

“All Monsters are Human”: The Grotesque in American Culture



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Course Description:

Why do drivers slow down to look at traffic accidents? Why do we flock to scary movies in order to be freaked out...*on purpose*? Why would anyone *ever* watch a TV show called *Monsters Inside Me*? This class interrogates these questions, and others like it. The grotesque is loosely defined as the fascinating yet repulsive quality seen in much of our entertainment today, from reality TV shows to Coen Brothers films. The grotesque, in its many forms, has haunted American culture and art for centuries. It has infiltrated literature from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Anne Rice, and it continues to permeate popular culture, making us deliberately uncomfortable in TV shows like *American Horror Story*, *Dexter*, and many more. Evidently, the grotesque is everywhere—but what exactly is it, and why is it so popular?

The texts we will analyze over the course of the semester will respond to our Inquiry Question: What is the grotesque, and how does it affect us? In grappling with this question, some essential questions we address will include:

- When and why is the grotesque implemented in works of art?
- Has the grotesque impacted American culture? If so, how?

These questions will connect the art of the grotesque to its present cultural moments, as well as the prevalence of the grotesque in American entertainment. The grotesque has a deeply disruptive appeal that taps into unspoken fascinations, and in this class we will venture toward the root of this experience. By the end of the course, you will be equipped to examine, interrogate, and write analytically about some of the scaffolding behind modern American culture, and you will have a firm understanding of the forms the grotesque can take.

Required Texts

Books:

Rewriting. Joseph Harris. 2006.

Writing Analytically. David Rosenwasser, Jill Stephen. Seventh Edition, 2015.

Films to See:

Vertigo. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1968.

Django Unchained. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Columbia Pictures, 2012.

OR

Blue Velvet. Dir. David Lynch. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986.

[Please note: both of these films involve graphic violence and allude to/display brief scenes of sexual violence and sexual assault. Be sure to read the links posted on Canvas for background on the films before choosing which one to view, and let me know if you have questions/comments about viewing either one.]

While no subscriptions are mandatory for the course, be aware that you are responsible for finding access to each of the TV shows and films on the syllabus. The literature, articles, and essays will be available on Canvas in PDF form.

Coursework

We will complete two types of written assignments this semester. **Short Assignments** are shorter opportunities for practicing the strategies of analytical reading and writing that we will be studying in class. **Essays** give you the chance to make and develop evidence-based claims about cultural texts that we will be analyzing and discussing. Several short assignments throughout the semester will provide additional opportunities for us to practice the skills we are learning. You must complete and hand in all Short Assignments and Essays in order to qualify for a passing grade for the course. Assignments are weighted as follows:

Short Assignment One	From Summary to Analysis	40
Essay One	Comparative Analysis	150
Short Assignment Two	Analysis of a Film Scene	50

Creative Assignment	Group Film Representation or Individual Test Object	10
Essay Two	Lens-driven Analysis	250
Short Assignment Three	Annotated Bibliography	50
Short Assignment Four	Analytical Outline	25
Essay Three	Research-based Analysis	350
Participation	Peer Review and Public Speaking	25
Short Assignment Points	Various	50
Total Points		1000

Grades

The grades I assign to your work this semester are a measure of how successfully you have completed a task—an indicator of how well you appear to have learned the lessons that the task intends to teach. Grades are not a measure of your worth as a person or your potential as a student. They are also not a reward for the effort you have made toward completing an assignment. At their best, grades are one important piece of how you learn both what you're doing well and what you can improve this semester. If you have any questions about your grades after having carefully considered my comments on your work, please ask me.

Grade	%	What it Means
A	97-100 A+ 93-96 A 90-92 A-	Superlative work. Addresses all the requirements of the assignment in a compelling and insightful way. Manifests consistent attention to detail in both the ideas being presented and the writing that conveys them. Leaves you thinking well after the last word goes by.

B	87-89 B+ 83-86 B 80-82 B-	Excellent work. Clearly and engagingly addresses the requirements, issues, and major ideas of the assignment. Writing is not only readable but also rewarding, attuned to the needs and interest of the reader. Almost entirely error-free.
C	77-79 C+ 73-76 C 70-72 C-	Adequate work. Meets all the basic requirements of the assignment. Clearly addresses the main issues and ideas the assignment articulates. Writing is readable overall with occasional lapses in correctness and style. Punctuation, spelling, source citation, and other mechanical matters are largely error-free.
D	67-69 D+ 63-66 D 60-62 D-	Barely meets the most basic requirements of the assignment. Addresses the important issues or ideas that the assignment engages, but largely without insight. Frequent lapses in style, correctness, and mechanics impact readability and indicate a lack of careful proofreading.
F	Everything else	Fails to meet the most basic requirements of the assignments. Fails to address important issues or ideas that are central to the assignment. Fails to demonstrate attention to style, correctness, and mechanics.

