

**MCOM 320B 02 Advanced Studies in Criticism:
The Philosophy of Horror Films (3 units)
Biola University, Fall 2007
R 6:00-8:50pm in Rood 52**

Instructor: John McAteer

Office Hours: Thursdays from 4:30-5:30pm in or around Common Grounds

Course Description: A philosophical exploration of the nature and appeal of horror: What makes a film horrific? Why do (some) people enjoy horror films? How should Christian filmmakers, pastors, and ordinary moviegoers respond to the current popularity of the horror genre? We will look at psychoanalytic, feminist, and analytic philosophical interpretations of horror films and attempt to construct our own Christian interpretation.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will become familiar with the methods of philosophical analysis as exemplified by the *assigned readings*.
2. Before the end of the course students will be able to practice these methods with at least minimal facility in their *class discussions* and *term paper*.
3. Through the *in-class screenings*, students will become familiar with the major cinematic texts of the horror film tradition.
4. Aided by the *assigned readings* and *class lectures*, students will understand and be able to critique several philosophical interpretations of the nature and meaning of horror films.
5. Through *assigned readings* and *class discussions* students will develop their own personal understanding of the nature and meaning of horror films.
6. Finally, through the *term paper*, students will articulate their philosophy of horror.

Course Requirements and Grading:

1. Reading, Attendance, and Participation: 60%
2. Term Paper: 40%

NB. All majors within the Cinema and Media Arts Department must achieve a minimum grade in all major courses (required and elective) of "C" (2.00). Anyone receiving a lower grade must repeat the course with a higher grade to receive credit for the course.

Course Texts:

Required:

1. Carroll, Noel. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge, 1990) – 0415902169, \$29
2. Freeland, Cynthia. *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Westview, 2000) – 0813365635, \$34

Recommended [Required readings from each of these books will be on reserve at the Library]:

3. Grant, Barry Keith, ed. *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (University of Texas, 1996) – 0292727941, \$27
4. Jones, E. Michael. *Monsters from the Id: The Rise of Horror in Fiction and Film*. (Spence, 2002) – 1890626066, \$28
5. Schneider, Steven Jay and Daniel Shaw. *Dark Thoughts: Philosophical Reflections on Cinematic Horror* (The Scarecrow Press, 2003) – 0810847922, \$50
6. Schneider, Steven Jay, ed. *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge, 2004) – 0521825210, \$75

NB. There will be about 50 pages a week until the last two weeks when the reading becomes lighter to allow you to work on your term papers. This is more reading than many other Biola professors assign, but students should be able to finish the reading within the University's expected time table of 6 hours of homework per week for a 3 unit course.

Preparation Notes: Each week, students are expected to come prepared to discuss the assigned reading. In order to facilitate this requirement, students will turn in a 1 page typed paper on each assigned chapter. (This means that if, for example, three chapters are assigned, then students will turn in three sets of notes.) Each paper should consist of three parts: (1) first, in your own words and as clearly and concisely as you can, state the overall *thesis* of the chapter; ideally, this will be only one sentence; (2) next, state an *objection* not considered by the author; if you agree with everything the author says, then give an objection you imagine someone else might have; (3) finally, state at least one *question* raised by the chapter; this might be something you didn't understand about the material or it might be a topic you wish to discuss with your classmates. *No late papers will be accepted.*

Term Paper: Pick a movie monster (Dracula, Frankenstein, Hannibal Lecter, etc.), or a general kind of monster (Vampires, Zombies, Demons, Serial Killers, Torturers, etc.) and explain its "meaning" in a 7-10 page term paper: explain why people are afraid of it (use one of the theories discussed in class, or make up your own, but be sure to explain why whichever theory you choose is superior to the others for making sense of this monster), why people enjoy watching it (don't try to explain the attraction of horror in general; explain the attraction of this particular monster); what this monster has to say about our culture; and what the Christian response to this monster should be. Be sure to discuss the monster in at least two significantly different films (if you are comparing a movie with its sequel, make sure you have something interesting to say about the differences between the films). Due on 12/13 via email by 6:00 pm. **Late papers will be reduced 1/3 of a letter grade for each 8 hours late.**

