

Lakehead University
Department of Women's Studies

WOME / ENGL 2035 – Horror Films & Feminism
Fall 2023, ATAC 2021, T 2:30-5:30

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Office Hours: Thursday 11:30-12:30
RB-2014

Course Description: In this course, you will study horror films as cultural texts that support and/or challenge hierarchies of gender as it intersects with race, class, sexuality, age, and other identity markers. You will consider what horror films do, socially, in relation to other systems, and contemporary events, and will learn and use feminist theories to analyze the texts, including cultural, psychoanalytic, audience response, and queer feminist film studies. By the end of the course, you will show that you are able to interpret and analyze horror films within the matrix of feminist analysis and that you understand and can discuss the role that horror films play in the cultural re/production of gender-linked hierarchies and oppressions. You will also be able to show how some horror films challenge traditional tropes that define particular bodies (women, mothers, racialized people, feminized men, nonbinary and trans folx, and more) as uncanny, unnatural, abject, or just plain evil.

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Learner Outcomes specific to this course

In this course you will:

- Develop your ability to orally express a position with supporting evidence;
- Develop your scholarly writing, including improving your evidence-based approach to argumentation;
- Improve your critical analysis skills in relation to popular cultural texts;
- Develop arguments and observations based in feminist theory and methods of horror films and their role in society

My Availability: I am always available during my office hours on a first-come, first-served basis. I am also available by appointment if we can find a mutually convenient time to meet on Tuesdays, Thursdays, or Fridays. I check my work email during work hours: 8:30 – 4:30, Monday to Friday. I don't check my work email on weekends, holidays, or outside regular work hours.

Important Content Note: You will watch, discuss, and write about horror films and horror parody. They contain assault and violence (sexual and other); nudity (sometimes porn-ish); sex (consensual); murder; blood; brains; and more. If you will be emotionally or psychologically harmed (triggered) by horror films, please consider a different course. All films are mandatory and we watch them together in class. I haven't included films like the *Saw* or *Hostel* series; all films are required.

Weekly Topics and Materials

All the materials listed weekly are required. Readings are on our D2L site.

Wk. 1, September 5 – Introduction

I. Horrifying Bodies: The Monstrous Feminine

Wk. 2, September 12 – Traditional Horror Tropes

Film: *Friday the 13th*

Reading:

Trencansky, Sarah. "Final Girls and Terrible Youth: Transgression in 1980s Slasher Horror." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 2.2 (2001): 63-73.

Wk. 3, September 19 – Religiously Producing Abjection

Film: *Carrie*

Reading:

Creed, Barbara. "Woman as Witch." *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, 1993, pp. 73-83.

Wk. 4, September 26 – Monstrous Teen Years

Film: *Ginger Snaps*

Reading:

Miller, April. "The Hair That Wasn't There Before': Demystifying Monstrosity and Menstruation in *Ginger Snaps* and *Ginger Snaps Unleashed*." *Western Folklore* 64.3/4 (2005): 281-303.

Wk. 5, October 3 – Biting Back

Film: *Teeth*

Reading:

Creed, Barbara. "Medusa's Head: The *Vagina Dentata* and Freudian Theory [excerpt]." *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, 1993, pp. 105-8.

Kelly, Casey Ryan. "Camp Horror and the Gendered Politics of Screen Violence: Subverting the Monstrous-Feminine in *Teeth* (2007)." *Women's Studies in Communication* 39.1 (2016): 86-106.

Wk. 6, October 10 – reading week

II. Our Zombies, Ourselves - Intersectional anti-racist, anti-colonial Feminism and the Zombie Apocalypse

Wk. 7, October 17 – Slavery, Class, and Zombies

Film: *Fido*

Reading:

Coonfield, Gordon. "Perfect Strangers: The Zombie Imaginary and the Logic of Representation." *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, edited by Murali Balaji. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013, pp. 3-16.

