American Vampire: The Horror Genre in Fiction and Film

CST 240: Topics in Film
Spring 2008, Section 70
Time: Wed. 7-10 PM; Location: MIL 33

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T, W, & R 6:00 – 6:45 PM, & by appointment

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"[U]nlike Count Dracula, [those comic-book vampires] were American vampires. Some of them drove cars ... went out on dates ... and there were the ones that owned the vampire restaurant (where, I remember, one of the specials was French Fried Scabs). Why, if owning a goddam beanery wasn't good old American free enterprise, what was?"

--Stephen King, from the 1999 introduction to Salem's Lot

Edvard Munch, The Vampire (1895)

Course Description: In the 19th century, the vampire myth was decidedly European, as Old World romanticism inspired writers such as Bram Stoker and painters such as Philip Burne-Jones. By the next century, however, motion pictures gave audiences an expanding pool of vampire stories to sink their fangs into, and Hollywood adapted the vampire to fit uniquely American themes. This class traces the development of the vampire genre in American literature and film, from Tod Browning’s screen adaptation of Dracula to Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight. Particular attention will be paid to the historical analysis of what the vampire legend meant for the culture and period that produced it.

Books & Resources: The below books can be purchased from the Campus Bookstore, but feel free to pick them up elsewhere. Online booksellers (e.g. www.alibris.com, www.betterworldbooks.com) often sell texts at reduced prices. You may use any edition of the novels, but be aware that this will give you different pagination from the course’s references.

✓ Stephen King, Salem’s Lot (1975)
✓ Robert Matheson, I Am Legend (1954)
✓ Anne Rice, Interview with the Vampire (1976)
✓ Stephenie Meyer, Twilight (2005)

You’ll also want access to the course’s eCollege companion website, which will have digital copies of the syllabus, schedule, assignments, and handouts. We’ll also be using the eCollege site’s threaded message boards to continue our in-class seminar discussions. The site is accessed at: www.cedarcresonline.net. To login, you’ll need a user ID and password issued to you from the Cedar Crest Registrar’s Office, typically sent to your Cedar Crest email account.

Your writing for the course should follow the MLA format, so you’ll want to have access to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers or a manual that covers the MLA style. An online companion to Diana Hacker’s Research and Documentation in the Electronic Age, which covers the MLA and research in the Humanities, is available at: www.dianahacker.com/resdoc. See also my “Guidelines for Writing about Literature and Film.”

Course Outcomes: The goals of CST 240 American Vampire (Topics in Film) are to develop an understanding of the cultural importance of vampire narratives in America and to become knowledgeable about the conventions of the horror genre in both film and literary fiction. Each age reinvents the vampire to suit its own fears, its own anxieties, and its own desires, and a study of the vampire narratives can reveal much about why a culture recreates such stories. Through the course of the semester, then, these are the skills I hope you’ll come away with:
• You’ll develop an understanding of vampire narratives as changing but continually present throughout modern American history, as well as the ability to think critically about the purpose such stories serve for a culture.
• You’ll develop an understanding of the stylistic and narrative conventions of the horror genre in both film and literary fiction.
• You’ll be able to interpret works of film and literature that use the vampire narratives for how they suggest complex meanings, and you’ll be able to analyze such works as to what they suggest about the cultures that produce and consume them.
• You’ll be able to express your understanding of course material thoughtfully and clearly through written analyses, a group presentations, and both classroom and online discussions.

Since the best way to develop an understanding of the texts that represent a culture’s mythology is to study a broad range of them, we’ll be watching and reading works that span the past century of American vampire narratives. You should read these films and story comparatively, evaluating how the vampire myth changes through different incarnations and asking what relevance variations on the vampire have for a given moment in history.