Academic Honesty: We are committed at Biola University to ethical practice in teaching, scholarship, and service. As such, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please see the undergraduate student handbook policy on academic honesty. It is imperative that you present all written, oral, and/or performed work with a clear indication of the source of that work. If it is completely your own, you are encouraged to present it as such, taking pleasure in ownership of your own created work. However, it is also imperative that you give full credit to any and all others whose work you have included in your presentation via paraphrase, direct quotation, and/or performance, citing the name(s) or the author(s)/creator(s) and the source of the work with appropriate bibliographic information. To do otherwise is to put oneself in jeopardy of being sanctioned for an act or acts of plagiarism that can carry serious consequences up to and including expulsion from the university.

Disabilities: Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class are to contact Disability Services. Disability Services is located in the Learning Center in the Biola Library, upstairs from the main floor, and can be reached by calling 562.906.4542 or extension 4542.

Class Schedule:

NB. We will *not* screen the following films in class, but I will nevertheless assume you are familiar with them (all of which are available in the Equipment Center): *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Exorcist*, *Halloween*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Hellraiser: Inferno*.

Week 1 (8/23) *Intro to Course*
In-class viewing: *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)

Part I: Cognitivist Analyses

Week 2 (8/30) *Defining Horror, Take 1*
Homework: Carroll Ch 1
In-class viewing: *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980)

Week 3 (9/6) *Defining Horror, Take 2*
Homework: Freeland Ch 7 and Hills in Schneider & Shaw [On Reserve]
In-class viewing: *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sanchez, 1999)

Week 4 (9/13) *The Rationality of Horror*
Homework: Carroll Ch 2
In-class viewing: *Alien* (Scott, 1979)

Part II: Feminist Analyses

- Week 5 (9/20) *Classical Feminist Critique, Take 1*
Homework: Williams and Creed in Grant Ch 1-2 [On Library Reserve]
In-class viewing: *Peeping Tom* (Powell, 1960)
- Week 6 (9/27) *Classical Feminist Critique, Take 2*
Homework: Clover in Grant Ch 3 [On Library Reserve]
In-class viewing: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974)
- Week 7 (10/4) *Cognitivist Feminism*
Homework: Freeland Ch 2 and 5
In-class viewing: *Frenzy* (Hitchcock, 1972)

Part III: The Paradox of Horror Pleasure

- Week 8 (10/11) *Psychoanalytic Approaches*
Homework: Urbano, Levine, and Tudor in Schneider Ch 1-3 [Reserve]
In-class viewing: *The Birds* (1963)

No class Thurs 10/18 (Torrey Conference)

- Week 9 (10/25) *Cognitivist Approaches, Take 1*
Homework: Carroll Ch 4
In-class viewing: *Scream* (Craven, 1996)
- Week 10 (11/1) *Cognitivist Approaches, Take 2*
Homework: Freeland Ch 8 and Solomon in Schneider & Shaw [Reserve]
In-class viewing: *Hellraiser* (Barker, 1987)

Part IV: Sociopolitical Analyses

- Week 11 (11/8) *Marxist Approaches*
Homework: Wood [On Library Reserve]
In-class viewing: *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968)

- Week 12 (11/15) *Conservative Approaches*
Homework: Jones Ch 8-9 and Conclusion
In-class viewing: *The Brood* (Cronenberg, 1979)

No class Thurs 11/22 (Thanksgiving)

- Week 13 (11/29) *Horror as Pornography*
Homework: Hostel reading packet [On Library Reserve]
In-class viewing: *Hostel* (Roth, 2005)

Part V: Christian Analyses

Week 14 (12/6) *The Possibility of Christian Horror*
Homework: Christian horror reading packet [On Library Reserve]
In-class viewing: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Derrickson, 2005)

No Final Exam. Term papers due on 12/13 via email by 6:00 pm.