Wk. 8, October 24 – Transnational Feminism and Zombies

Film: *The Rezort*

Reading:

Evans, Susan. "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, and Zombies are from...: Feminist Theories of International Politics and Zombies." *Political Science & Politics* 50.1 (2017): 554-557.

Wk. 9, October 31 – Challenging the Tropes: Anti-Colonial-Patriarchy Zombies

The final withdrawal date is November 3rd

Film: *Cargo*

Reading:

Kidd, Briony. "Outback Outbreak: Yolanda Ramke and Ben Howling on *Cargo* and the Zombie Film." *Metro Magazine*, 195, Jan. 2018, 18-23.

III. Postmodern Horror: Our World is Horrifying

Wk 10, November 7 – Horrifying Racism

Film: *Get Out*

Readings:

Nichols, Bryan. "Get Out: A Study of Interracial Dynamics in an Unrepaired and Unrepentant America – A Modern Day Racial Horror." *Psychoanalytic Review* 105.2 (2018): 223-36.

Adams, Ebony. "Well, Too Bad We Can't Stay." *Feminist Frequency*. March 1, 2017
<https://feministfrequency.com/2017/03/01/well-too-bad-we-cant-stay/>

Wk. 11, November 14 – "I purged, because staying in is un-American": Horrifying Politics

Film: *The Purge: Election Year*

Reading:

Roth, Silke. "Introduction: Contemporary Counter-Movements in the Age of Brexit and Trump." *Sociological Research Online* 23.2 (2018): 496–506.

Wk. 12, November 21 – Rethinking the final Girl(?)

Film: *The Descent*

Reading:

Lazard, Lisa. "'You'll like this – it's feminist!': Representations of Strong women in Horror Fiction." *Feminism & Psychology* 19.1 (2009): 132-6.

Wk. 13, November 28 – Horrifying Surveillance

Film: *Assassination Nation*

No reading this week: for our discussions and term wrap-up, show how you would apply some / any of the concepts you learned this term to perform a feminist analysis of the film.

Evaluation

In-Class: Discussion questions and weekly participation	20	In tutorial break-out groups beginning Week 2 or 3 (as soon as we can get a second room). I will provide you with a pro-rated grade based on the weeks up to Week 6, during Reading Week, so you know how you're doing.
Short Assignment: Horrifying Bodies (See details below)	25	October 17, 2023, before the start of class, in class. A hard copy. No

		exceptions without University-approved documentation
Short Assignment: Our Zombies, Ourselves (See details below)	25	November 14, before the start of class, in class. A hard copy. No exceptions without University-approved documentation
Take Home Final: Your choice, one of three options (See details below)	30	Due by December 13, 2023, by 4:00 pm. No exceptions without University-approved documentation. Hand in online via D2L

Discussion questions and weekly participation
20 Marks

It is your responsibility to be aware of appropriate classroom behaviour as set out in the University's Student Code of Conduct and to follow it. I expect good quality, respectful, discussion that shows you can apply the ideas that appear in the required materials (readings and films), and in my brief lecture, or that you're engaged in working to understand and apply them in the spirit of scholarly inquiry.

Discussion mark rubric

You can miss one class without documentation and not be penalized. More than one class will require University-approved documentation or you will receive a 0 for that week.

You receive up to 2 points each week beginning week X, which are totaled at the end of term, and transformed into a percentage that is applied to the 20 marks available. You will receive a pro-rated grade update during reading week so you have an idea of how you're doing.