Course Assessment: We’ll work toward achieving our course goals each week by studying different vampire films or literary works and discussing them in light of selected scholarly readings. Your success in achieving the above goals will be assessed through the following assignments:

• Two exams over the course of the semester will allow you to synthesize analyses of vampire narratives through essay questions. You’ll also demonstrate your knowledge of film and literary content, along with lines of theoretical inquiry, through a series of objective multiple-choice questions.
• One analytical paper (of about 6-7 pages) will allow you to analyze a set of film and literary texts in depth, taking into account the range of scholarly arguments on the works and developing your own interpretation as to their significance.
• One group presentation (with 4 of your classmates, strictly timed to 25 minutes or less) will enable you to work present alternative scholarly interpretations of a vampire text for class discussion.
• Regular in-class and online discussion participation will allow you to develop and refine your critical thinking as to the significance of the vampire myth for the American culture.

See further down the syllabus for specifics on assignments, due dates, and participation assessment.

Honor Philosophy: The Cedar Crest Honor Philosophy states that students shall uphold community standards for academic and social behavior to preserve a learning environment dedicated to personal and academic excellence. It is based upon the principle that, as a self-governing body, students have the ability to create an atmosphere of trust and support. Within this environment, individuals are empowered to make their own decisions, develop personal regard for the system under which they live, and achieve a sense of integrity and judgment that will guide them through life.

Classroom Behavior and Protocol: You’re both encouraged and expected to share your understandings of the literature and films we’ll be reading together. By sharing our interpretations, each of us will develop sharper and more widely considered understandings of these works. A discussion—like any conversation worth having—requires both talking and listening. So, I ask that we treat each other’s contributions with their deserved respect, consider one another’s interpretations with an open mind, and not attempt to impose a particular point of view on our classmates. You should argue for a particular line of interpretation to which you’re committed, but do so with openness to other ideas and a respect for disagreement.

Appropriate classroom behavior is implicit in the Cedar Crest Honor Philosophy. Such behavior is defined and guided by complete protection for the rights of all students and faculty to a courteous, respectful classroom environment. That environment is free from distractions such as late arrivals, early departures, inappropriate conversations, and any other behaviors that might disrupt instruction or otherwise compromise students’ access to their Cedar Crest College education.

As we live in an age of increasing technological diversion—the call of cell phones, the click of mice, ringing in our ear—it becomes easy to forget the good manners of paying attention to those immediately around us. Please remember to silence cell phones before class begins (a vibrate setting is appropriate for emergencies). Also, refrain from checking your email or any wayward browsing of the internet during class time.

Attendance: Simply put, you must attend class. An accumulation of absences will affect your course participation grade.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Incumbent from the Honor Code, academic integrity and ethical behavior provide the foundations of the Cedar Crest scholarly community and the basis for our learning environment. Cedar Crest College expects students
to set a high standard for themselves to be personally and intellectually honest and to ensure that other students do the same. This standard applies to all academic work (oral, written, or visual) completed as part of a Cedar Crest education.

Plagiarism is the act of using someone else’s ideas or words and passing them off as your own without giving credit to the original source. Since a key goal of a college education is to develop and express your own ideas, plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense.

It is dishonest to present oral or written work that is not entirely your own, except as may be approved by an instructor, and you must follow the requirements of the instructor regarding when and how much collaboration with other students is permitted. Any language taken from another source, whether individual words or entire paragraphs, must be placed in quotation marks and attributed to the source, following the citation format specified. Paraphrased material from a source must also be attributed. In addition, if you are indebted to another source for a specific perspective or a line of argument—regardless of whether or not you’ve directly quoted the source—that debt must be acknowledged.

In this class, the penalty for plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct is a grade of F either on the individual assignment or for the entire course, to be determined by the instructor based upon the severity of the offense. All cases of academic misconduct will be kept on record with Cedar Crest College’s Provost Office.

Class Cancellation: If Cedar Crest’s campus is open, you should expect our class meetings to be held. If troublesome weather threatens to close the campus and thus cancel class, you should refer to Cedar Crest’s Inclement Weather Hotline at 610-606-4629 for notification. Of course, you should always use common sense and place your safety first when determining whether or not it’s appropriate for you to drive to campus under such conditions. If I cancel class independently of the campus closing, due to weather or for other reasons, I will send a class-wide email to your Cedar Crest account and (if possible) place an outgoing message on my office voicemail (x3474).

College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with me during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact Academic Services.