Bibliography:

- Anonymous review of "The Passion of the Christ" in *ESplatter: The Guide to Modern Horror Movies* <http://www.esplatter.com/reviewsotos/passionofthechrist.htm>
- Aristotle. *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (Penguin, 1996) – 0140446362, \$11
- Beal, Timothy K. *Religion and Its Monsters* (Routledge, 2001) – 0415925886, \$25
- Beavis, Mary Ann. "'Angels Carrying Savage Weapons': Uses of the Bible in Contemporary Horror Films" in *Journal of Religion and Film* 7:2 (October 2003)
<http://avalon.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol7No2/angels.htm>
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (UC Press, 1988) [Especially the first part of Chapter 7 on "the patterning of desire".]
- Byassee, Jason. "Devil in the Details: When Faith Is Ruled by Fear" *The Christian Century* Nov. 1, 2005 [Review of *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*]
- Carroll, Noel. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge, 1990) – 0415902169, \$29
- Chattaway, Peter T. "Horror: The Perfect Christian Genre" in *Christianity Today Movies* (Posted 8/30/05) [interview with Scott Derrickson]
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/interviews/scottderrickson.html>
- Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, 1993)
- Freeland, Cynthia. "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films" in *Post Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (University of Wisconsin, 1996)
- Freeland, Cynthia. "Realist Horror" in *Film and Philosophy*, ed. Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg (Routledge, 1995)
- Freeland, Cynthia. *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Westview, 2000) – 0813365635, \$34
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (Penguin, 2003)
- Frisbie, Annie Young. "Raising Hell" in *The New Pantagrue* 1.4 (Fall 2004) [interview with Scott Derrickson] http://www.newpantagrue.com/issues/1.4/raising_hell.php?page=all
- Gaut, Berys. "The Paradox of Horror" in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33:4 (1993)
- Gilmore, Richard A. "Horror and Death at the Movies" in *Doing Philosophy at the Movies* (SUNY, 2005)
- Godawa, Brian. "A Theology of Horror Movies" in *Chalcedon Journal* (May and June, 2002)
<http://d.dominodeveloper.net/gsmlythe/home.nsf/f21ee91c64a30fa3882570900056e584/4ca419e0fe975a8f882570ce006e76eb!OpenDocument>
- Grant, Barry Keith, ed. *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (The Scarecrow Press, 1984; revised 2004) – 0810850133, \$45

- Grant, Barry Keith, ed. *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (University of Texas, 1996) – 0292727941, \$27
- Greydanus, Stephen D. “Horror, the Grotesque, and the Macabre: A Christian Appraisal” in *National Catholic Register*. Reprinted at: <http://www.decentfilms.com/sections/articles/2578>
- Hibbs, Thomas S. *Shows About Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture From The Exorcist to Seinfeld* (Spence, 2000) – 189062635X, \$15
- Hibbs, Thomas. “The Horror and *The Passion*” in *National Review Online* at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/hibbs/hibbs200404090651.asp>
- Jones, E. Michael. *Monsters from the Id: The Rise of Horror in Fiction and Film*. (Spence, 2002) – 1890626066
- Kearney, Richard. *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Ideas of Otherness* (Routledge, 2002)
- Leggett, Paul. *Terence Fisher: Horror, Myth and Religion* (McFarland, 2001) – 0786411678, \$35 [See also Greydanus’s review at <http://www.decentfilms.com/sections/articles/terencefisher.html>]
- Morton, Adam. *On Evil* (Routledge, 2004), especially Chapter 3 on the morality of *The Silence of the Lambs* (esp. p. 92-103)
- Mulhall, Stephen. *On Film* (Routledge, 2002)
- Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Screen* 16 (1975)
- Paffenroth, Kim. *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero’s Visions of Hell on Earth* (Baylor, 2006)
- Prince, Stephen, ed. *The Horror Film* (Rutgers, 2004) – 0813533635, \$24
- Schneider, Steven Jay and Daniel Shaw. *Dark Thoughts: Philosophical Reflections on Cinematic Horror* (The Scarecrow Press, 2003) – 0810847922, \$50
- Schneider, Steven Jay, ed. *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge, 2004) – 0521825210, \$75
- Taylor, W. David O. “The Horrors!” in *Christianity Today Movies* (Posted 4/5/05) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/commentaries/horrors.html>
- Walton, Kendall. “Fearing Fictions” in *Journal of Philosophy* 75:1 (January, 1978)
- Wood, Robin, Andrew Britton, Richard Lippe, and Tony Williams, eds. *The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film* (Festival of Festivals, 1979)