2	You initiate discussion and show that you have understood and can apply the ideas in the week's required materials and brief lecture in a professional and courteous way that respects your peers and supports discussion and ideas-sharing. This means coming to class thoroughly familiar with the assigned reading, being prepared to actively watch the film (taking notes throughout based on the discussion questions and in relation to the ideas presented in the reading[s]), and being
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	<p>prepared to identify topics of interest in the reading in relation to the film during the discussion in a clearly evidenced way (you show that know the reading well by backing up what you're saying with a direct quotation or page number reference).</p> <p>This does not mean monopolizing a discussion or shutting others down, or taking up too much space by talking for its own sake rather than engaging in the week's themes and materials. You work to allow everyone a chance to share their observations and ideas. You clearly connect anecdotal evidence to the week's materials.</p>
1	You participate on a regular basis, though less frequently than a 2-point student. 1-point discussants' participation may indicate that they are not well-prepared for class, or have not given thought to the assigned materials, because they do not support the point they make in class with clear reference to evidence from the readings, or they focus only the film.
0	You do not participate. Participation is impossible if you do not attend class.

Short Assignment: Horrifying Bodies

25% - October 17, 2023, before the start of class, in class. No exceptions without University-approved documentation.

Format: 1000-1300 words (ca. 4-5 pages) excluding any title page and Works Cited. Arial, 12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins. *I stop reading when you reach the maximum number of pages, so please edit for length if you want me to see your full argument.*

NOTE: I am happy to give feedback on rough drafts, so long as I receive them a week prior to the due date. I am also happy to discuss your ideas during my office hours.

Choose one from the following five themes and illustrate: 1) how traditional horror films represent gender in relation to your chosen theme; 2) how feminist-linked horror films challenge the traditional representation; and, 3) why challenging these traditional representation of gender matters, or is important.

- Monstrous mothers
- Final girls
- Menstruation
- Puberty / 'Coming of age'
- Sexuality

Make clear references to the films, readings, and short lectures to support your ideas. You will also need to reference information you paraphrase from the Key Concepts and the weekly Recaps.

I expect you to engage with at least two films for this assignment, one traditional (*Friday the 13th* or *Carrie*), and one feminist-linked (*Teeth* or *Ginger Snaps*).

Short Assignment: Our Zombies, Ourselves

25% - November 14, before the start of class, in class. No exceptions without University-approved documentation.

Format: 1000-1300 words (ca. 4-5 pages) excluding any title page and Works Cited. Arial, 12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins. *I stop reading when you reach the maximum number of pages, so please edit for length if you want me to see your full argument.*

NOTE: I am happy to give feedback on rough drafts, so long as I receive them a week prior to the due date. I am also happy to discuss your ideas during my office hours.

Examine one way in which zombies are a “metaphor for oppressed racial minorities and identities” (Baker Kee 48), and analyze how two films from these weeks represent and challenge oppressive and marginalizing social systems. Be sure to use a feminist analysis that ties in with the course themes and topics, and to support your argument with evidence from the readings, films, brief lectures, Key Concepts and Recaps of our zombie Unit.

Take Home Final: Choose one of three options

30% - by December 13, 2023, 4:00 pm. No exceptions without University-approved documentation.

Electronic copy handed in on D2L

Format: 1500-2000 words (ca. 6-8 pages) excluding any title page and Works Cited. Arial, 12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins.

NOTE: I am happy to give feedback on rough drafts, so long as I receive them a week prior to the due date. I am also happy to discuss your ideas during my office hours.

Option #1

Traditional scholarly paper

Focusing on our Postmodern Horror unit, and incorporating early supporting materials when appropriate, write a traditional scholarly paper on one of the following topics:

- a) abject bodies and feminist analysis of horror; **or**
- b) horror films in relation to systems of control and marginalization; **or**
- c) the use of horror as social commentary and resistance.

Be sure to show me that you can use course materials, concepts, and themes to support your ideas and argument throughout your paper.

Option #2

Write your own horror story

Write a short horror story that incorporates one or more of the main themes of the course. Along with your story, submit a scholarly write-up that clearly explains how your story connects to feminist analyses of horror, and/or feminist horror films.

Your short story will be a minimum of 4 pages long; your scholarly write-up will be a minimum of 2 pages long, with differentiation based on the word limit.

Be sure to show me that you can use course materials, concepts, and themes throughout your short story (I should be able to recognize themes we've covered this term), and your scholarly write-up, in a more formal style with citations.

