



Course Manual

Course Title:	The Monster You Can't See: Political Anxiety in Horror Cinema
Programme Name:	B.A. (Hons.) Journalism and Media Studies/ B.A. (Hons.) Film and New Media
Course Code:	J-ET-0086
Credits	3
Course Type	Elective
Semester	Cross-Listed
Course Instructor(s)	Kajori Sen
Academic Year	2025-26
Contact Details	ksen@jgu.edu.in
Office Hours	TBD

1. Course Objectives:

The core of horror as a genre lies in triggering the anxieties that are closest to its audiences imagination. Whether that is something as universal as the fear of the dark and unknowable or more culturally specific like the banshee (Ireland) or the aswang (Philippines), horror narratives are created to remind us that we are never safe and that dangers lurk where we expect it the least. Horror is predicated on subtext, the symbols that demarcate predator from prey, the allegories that bring our innermost anxieties and give it form.

Traditionally, these fears have been associated with the body and the mind. Andrew Tudor demarcated horror under the sub-heads of scientific, supernatural and psychological. In these categories, he argued, the fears of uncontrolled physical experimentation, the fears of the unknown and mysterious, and the fears of the unplumbed depths of the human mind were made manifest.

Over the last few decades, however, there has been an increasing recognition that horror doesn't just mine the personal to trigger a sense of fear and unease but also plays, both consciously and unconsciously, with the political. With different socio-political settings and backdrops, ranging from the anti-Semitic portrayal of the vampire in the Weimar Republic classic 'Nosferatu' to a scathing commentary of consumer capitalism through the spectacle of ravening zombies by Georges Romero in 'Dawn of the Dead', horror films have consistently served as commentary on different forms of political anxieties experienced by the viewer.

In this course, we shall examine different horror films from across the world through the prism of the political landscape within which they were formulated and interrogate how those narratives were located within specific anxieties of social, economic and historical tensions.

AIMS:

At the conclusion of this course, the successful student will

1. Have an understanding of horror as a genre, through the lens of various critical disciplines
2. Have an understanding of the ideas of monstrousness and how they have evolved
3. Have an understanding of key political concepts in the context of genre narrative
4. Have a rudimentary understanding of different forms of discursive evolution in the genre across the world
5. Be able to critically analyse ideas of representation and propaganda in horror cinema
6. Be able to engage with the role of horror cinema in reinforcing certain anxieties
7. Be able to critically look at the evolution of certain kinds of monstrous figures within a changing socio-political landscape

2. Student Learning Outcomes:

Course Intended Learning Outcomes	Teaching and Learning Activities	Assessments/ Activities
Understanding horror as a genre, focusing specifically on horror in cinema	Academic papers and books on the evolution of horror as folklore to horror as commodity	Final Examination
Analysing different horror texts from across the world and critically engaging with them	Screening of movies and engagement with the content through close reading of themes and motifs	Journal work
Mediating ideas of genre and how dominant Western cultural anxieties have been manifested in global horror texts	Looking at genre as a tool of cultural subjugation and applying it to the way horror has evolved	Essay
Exploring the connections between horror and social values, both conservative and subversive	Looking at how horror has operated as a way to produce anxieties for and against the state	Presentation
Examining the relationship between specific political events across the world and how horror cinema has responded to them	Analysing landmark moments in global horror cinema	Class participation

3. Teaching Methodology:

The teaching methodology for the course will follow a three-pronged approach

1. **Interdisciplinary focus on historicity and context:** The course is constructed by taking films from different cultural backgrounds, with different political and historical anxieties. To appreciate the specific cinematic approach each film has taken, the student must be made aware of the paradigmatic space within which the film has been made. Lectures and readings will focus on informing the students of the framework within which the narrative text has been developed.
2. **Critical engagement with the discursive, semiotic process:** The students will be encouraged to develop their own critical responses to the film within the contextual framework, from the choice of visual framing and technique to the specific development of character and plot. Journal entries and class participation will be used to ensure that the student brings a critical eye to the text
3. **Thematic Analysis:** The final component of the teaching methodology will focus on a deeper understanding of the way the film as a complete product reflects and emphasizes certain thematic approaches, while locating it within both a socio-political context and a cinematic tradition. Essays and presentations will focus on trying to give students a more profound understanding of how cultural texts reflect and represent a specific issue or set of issues

4. Assessment Structure:

1. JOURNAL ENTRIES: 30
 - Weekly submission
 - Will comment and respond to the text allocated for the week
 - Will assess the ability to engage with texts and analyse them
2. ESSAY 1: 20
 - To be submitted after week 10
 - Will compare how two films from two different cultures or different time periods represent the same kind of monster
 - Will assess the students understanding of contextual anxieties and how that is manifested in horror
 - Topic to be decided in consultation with instructor
 - Films discussed in the course cannot be the subject of the essay
3. PRESENTATION: 20
 - To be presented on week 14
 - Will look at how one or more texts specifically serve as propaganda or criticism of a single political event
 - Will assess the ability of the student to engage with questions of bias and narrative
 - Topic to be decided in consultation with instructor
 - Films discussed in the course cannot be the subject of the essay
4. END TERM EXAMINATION:
 - Will be held at the end of term
 - Will test conceptual understanding of theories and history of horror as a genre

Notes:

1. Assignments are due on the dates assigned; extensions will not be granted. Late assignments will be penalized. Assignments submitted over a week late will not be accepted.
2. All written assignments must be submitted in both hard and soft copy
3. All borrowed material, both direct and indirect, must be cited. Both APA and MLA forms are acceptable. For presentations, please cite on the PPT.

