

Sophister Module Description Template 2021-22

Full Name: American Horror Stories: Narrative, History and Nation.

Short Name: American Horrors

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Dr Bernice M. Murphy (murphb12@tcd.ie)

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: MT/HT Hilary Term

Year: JS/SS: SS

Module Content:

1. Puritan Nightmares: *The VVitch* (F Dir: Robert Eggers, 2015).
2. Rewriting Slavery: *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead (2016).
3. Lizzie Borden Took An Axe: *See What I Have Done* by Sarah Schmidt (2017)
4. Ed Gein: *Psycho* by Robert Bloch (1959).
5. A Massacre in Kansas: *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (1966)
- 6. Reading Week**
7. Satanic Panic: *Dark Places* by Gillian Flynn (2009).
8. The Monsters of 9/11: *Cloverfield* (F: Matt Reeves, 2008).
9. School Shooters: *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Lionel Shriver, 2003).
10. Cult California: *The Invitation* (F: Dir: Karyn Kusama, 2016)
11. Demons, Debt and Reality TV: *A Head Full of Ghosts* by Paul Tremblay (2015)
12. Race and Horror in the Trump Era: *Get Out* (F, Dir: Jordan Peele, 2017)

(F = Film)

Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Have studied the relationship between history and fiction, and the varied ways in which real life incidents and historical eras have been appropriated by writers, readers, film makers and historians;
- They will have engaged with some of the most significant and transformative events in the history of the United States, as well as smaller-scale occurrences which have, nevertheless, become part of the fabric of social, cultural and artistic life;
- They will have also be obliged to consider complex issues of race, gender, representation and American identity, as well as ways in which, to paraphrase Joan Didion's famous words, the stories we tell ourselves 'in order to live' impose a particular 'narrative line' on real-life events which may in themselves be inherently nebulous and uncontainable.

Learning Aims:

This module focuses on real-life 'American Horror Stories': twentieth and twenty-first century narratives explicitly or implicitly informed by some of the most disruptive and disturbing true-life events to have shaped the culture and identity of the United States. Several of the texts covered here draw upon the twin evils which lie the heart of European colonisation: the brutal subjugation of Native Americans and the profoundly dehumanising institution of slavery. We

will also engage with the cultural and psychological ramifications of the Puritan legacy and the self-aggrandising doctrine of 'Manifest Destiny'. In addition, we will also discuss certain key individual events which have informed how the nation sees itself – including the 1968 Manson Murders, the Columbine Massacre, and the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks. The course will require students to engage with both the primary texts listed below (which encompass fiction, film, and non-fiction), as well as historically-based secondary readings each week. The primary texts to be discussed are drawn from a wide range of popular genres: they include horror, true crime, alternate history, the psychological thriller, and historical non-fiction.

Assessment Details:

- Type of Assessment (Continuous and/or Exam): Essay
- Number of Components: 1
- Word Count of Component(s): 5,000
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List: As listed in 'content' above.

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.