Course Policies

The following policies for the course enable us to know what to expect from each other this semester. Please see me if you have any questions.

Course Content. I have spent quite some time thinking about what texts will be useful for helping us evaluate where the grotesque lies and what forms it can take. Much of the material we'll encounter I've encountered in my own coursework or have seen either on television or on the internet simply by existing in a world that has increasingly incorporated disturbing and uncomfortable material into its everyday content. Thus, my hope is that none of the content we will discuss will produce a reaction from you, the audience, that is so overwhelming you feel you cannot talk about or contend with the art at hand. As a result, if you think some of the material on the syllabus will be too emotionally taxing, please consider the following options:

1) Take a different class to fulfill the requirement. There are many sections of W131 and other W170 sections I'm sure you'd enjoy more if you aren't a fan of feeling disturbed or uncomfortable.

2) If one particular piece of material is something you think would be upsetting, perhaps skip that class discussion. As you'll see on the syllabus schedule, it's easy to tell from the headings what general issues will come up in the test objects we'll be looking at, and the attendance policy (seen below) allows some flexibility in what classes you attend.

3) Drop the class and take a different section another semester. You're all young and intelligent and hardworking, and I'm sure you can get into another section of W131/W170 to fulfill this requirement long before graduation. Don't stress.

If you have any problems with the content of the course that come up unexpectedly during the semester, please email me immediately so that I can attempt to provide assistance. I can't help you unless you let me know there's a problem, and better sooner rather than later. Also, we have a fantastic CAPS program on campus, and you can always reach out to them if you're struggling with the material for personal reasons. Whatever you do, let someone know what's going on so that you don't let the test object in question take any sort of lasting emotional toll on your wellbeing. It happens, unexpectedly, to most of us at some point in our lives.

Attendance and tardiness. Your attendance is an important factor in your success in this course. If you're not present for discussions, there's no way to learn from your classmates and myself. You may be absent three times this semester without penalty; I recommend saving these for illnesses and emergencies. Each absence beyond these three will lower your final course grade by a third of a letter (e.g., B to B-). It's best to notify me in advance if you must miss a class. Also be sure to inform me in advance of special circumstances, such as religious holidays or other university-excused absences, for which there will be no penalties (you must provide all relevant documentation). If you have an emergency or illness, please remain in contact with me by email so that we can make appropriate arrangements for you to keep up with assigned work. In general, remember that the sooner you inform me of any complications to your regular attendance this semester, the more options we'll have for ensuring that they have as little negative impact as possible on your performance. Tardiness will be penalized as $\frac{1}{3}$ of an absence (so three late appearances equal an absence); frequent tardiness or lateness that causes you to miss a large portion of a class meeting may count against your total absences (instances where you are not seated by the time I call your name for roll means you are late, and if you have missed part of the discussion or arrived unprepared for the day, you're considered absent for the entirety of that class).

Drafts and late assignments. Revision is a critical part of inquiry and writing. For that reason, you will be required to bring drafts of your work to several of our class meetings (as indicated in red on the schedule). Sometimes this will be a draft of a specific section, and sometimes it will be a complete rough draft of an assignment

(which means a full-length version that addresses all of the requirements that are specified on the assignment sheet). Failure to bring and submit the required rough draft materials on the days they are due in class will result in a 10% penalty (that is, one letter grade) on the final assignment. Short assignments will be distributed at my discretion throughout the semester and cannot be made up without prior arrangements with me.

All assignments must be submitted in class on the due date listed. You will be penalized 10% of the final grade for the assignment every calendar day that an assignment is late. You must complete and hand in all Short Assignments and Essays in order to qualify for a passing grade this semester.

Participation. I hope you will do your part to help foster a respectful and comfortable environment in our class. Discussion of the test objects and scholarly articles is essential to our learning process for this course, and so your participation will be required throughout the semester. If you do not do the work necessary to participate, you will be asked to leave and you will be marked absent. When contributing to class discussion—and you will, of course, contribute!—please refrain from the use of potentially offensive or hurtful language, even in jest. The grotesque relies on audience response, and each of us will have a different response to each text. Be respectful of any response to the material, even if (and perhaps especially if) you don't understand it at first.