Assignment Format: All formal out-of-class assignments must be typewritten, stapled, and double-spaced with a 12-pt Times New Roman font and one-inch margins. Syntactically correct American English should be used. You don’t need a cover page or fancy binder, but be certain to include your name, our class information, and a descriptive title on the first page.

Deadlines and Lateness: Since it’s important to work with deadlines and fairest to your classmates to maintain consistent due dates, assignments are due for the dates specified on the course syllabus. Assignments submitted late will be reduced one letter grade (A to A-) for each 24-hour period after the due date. If you’re absent from class when a paper is due, you may submit it via email (rawison@cedarcrest.edu) as an attached MSWord or RTF document. Please do not send assignments in a different format (WordPerfect, etc.): most word processing programs allow you to save files as either Word (.doc) or RTF (.rtf) documents. Individual assignment extensions may be granted for extenuating circumstances (personal or family crisis, serious illness, roommate problems, etc.), but should be requested as soon as possible. Computer problems are not appropriate excuses for extensions or lateness.

Description of Assignments: Your final grade for the course will be based upon two exams, one analytical paper, a group presentation, and both online and in-class discussion participation. Final grades will be determined along the following assignment weights.

Exams (40% of Final Grade, 2 for 20% Each): You’ll take two of our three exams during the semester; for whichever exam you don’t take, you’ll submit an analytical paper on a film from that unit. (For instance, if you take Exams 1 and 2, you must write a paper for Unit 3 and submit it by the Exam 3 due date. If you take Exam 1, submit a paper for Unit 2, you’ll then also take Exam 3.) Exams will focus on assigned readings and in-class lecture and discussion material. Their format will include a series of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and essay questions that will ask you to synthesize interpretations of several works.

Analytical Paper (20% of Final Grade): You’ll write one 6-7 page paper that analyzes at least two texts along the themes of a course unit. Topics will be drawn from a list of prompts. The paper must be submitted in place of one of our three exams, due on the exam date for the appropriate unit. See the “Analytical Paper Assignment” for details and evaluation criteria.

Group Presentation (20% of Final Grade): You and a group of 3 or 4 classmates will give a presentation to the class that summarizes a secondary scholarly essay on a vampire text and offers your evaluation of the scholarship and your own interpretation(s) of the work. Presentations will be limited to 25 minutes total length. You will sign up for a group presentation date on 2/25. See the “Group Presentation Assignment” for details and evaluation criteria.

Online Discussion Participation (10% of Final Grade): Weekly eCollege discussion assignments (www.cedarcrestonline.net) will supplement our in-class screenings and discussions of films and literature. Following
selected classes for the dates listed on the syllabus, you will post one response to the discussion questions and then post at least one reply to the observations of your classmates. Online Discussion responses and replies are due before the next class meeting. See the “Online Discussion Assignment” for details and evaluation criteria.

In-Class Discussion Participation (10% of Final Grade): For each class meeting, you are expected to participate in our discussion of course material. Your comments and questions should express a developing sense of the class interpretation of vampire narratives, your own analyses of the films and literature, and an understanding of the semester’s secondary readings. See the handout “College Discussions: Guidelines for Participation” for suggestions on how to prepare for class meetings. Participation will be evaluated once at mid-term and again at semester’s end according to the below rubric.

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Consistently raises thoughtful questions and proposes original ideas based upon course texts and concepts. Makes substantive connections, criticisms, and interpretations between multiple texts. Goes beyond those interpretations presented in lectures and readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Frequently contributes to discussion with relevant points and questions drawn from course texts and concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Infrequently contributes to discussion except when called upon, but contributions demonstrate familiarity with essential course texts and concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Occasionally cites textual evidence. Relies heavily upon unqualified reader-response to a text, personal experience, or anecdotal evidence without reference to how textual language and images operate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Rarely contributes to class discussion except when called upon and contributions are off-topic and do not reference course texts and concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Does not cite textual evidence. Relies almost exclusively upon unqualified reader-response to a text, personal experience, or anecdotal evidence without reference to how textual language and images operate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Fails to contribute to class discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Absent from multiple classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Demonstrates negligible understanding of course texts and concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Absent from several classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Demonstrates unsatisfactory understanding of course texts and concepts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Absent from all classes.</td>
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Final Grade Assessment: Assignments will carry the following weights relative to your final grade.