5. Evaluation Scheme:

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

1. Journal Entries: 30 marks
 - Each journal entry will be graded out of 5. There will be 10 journal entries in total. The best 6 will be graded.
 - Each journal entry must be 300-400 words
 - The grading rubric for the journal entry is – recognizing themes, interrogating specific scenes, identifying patterns, commenting on character development, analysis of fear response or lack thereof
 - A summary of the film will not be considered a journal entry and will be graded down
2. Essay: 20 marks
 - The essay will be 1500-2000 words long
 - The grading rubric for the essay will be – Choice of films and reasoning, cultural context for the film and for the monster, thematic analysis of the monster and how it is depicted in the two films
 - Films from the course will not be included in the essay
3. Presentation: 20 marks
 - The presentation will be 10-12 minutes long
 - The grading rubric of the presentation will be – Locating the film within the larger political context, analysis of the themes of the film, mise-en-scene analysis, presentation skills
 - Films from the course will not be included in the presentation

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

1. End Term Exam: 30 marks
 - The exam will be a traditional sit-down exam conducted over 1.5 hours at the end of semester
 - The exam will assess the understanding of different forms of horror theory and application to films examined in the syllabus

6. Detailed Course Structure:

MODULE 1: WHAT IS HORROR?

- **WEEK 1:** FROM FOLKLORE TO FILM: A HISTORY OF HORROR
READING: CONFIGURING THE MONSTER, PAUL WELLS
- **WEEK 2:** WAYS TO READ HORROR: FROM THE PHILOSOPHICAL TO THE PSYCHOANALYTICAL
READING: COGNITIVE AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO HORROR, AARON SMUTS
- **WEEK 3:** HORROR AS POLITICAL COMMENTARY: THE RADICAL AND THE NEO-CONSERVATIVE
READING: THE HORROR FILM AS SOCIAL ALLEGORY (AND HOW IT COMES UNDONE), CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

MODULE 2: THE RISE OF HORROR CINEMA AND EARLY ANXIETIES

- **WEEK 4:** NOSFERATU (1922): VAMPIRE AS PREDATORY OUTSIDER IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC
READING: NARRATIVE UNIVERSALS, NATIONALISM AND SACRIFICIAL TERROR: FROM NOSFERATU TO NAZISM, PATRICK HOGAN
- **WEEK 5:** THE MUMMY (1932): IMPERIALISM AND THE HORROR OF THE RISING ORIENT
READING: THE CREATURES FEATURES: MOULDING THE MUMMY AND THE MUMMY MOVIE, BASIL GLYNN

MODULE 3: POST-WAR MONSTERS

- **WEEK 6:** GOJIRA (1954): THE MONSTER THAT AMERICA CREATED
READING: JAPAN, GODZILLA AND THE NUCLEAR BOMB, JOHN ROCCO ROBERTI
- **WEEK 7:** INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (1956): THE COMMUNISTS ARE COMING
READING: POST-WAR HEGEMONY BESIEGED IN INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, KATRINA MANN

MODULE 4: CAPITALISM BITES

- **WEEK 8:** DAWN OF THE DEAD (1978): HELL IS A SHOPPING MALL
READING: THE IDLE PROLETARIAT: DAWN OF THE DEAD, CONSUMER IDEOLOGY AND THE LOSS OF PRODUCTIVE LABOUR, KYLE BISHOP
- **WEEK 9:** TRAIN TO BUSAN (2016): THE BETRAYAL OF THE CAPITALIST STATE
READING: NATIONAL CINEMA, TRAUMA AND MELODRAMA IN THE KOREAN ZOMBIE FILM, LUISA KOO

MODULE 5: NEGOTIATING PAST TRAUMAS

- **WEEK 10:** THE DEVILS BACKBONE (2001): THE GHOSTS OF WAR
READING: HAUNTOLOGY AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR IN DEL TORO'S THE DEVILS BACKBONE, ANNE HARDCASTLE
- **WEEK 11:** UNDER THE SHADOW (2016): INVASION, TRAUMA AND REPRESSION
READING: VAMPIRES, DJINNS AND THE MAGICAL IN IRANIAN HORROR FILMS, ZAHRA KHOSHRAHI

