LITERATURE

Ghosts and Vampires: interpreting gothic literature
Denyse Straker MA

6 weeks 12, 19 October; 2, 9, 16, 23 November
Thursdays 10.30am – 12.30pm
Course code: 17TON311 Course fee: £90

This course examines five Gothic texts with familiar genre conventions: ghosts, haunted houses, family dysfunction and vampires. Poe examines madness and residual evil in the House of Usher. Hoffmann employs the doppelgänger creating impressions of childhood horror. LeFanu and Stoker probe vampire mysteries. Finally, we have James’ famous ghost story.

Gothic stories were extremely popular during the nineteenth century. Transgression, madness, supernatural figures and sexual perversions abound in Gothic literature. This short course will look at three early examples of the genre together with the most famous Gothic story of all: Bram Stoker’s Dracula and finishing with a popular ghost story by Henry James. We start with Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ where the decay and deterioration of the house reflects its occupants’ disintegration. The German short story, ‘The Sandman’ tells of a dysfunctional family and the ensuing madness of the hero, Nathaniel, as he tries to escape from the horrors of his childhood. We go on to look briefly at ‘Carmilla’ by Sheridan Le Fanu. This novella was an inspiration for Bram Stoker’s Dracula, our main text, which we will study for two weeks and which has some surprising subtexts. The final novella is ‘The Turn of the Screw’ which raises questions about the effects of isolation resulting, perhaps, in child abuse and distorted imagination. We will discuss the position of the governess in Victorian literature and her vulnerability at Bly, the house of real or imagined ghosts.

Particular attention will be given to the position of women, considering whether the female characters are subjected to sexual abuse and what these texts may suggest about nineteenth century attitudes. The concept of women’s ‘hysteria’ will also be addressed.

Required reading in weekly order

Week 1: Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’
Week 2: E. T. A. Hoffmann, ‘The Sandman’
Week 3: Sheridan Le Fanu, ‘Carmilla’
Week 4: Bram Stoker, Dracula
Week 5: Bram Stoker, Dracula
Week 6: Henry James, ‘The Turn of the Screw’
Any editions of these texts will be suitable. The texts are available online and photocopies of ‘The Sandman’ will be given on request.

Additional information

- No prior knowledge needed.
- The course is suitable for beginners, as well as students with some prior knowledge.
- This course allows you to spend time exploring a subject for interest, among like-minded people, without formal assessment.
- There will be discussion activities during the course or between sessions.

Intended learning outcomes

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Recognize the typical conventions of Gothic literature and understand the background and context of the texts.
- Engage with other students in discussion of these texts and analyse and interpret them in the light of current critical thinking.
- Demonstrate understanding of the symbolism and ideas contained in these texts and be able to present creative arguments through group work and individual presentations.

About the tutor

Denyse Straker studied for her BA through the University of Kent’s part-time programme at the Tonbridge Centre. She went on to do a research MA on depictions of child abuse in literature at the School of European Culture and Languages in Canterbury. She has been teaching Comparative Literature at Kent since 2001, and has taught a wide range of topics on the short course programme at Tonbridge as well as on undergraduate courses at Canterbury. She is particularly interested in American Literature and Women’s Studies as well as specialising in Travel Literature.
Short Course Programme
General information, terms & conditions

How to book a place
These courses are usually very popular so you are advised to apply as soon as possible. Places cannot
be held without payment of the course fee.
- **Online Booking is preferred**: Please visit [www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge](http://www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge)
- **By post** to us at the address below, using the application form in the programme booklet. Please note that you will not receive an acknowledgment of your paper application; your payment will usually be processed when the course becomes financially viable, otherwise we will notify you of cancellation approximately seven days prior to the course. A paper application affirms acceptance of our terms & conditions.

Course cancellation
As these short courses are self-financing, each course can only proceed if there are sufficient enrolments. Therefore, if a course is cancelled due to insufficient enrolments we aim to notify applicants approximately one week before the course start date; if there is no suitable alternative course, we will refund the appropriate course fee in full. The University of Kent reserves the right to cancel a course for this or any other reason in which case the relevant course fee will be refunded in full.

If you find it necessary to cancel your place on a course, please let us know as soon as possible. Refund requests, including the reason, should be made by email or in writing to us at the address below. We reserve the right to retain all or part of the course fee if you request a refund after 14 days of your online booking being made or paper application being received. Discretionary, partial refunds may be made, after the deduction of an administrative handling fee as follows:
- a course fee of up to and including £42 will incur an administrative handling fee of £10.00
- a course fee of £43 and over will incur an administrative handling fee of £12.50.

The University reserves the right to:
- a) exclude any student if the student’s presence is making it difficult for the class to function properly
- b) cancel or amend the length of any course if the circumstances so warrant.

Neither the University of Kent, nor its staff, can be held responsible for any damage, loss or injury, however sustained, suffered by participants attending courses. Insurance is the student’s responsibility.

University Centre Tonbridge
For details of our other courses, news, events and location visit [www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge](http://www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge).
- Parking. There is plenty of public pay and display car parking locally, but please note that only selected car parks permit parking in excess of four hours; detailed information is available from [www.tmbc.gov.uk](http://www.tmbc.gov.uk). No parking is available here on site.
- Refreshments are not provided; food and drink can be purchased from any of the nearby café outlets - we are closely situated to the High Street and town centre. A hot drink vending machine is usually available on the ground floor of this building.

Mailing List and data protection
Those attending our courses are automatically added to our database and kept informed about new courses. This information is not released to outside organisations. Please write to us if you do not wish your details to be kept on our database.

*Please contact us if you have any queries or would like to register your email address to receive our course information updates. We look forward to welcoming you here soon.*

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