EN4372: The American Gothic: Landscapes of Fear

Short Title: American Gothic

“If we had less imagination, we would feel more secure.” (Yi-Fu Tuan, Landscapes of Fear)

10 ECTS

Lecturer: Dr Bernice M. Murphy (murpb12@tcd.ie)

Hilary 2017.

Assessment Details: End of Hilary term exam (100% of final grade).

Option Content: This one-term course explores the relationship between the individual and the physical environment in American horror and gothic texts from the beginnings of an independent American literary culture to the present day. From the seemingly savage wilderness that confronted the first European settlers to the brutal realities of frontier life and, latterly, the rather different varieties of terror found in the rural, urban (and then suburban) environments, American authors and filmmakers have always been fascinated with the impact that the nation’s vast and varied landscape has upon those who reside there. This course will explore the many reasons why this is the case, and also consider the differing ways in which horror and gothic depictions of specific geographical and architectural settings serve to dramatize some of the most profound anxieties and preoccupations associated with the American way of life.

Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Have become familiar with a number of key American horror and gothic narratives;
- Will have been introduced to significant sub-genres of the wider American gothic tradition. These include: the rural gothic, the suburban gothic, the urban gothic and the highway horror film;
- Have gained an understanding of the factors informing the cultural construction of place and space in American gothic and horror narratives;
- Students will also be introduced to a range of critical and theoretical approaches towards the primary texts and the key issues raised by the course, as well as issues related the wider academic study of place and space.

Course Schedule:
1. **The Wilderness Condition 1:**
   - *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* by Mary Rowlandson (1682).

2. **Small Town Horror:**

3. **Urban Horror 1:**
   - *Seven* (F Dir: David Fincher, 1995). ‘The Smoke Ghost’ by Fritz Leiber (1941), and ‘The Whimper of Whipped Dogs’ (1973) by Harlan Ellison.

4. **Urban Horror 2:**

5. **The Suburban Gothic 1:**

6. **Backwoods Horror:**

7. **READING WEEK**

8. **The Indian Burial Ground:**

9. **The Highway Horror Film:**
   - *Duel* (F Dir: Stephen Spielberg, 1971) F (original story should be read also).

10. **The American Asylum:**
    - *Session 9* (F Dir: Brad Anderson, 2001). F

11. **The Wilderness Condition #2:**

12. **The Suburban Gothic 2:**
    - *Get Out* (F Dir: Jordan Peele, 2017)