader)

Group Four: Close Reading

(Please note that although this is a close reading day, I'd like the class as a whole to pay attention to what aspects of Hawthorne's writing Melville admires and take note of whether Melville uses them in "Bartleby.")

**Week 9**

T 11.1 Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*

Group Two: Close Reading

R 11.3 Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*

Group One: Cultural Context

**Week 10**

T 11.8 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Group Three: Close Reading

R 11.10 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Group Four & One: Narrative Convention

**Week 11**

T 11.16 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Group Two: Cultural Context

R 11.18 William Wells Brown, *Clotel*

Group Three: Narrative Convention

**Week 12**

T 11.23 William Wells Brown, *Clotel*

Group Four: Cultural Context

R 11.25 **Thanksgiving**

**Week 13 AMERICAN REALISM**

T 11.30 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Group One: Genre

R 12.2 Kate Chopin, "Désirée's Baby" (Reader)

Group Two: Genre

**Week 14**

T 12.7 Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Sheriff's Children" (Reader)

Group Three and Four: Genre

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Below is a description of the four types of papers you are being asked to write this semester. These topics are designed to help you master the skills taught in this class and to prepare for class discussion. The primary skills this course covers are close reading of fiction, analysis of narrative strategies, cultural analysis, and genre analysis. Please see the above schedule for when the various types of papers are due for each group. All papers should be one page long (single spaced is fine) except the genre paper which should be 2-3 pages.

**1. Close Reading.** Choose a rich, SHORT segment of the assigned readings for the day (1-2 paragraphs maximum). Your paper should make an argument about this segment of the story/novel. What purpose does the

segment play in the larger work? Literary Critic Edgar Roberts provides the following useful questions for close readings of passages based on their location in a narrative. You may want to use his questions as a starting point; you do not, however, need to answer all of them.

**For an Early Passage:** Does the passages occur early in the work? If it does, you may reasonably expect that the author is using the passage to set things in motion. Thus you should try to determine how ideas, themes, characterizations, and arguments that you find in the passage are related to these matters as they appear later in the work. You may assume that everything in the passage is there for a purpose. Try to find that purpose.

**For a Later, Midpoint Passage:** Does the passage come later in the work, at a time that you might characterize as a "pivot" or "turning point"? In such a passage a character's fortunes take either an expected or unexpected turn. If the change is expected, you should explain how the passage focuses the various themes or ideas and then propels them toward the climax. If the change is unexpected, however, it is necessary to show how the contrast is made in the passage. It may be that the work is one that features surprises, and that the passage thus is read one way at first but on second reading may be seen to have a double meaning. Or it may be that the speaker has had one set of assumptions while the readers have had others, and that the passage marks a point of increasing self-awareness on the part of the speaker. Many of the part of works are not what they seem at first reading, and it is your task here to determine how the passage is affected by events at or near the end of the work.

**For a Concluding Passage:** If the passage occurs at or near the end of the work, you may assume that it is designed to solve problems or to be a focal point or climax for all the situations and ideas that have been building up in the work. You may need to show how the passage brings together all themes, ideas, and details. What is happening? Is any action described in the passage a major action, or a step leading to the major action? Has everything in the passage been prepared for earlier in the work?<sup>1</sup>

**2. Narrative Convention.** Narrative conventions are the strategies writers use to create fiction (and nonfiction). They include aspects of storytelling such as setting, point of view, characterization, figurative language, and the like. On the days you are assigned a "narrative convention" paper, please do a brief amount of research into a ONE narrative convention by reading one essay in the recommended text *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, edited by Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (in the bookstore and on reserve). Apply what that essay says about that narrative convention to the assigned reading for the day. Your essay should clearly indicate (1) what the narrative convention is that you chose, (2) what essay you read in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, (3) what the main argument or terms of that essay were (not more than one paragraph of your essay), and (4) how the essay helps us understand the assigned readings better. You will notice for some of the days indicated as "Narrative convention" you are assigned a short article on the gothic by one of the nineteenth-century authors we are studying. If this is the case, please use the indicate essay by the nineteenth-century author *instead* of one of the essays in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*.

**3. Cultural Context.** You will notice that the syllabus is broken into three time periods: Early Republic, American Renaissance, and American Realism. During these three eras the fears and anxieties in nineteenth-century American society slowly shifted. The purpose of this assignment is to explore the specific nature of one anxiety plaguing America during the specified era and show how it relates to the assigned readings. One the days that you are assigned "Cultural context" papers we will be reading cultural or critical editions that have contextual information in the back of the books. Please choose one item from these contexts (e.g. an announcement of a slave sale, or Theodore Parker's sermon on the "Dangerous Classes"). In your paper you should (1) analyze the significance of the object with respect to American fears and anxieties in the nineteenth century (one paragraph) and (2) explain how the object helps us understand the primary readings better (one paragraph).

**4. Genre:** This is your final paper and it should be slightly longer than your earlier papers (**2-3 pages**). The goal of this paper is to evaluate how the gothic has changed over the course of the nineteenth-century through a comparison on two works. For this paper you should compare the type of gothic found in the assigned reading for the day to **ONE** of the earlier stories or novels we have read. Your life will be easier if you compare the later work to an earlier piece that has some basic thematic similarities. In your paper you should address both what characterized the gothic mode in the earlier work and how the later work differs (or retains similarities). What is the gothic for this later writer? What narrative strategies does the writer value?

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Roberts. *Writing Themes About Literature*, 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1983): 187-88.