Technology Policy. In addition to being physically present for class, you need to be mentally present as well. As a result, if I see your phone or laptop out, you will be marked absent. There will be no warning. If a laptop is essential to your form of note taking or learning, please speak to me within the first week of class so arrangements can be made. In addition, I will also not accept electronic submissions of papers unless you speak to me MORE THAN 24 HOURS before the deadline and we make arrangements.

Canvas. Be sure to check Canvas regularly this semester for updates, announcements, and course materials. An updated version of the syllabus will always be available there.

Writing Tutorial Services (WTS). I encourage you to visit a W131/W170 tutor at Writing Tutorial Services for feedback on your work at any stage of the writing process. Their incredibly valuable services are free to all IU students. WTS is not a proofreading service. Rather, tutors do something much more valuable: they assist you in developing your ideas and skills in written communication. You can call WTS at 855-6738 for hour-long appointments in the Wells Library, and you can check their website (www.indiana.edu/~wts) for hours at other WTS centers.

Student disability services. If you require assistance or appropriate academic accommodations for a university-documented disability, please speak with me after class, during office hours, or by appointment. If you have not yet established your eligibility for disability support services through the Office of Disability Services for

Students in the Herman B. Wells Library, Suite W 302, please contact them first (855-7578).

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of other people's words or ideas, whether deliberately or accidentally. Any written work with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the ideas, wording, and structure are yours, with exceptions indicated by quotation marks and citations. Evidence of plagiarism will result in an F in the course, and a report on your academic dishonesty will be filed with the Dean of your school and the Registrar. Please see the Indiana University "Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct" at <http://www.iu.edu/~code/code/responsibilities/academic/>.

Meeting with Me. The office hours listed on the first page of this syllabus are the times you are guaranteed to find me in my office, ready to talk with you about any aspect of the course, especially your written work. Be sure to bring drafts, outlines, or concrete questions about the material. If you are unavailable during these times, talk with me or email me to see about scheduling an appointment for another time. I check my email once a day on weekdays, so do not expect an immediate response. For conversations about your drafts and/or grades, please see me in person. Coming to office hours does not mean that you will necessarily do better on your assignments; it does ensure, however, that we will have a chance to enact some of the feedback, questioning, and conversation that all good writing requires before it can be great.

Again, welcome to W170, and I look forward to working with you and your writing this semester!

Weekly Course Schedule:

	Schedule	Class Activity	Reading Due	Assignment Due
UNIT 1: WHAT IS THE GROTESQUE?				
Week 1 Defining Terms—What is the grotesque?				
1/9	Day 1	Introduction		
1/11	Day 2	What is the grotesque?	Wolfgang Kayser, <i>The Grottesque in Art and Literature</i> (excerpts)	Biography Due
Week 2 Engaging and Evaluating Criticism				
1/16	Day 3	Coming to terms: what do we find grotesque?	Michael Steig, "Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis" (excerpts); <i>Rewriting</i> Introduction	
1/18	Day 4	Drafting for Short Assignment 1	Stephanie Lay, "Uncanny Valley: why we find human-like robots and dolls so creepy"; <i>Rewriting</i> Chapter 1; "Tools for Textual Analysis"; WA 17-21, "Notice & Focus (Ranking)"	Bring Draft of SA1
UNIT 2: HOW IS THE GROTESQUE REPRESENTED?				
Week 3 Diving into Southern Grotesque/Gothic				
1/23	Day 5	Interrogating the Southern Gothic	William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily"; "Genres of Southern Literature"; WA	Short Assignment 1 Due

			21-23, "Move 3...Asking 'So What?'"	
1/25	Day 6	The Southern Grotesque	Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"* <i>Rewriting</i> Chapter 2; WA 63-68, "Apply a Reading as a Lens"	
Week 4 Southern Grotesque				
1/30	Day 7	Southern Grotesque Continued	Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee"; O'Connor, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction"; WA 26-32, "Move 4...(The Method)"; WA 196-98, "Integrating Quotations into Your Paper"; WA 56-58, "Uncovering Assumptions"	
2/1	Day 8	Peer Review	"The Paragraph as a Sandwich"; WA 39-41, "Becoming Conversant Instead of Reading for the Gist"; WA 243-51, "Introductions and Conclusions Across the Curriculum"	Draft Due
Week 5 The Body and the Grotesque				
2/6	Day 9	The Grotesque Body	Selections from Mikhail Bakhtin's "Rabelais and His World"; Lady Gaga, "Bad Romance"	Essay 1 Due
2/8	Day 10	Serial Killer Day	Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?";	