Grades for the course will be issued according to the following percentages:

- 94-100% = A
- 90-93.99% = A-
- 87-89.99% = B+
- 84-86.99% = B
- 80-83.99% = B-
- 77-79.99% = C+
- 74-76.99% = C
- 70-73.99% = C-
- 67-69.99% = D+
- 60-66.99% = D
- 0-59.99% = F

Caveat: A special note about course material here. Vampire narratives depict some of most unsettling images and themes in literature and film. By their very nature, they confront a culture’s taboos, testing the boundaries of what’s considered normal, scary, or inappropriate. The horror genre is designed to disturb and push beyond audiences’ comfort zones. While we’ll see that much of the power of the well-crafted horror story lies in suggestion rather than the explicit image, many of the works we’ll study do graphically portray violence, sexuality, profanity, and other mature themes. By enrolling and continuing in The American Horror Show, you must bring an understanding and commitment to the serious scholarship and spirit of intellectual inquiry with which the course approaches these narratives.
## CST 240: Course Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment or Class Activity</th>
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| 1/21    | Course Introduction: Or, How to Read a Bloodsucker  
**The Fangs of Aristocracy: Dracula & The Great Depression**  
*Dracula* (Tod Browning, dir; with Béla Lugosi; 1931; Universal Pictures; 75 mins.)  
(Alternative Film: *Dracula*; Terence Fisher, dir; with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing; 1958; 1 hr. 22 min.)  
Browning’s Dracula Online Discussion (Due 1/28) |
| 1/28    | Carmilla and the Vampire Feminine: “You are mine, you shall be mine!”  
*Carmilla* (Gabrielle Beaumont, dir; with Meg Tilly, Ione Skye, and Roddy McDowall; 1989; 58 min.)  
(Alternative Film: *Vampyr*; Carl Theodor Dreyer, dir; 1922; 1 hr. 15 min)  
Carmilla Online Discussion (Due 2/4) |
| 2/4     | The Blood is the Life: The Vampire as Disease  
*Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, dir; American Zoetrope/Columbia Pictures Corp.; 1992; 2 hrs. 7 min.)  
(Alternative Film: *Nosferatu*; F. W. Murnau, dir; Film Arts Guild; 1922; 1 hr. 34 min)  
Coppola’s Dracula Online Discussion (Due 2/11) |
| 2/11    | Outsiders in Stoker’s Dracula: Or, A Transylvanian and a Texan come to England  
*Bram Stoker, Dracula* (1897 novel) (Riverside Edition, pp. 149-460)  
2/18     | Unit 1 Exam –or– Paper  
(Note: We’ll use the first half of our class time to complete the exam and the second half as an introduction to our next unit. If you’re submitting a paper for this unit in place of the exam, you may arrive at 8:30PM.)  
*Unit Two Introduction*: The X-Files, “Bad Blood” (Season 5, Episode 12; Vince Gilligan, writer; Cliff Bole, director; 2/22/1998; 46 min.)  
(Alternative TV Episode: *The X-Files*, “3” (Season 2, Episode 7; Chris Ruppenthal, Glen Morgan & James Wong, writers; David Nutter, director; 11/4/1994; 46 min.)  
2/25     | The Psychic Vampire: Or, a Love that Drains You  
Edgar Allan Poe, “Ligeia” (1838); Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman, “Luella Miller” (1902); Edith Wharton, “Bewitched” (1925); and Karen Russell, “Vampires in the Lemon Grove” (2007) (Short stories are available via eCollege as PDF documents. Look under the “Doc Sharing” tab.)  
“Bewitched.” *Shades of Darkness*. (Edmund Oboler and John Gorrie, dirs.; 1983; 60 min).  
(Alternative Film: *Vampire’s Kiss*; Robert Bierman, dir; with Nicholas Cage, Maria Conchita Alonso, and Jennifer Beals; 1989; 1 hr. 43 min.)  
Psychic Vampire Online Discussion (Due 3/4)  
(Note: Are you graduating this semester? 3/1 is the deadline to apply for May graduation.) |