MODULE 6: NEGOTIATING PRESENT TRAUMAS

- **WEEK 12:** GET OUT (2017): WHITE TERROR AND BLACK BODIES
READING: HORROR VERITÉ: POLITICS AND HISTORY IN JORDAN PEELE'S GET OUT
- **WEEK 13:** GHOUL (2020): THE SPECTRE OF TOTALITARIANISM
READING: THE SPECTRAL AS POLITICAL: DYSTOPIA, MYTH AND HORROR IN PATRICK GRAHAM'S GHOUL

WEEK 14: PRESENTATIONS

WEEK 15: READING AND REVISIONS

7. Consolidated List of Readings:

1. Horror, The Film Reader. (2002). United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.
2. The Horror Film (Rutgers Depth of Field Series). (2004). United Kingdom: Rutgers University Press.
3. Tudor, A. (1989). Monsters and mad scientists : a cultural history of the horror movie. United Kingdom: Wiley.
4. A Companion to the Horror Film. (2017). United Kingdom: Wiley.
5. Carroll, N. (2003). The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart. (n.p.): Taylor & Francis.
6. Freeland, C. (2018). The Naked And The Undead: Evil And The Appeal Of Horror. (n.p.): Taylor & Francis.
7. Planks of Reason : Essays on the Horror Film. (2004). United Kingdom: Scarecrow Press.
8. Towlson, J. (2014). Subversive Horror Cinema: Countercultural Messages of Films from Frankenstein to the Present. United Kingdom: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers.

8. Grade Scale

COURSE LETTER GRADES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Interpretation
O	80 and above		Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75- 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules, and principles, and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 - 74		Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules, and principles, critically analyze existing material, and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65-69		Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60-64		Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems, and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55 - 59		Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50-54		Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills
P1	45-49		Pass 1: Pass with basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40-44		Pass 2: Pass with rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
	Below 40		Fail Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.
	Pass		·p· represents the option of choosing between the Pass/Fail grading system over the CGPA grading system in the COVID 19 semester/s. The option is provided when students attain a minimum of 40 percentage marks under the current grading structure in a given subject.

	Incomplete		Extenuating circumstances preventing the student from completing coursework assessment, taking the examination; or where the Assessment Panel at its discretion assigns this grade. If an "I" grade is assigned, the Assessment Panel will suggest a schedule for the completion of work at a later date
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Operational Grades and Consequences

IP	In Progress	Assessment will be completed in the subsequent or another semester.
S	Submitted	"S" grade is assigned when a student's dissertation has been submitted for assessment.
P#	Pass	For subjects with pre-decided Pass / Fail grades.
IM	Improvement	When the student has given an improvement examination in the subsequent semester.

9. Plagiarism & Academic Dishonesty

PLAGIARISM POLICY:

Plagiarism is a serious offense which happens if one uses already published material without citing the source. Below are the ways in which a student may be judged to have plagiarized:

1. If a student is using an argument, or a fact, or a figure, or an idea from some published source (either electronic or print) to substantiate a work, s/he needs to mention the author and year of publication in the text wherever it is used. Also, the student needs to cite the source with author name, where it was published, full title and year in either a footnote or end-note. Failure to do any of the above will be interpreted as plagiarism.
2. For journalistic articles, while using arguments, facts, or figures from a particular source, students are required to attribute them to the original source even if full citation may not be required by the course instructor(s).
3. If a student is directly quoting from a source, in the words of the author, s/he needs to put it within quotes. This needs to be followed by citation in the manner indicated in the first bullet point. Either the absence of quotes or the citation will be interpreted as plagiarism.
4. If a student is quoting from a speech or a media bite, s/he needs to put the text within quotes. The students also need to mention who said that and cite the source of the speech or the article/material which reported the person having delivered that speech. Failure to do this will be interpreted as plagiarism.
5. Note that even when using a picture or graph or figure, one needs to cite the source of that image right underneath that figure.
6. If a student uses material from a source by replacing the words from the original source with synonyms but keeping the basic structure of the text unchanged, and has not acknowledged the original source, then this will also be interpreted as plagiarism.
7. If the student uses her own previous work or uses the same work as her response to evaluation components in different courses without acknowledgment and permissions from all instructors involved, it will be interpreted as plagiarism.

10. Disability Support

JGU endeavours to make all its courses accessible to students. The Disability Support Committee (DSC) has identified conditions that could hinder a student's overall well-being. These include physical and mobility-related difficulties, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental health conditions, and intellectual/learning difficulties e.g., dyslexia and dyscalculia. Students with any known disability needing academic and other support are required to register with the Disability Support Committee (DSC) by following the procedure specified at <https://jgu.edu.in/disability-support-committee/>

Students who need support may register any time during the semester up until a month before the end semester exam begins. Those students who wish to continue receiving support from the previous semester must re-register within the first month of a semester. Last-minute registrations and support might not be possible as sufficient time is required to make the arrangements for support.

The DSC maintains strict confidentiality about the identity of the student and the nature of their disability and the same is requested from faculty members and staff as well. The DSC takes a strong stance against in-class and out-of-class references made about a student's disability without their consent and disrespectful comments referring to a student's disability.

All general queries are to be addressed to disabilitysupportcommittee@jgu.edu.in