			"Pied Piper of Tucson"; <i>Mindhunter</i> Episode 2*; WA 82-83, "Strategies for Making Comparison/ Contrast More Analytical, Including Difference within Similarity"	
Week 6 Film Analysis				
2/13	Day 11	Film Viewing Day!	"Tools for Analyzing Visual Media"	
2/15	Day 12	Visual Analysis Continued	WA 105-106, "Doing 10 on 1: Saying More About Less"	
Week 7 Film Composition and Race				
2/20	Day 13	Film Production Day		Viewer Responses Due for <i>Vertigo</i> and <i>Django Unchained/ Blue Velvet</i>
2/22	Day 14	Race and the Grotesque	"The Black Grotesquerie" (excerpts); Alice Walker's "Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells"*; WA 129-31, "Seems to Be about X, but Could Also Be... about Y"; WA 191-93, "Strategy 5: Put Your Sources into Conversation with One Another"	Film Production Assignment Due
Week 8 The Body and the Carnavalesque				
2/27	Day 15	The Erotic as Grotesque	Aimee Bender, "Quiet Please"; Carnavalesque selections from Mikhail	Short Assignment 2 Due

			Bakhtin's <i>Rabelais and His World</i> ; <i>Rewriting</i> Chapter 3	
3/1	Day 16	The Body Continued—Insides Out	Chuck Palahniuk, "Guts"*; <i>Rewriting</i> Chapter 4	
Week 9		Workshopping Essay 2		
3/6	Day 17	Essay 2 Workshop		Drafts Due
3/8	Day 18	Review		Essay 2 Due
UNIT 3: HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE GROTESQUE IN ART, CULTURE, AND THE NEWS?				
Week 10		<i>TrueBlood</i> and the Contemporary Grotesque		
3/20	Day 19	The Contemporary Grotesque	<i>TrueBlood</i> : Episode 1, Season 1*; Goldhill, "There's a neurological explanation for the link between sex and violence"	
3/22	Day 20	Fiction vs. Reality	My Favorite Murder Podcast #24: "...And Twenty Justice Four All"*; WA 245-46, "Putting an Issue or Question in Context"; WA 72-75, "Find the Analytical Potential: Locate an Area of Uncertainty"	News articles from this week plus a 1-2 paragraph reflection on how that article reflects the grotesque
Week 11		The Revulsion of Reality Television		
3/27	Day 21	Disgust and the Grotesque: Reality Television	<i>My Strange Addiction</i> : Episodes "Eats Dry Wall/Shower Drain Hair"	Bring grotesque

			Collector," "Drinks Nail Polish/Ear Digger," "Drinks Gasoline/Smelling Her Doll Head"; Freud's <i>Totem and Taboo</i> (excerpts); <i>Rewriting</i> Chapter 5	objects to class!
3/29	Day 22	Taboo Continued	Kristeva's <i>Powers of Horror</i> (excerpts); <i>WA</i> 156-75, "Making a Thesis Evolve"	Inquiry Question Worksheet
Week 12 Reality Television Continued				
4/3	Day 23	Reality Television Continued	Steven Reiss and James Wiltz, "Why America Loves Reality TV"	Short Assignment 3 Due
4/5	Day 24	TBD		
Week 13 Our Grotesque Reality				
4/10	Day 25	Reality Television Continued	Kaitlin Menza, "There's a Reason Why We Like to Click on Gross Stuff on the Internet"	Short Assignment 4 Due
4/12	Day 26	Summary Discussion: Why do we continue to engage with the grotesque?		
Week 14 Preparation for Essay 3				
4/17	Day 27	Peer Review of Pieces and Conferences		Essay 3 Draft Due
4/19	Day 28	Individual Conferences		
Week 15 Workshops				
4/24	Day 29	Individual Conferences		
4/26	Day 30	Final Day Evaluations		Essay 3 Due!

*The asterisk next to content means that the text could include a depiction of physical violence, sexual violence, or some other potentially disturbing image or representation.