| 3/4     | From Blood to Brains: The Vampire and Modern Reason  
*Martin: The Blood Lover* (George Romero, dir; Libra Films International; 1978; 1 hr. 35 min.)  
(Alternative Film: *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, dir; Walter Reade Organization; 1968; 1 hr. 36 min.)  
Romero’s Martin Online Discussion (Due 3/18) |
| 3/11    | No Class: Spring Break! |
*Salem’s Lot* (Mikael Salomon, dir; TV Miniseries; 2004; 3 hrs. 1 min., segments)  
(Alternative TV Series: *Salem’s Lot*; Tobe Hooper, dir; TV Miniseries; Warner Bros.; 1979; 3 hrs. 4 mins) |
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Activity</th>
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| 3/25 | The War on Vampirism: Vampires in the Age of Terror  
*Robert Matheson, I Am Legend (1954)*  
*Alternative Film: The Omega Man; Boris Sagal, dir; with Charlton Heston; Warner Bros.; 1971; 1hr. 38 min.*  
*Secondary Reading: Mary Pharr, Vampiric Appetite in I Am Legend, Salem’s Lot, and The Hunger, from The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature (1999) (eCollege)*  
*I Am Legend Online Discussion (Due 4/1)* |
| 4/1  | Unit 2 Exam—or–Paper  
(Note: We’ll use the first half of our class time to complete the exam and the second half as an introduction to our next unit. If you’re submitting a paper for this unit in place of the exam, you may arrive at 8:30PM.)  
*Unit Three Introduction: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, “Hush” (Season 4, Episode 10; 12/14/1999; 44 min.)*  
*(Alternative TV Episode: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, “Once More, with Feeling” (Season 6, Episode 7; 11/6/2001; 53 min.))  
| 4/8  | Vampyre as Subculture: How a Cult Makes a Classic  
*Near Dark (Kathryn Bigelow, dir; Anchor Bay; 1987; 1hr. 35 min.)*  
*Bauhaus, “Bela Lugosi’s Dead” (Song, Recorded 26 January 1979)*  
*(Alternative Film: The Hunger; Tony Scott, dir; MGM; 1981; 1hr. 40 min.)*  
*Near Dark Online Discussion (Due 4/15)*  
(Note: The college is on break from 4/10-4/13. Also, 4/14 at 4PM is the deadline for course withdrawal, and now is a good time to check how you’re doing in all of your classes.) |
| 4/15 | Eat the Young: Vampiric Obsolescence  
*Anne Rice, Interview with the Vampire: A Novel (1976)*  
*Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles (Neil Jordan, dir; Warner Bros.; 1994; 2 hrs. 2 min.)*  
*Interview with the Vampire Online Discussion (Due 4/22)* |
| 4/22 | Lizz’s Choice (This week, our teaching intern will select the film and text that we’ll study. Selections TBA.)  
*Lizz’s Choice Online Discussion (Due 4/29)* |
| 4/29 | The Fangs of Adolescence: Vampires without Bite  
*Stephenie Meyer, Twilight (2005)*  
*Twilight (Catherine Hardwicke, dir; Summit Entertainment; 2008; 2 hrs. 1 min.)*  
*(Alternative Film: Once Bitten; Howard Storm, dir; with Lauren Hutton and Jim Carrey; 1985; 1 hr. 34 min.; A critical flop and a modest commercial success, this comedy is noteworthy for its overt treatment of adolescent sexuality as part of the vampire myth.)*  
*(Alternative Film: Shadow of the Vampire; E. Elias Merhige, dir; with John Malkovich and Willem Dafoe; Lions Gate; 2000; 1hr. 32 min.)*  
*Twilight Online Discussion (Due 5/7)*  
(Note: 5/5 is the last day of spring classes, and you should follow your Friday class schedule on that Gregorian-calendar Tuesday.) |

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<tr>
<th>Finals Week</th>
<th>Exam 3—or–Paper Due</th>
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|             | Date, Time, and Location TBA.  
(Note: The Final Exam period run from 5/6 through 5/13. |