Option #3

Analytical reflection

This assignment gives you the opportunity to place yourself within the culture that surrounds you to think about how you, yourself, might reproduce or resist cultural norms.

1. Begin by identifying one film from "Horrifying Bodies," one film from "Our Zombies, Ourselves," and one film from "Postmodern Horror," for a total of three (3) films that affected you the most (either scared you the most, or made you the most uneasy / squeamish, or angry);
2. Take time to do free writing in relation to the three films (I recommend 15-20 minutes per film). Free writing is best done in a quiet place, with no distractions, and you write down whatever comes into your head as ponder the guiding question: "why did this film scare / bother / upset me?" Free writing can be a series of words, impressions, complete sentences, bullet points, whatever works best for you. You will hand in your free writing as an appendix to your Analytical reflection. I will not mark it, but will use it as a reference to what you argue in your reflection;
3. Leave your free writing for a day or two to give yourself some distance from it;
4. Return to your free writing and see it as a cultural text of its own, on which you can reflect, and analyze:
 - a. what themes, words, or ideas are the most prominent / repetitive in relation to the three films you identified?
 - b. what does your response to the films, as evidenced in the main ideas you identified in step a. above, tell you about the culture that you live in, and yourself as a conduit of / part of that culture?

- c. why do you think these films affected you the way that they did, based on the main themes you identified in your free writing (remember that your social location will affect your response to the films)? What have you been taught to be disturbed by, or afraid of, and why do you think the dominant cultural norms taught you to fear or be disturbed by the things you identified?

When you work through 4.b) and c), above, be sure to cite course materials and concepts to support your argument and ideas.

Marking rubric for all written work

A+ (90-100%): Near-Perfection. The work clearly develops a near-irrefutable argument concisely and convincingly. Ideas are linked and flow clearly from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. The argument or story, if that option is chosen, leads clearly and inexorably to its conclusion, is stimulating to read and shows analytical and connective abilities well in excess of expectations for the level. There are no errors in scholarly documentation or formatting, and the work is virtually free of errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Secondary sources never stand in for student's own thoughts and are used intelligently to evidence the argument.

A-, A (80-89%): Excellent. The work thoughtfully develops an interesting thesis, or story, if that option is selected; secondary source material is used intelligently, and not as a substitute for the student's own thinking in scholarly work. The student is in command of the topic and shows some originality and enthusiasm in discussing it. The work is well organized, convincingly argued, or presented if the short story is chosen, and clearly expressed – a pleasure to read. It is mainly free of errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, and uses the conventions of scholarly documentation correctly.

B-, B, B+ (70-79%): Very Good to Good. The work is a competent, accurate treatment of its topic. It is well written and has a clear thesis, or storyline, if that option is chosen. Writing at the bottom of this range may not have fully digested the materials, and may lean uncritically on secondary sources. The organization is good and the sentences are all comprehensible. There are few errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. The work follows standard conventions of scholarly documentation.

C-, C, C+ (60-69%): Good to Fair. The thesis is unclear, or trivial, or undeveloped; the short story, if that option is chosen, is difficult to follow, under-developed, or not clearly connected to course themes and content. Much of the work is summary or paraphrase, with only occasional analytical comment. There may be inaccuracies; writing at the bottom of this range may rely exclusively on secondary sources instead of the students' own thoughts. The writing is disjointed; some sentences may be convoluted and incomprehensible. There may be mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as carelessness about scholarly documentation.

D-, D, D+ (50-59%): Poor. The work has serious inaccuracies and inconsistencies. The student has some grasp of the topic, but not much. Where sources are cited, they tend to be misused or misinterpreted. The student may express opinions, but does not support them with evidence or argument from the course materials in support of their position. The writing lacks coherence, is unclear, and has many errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as carelessness about scholarly documentation.

E (40-49%): Failure Grade. Near-total misunderstanding. The student has very little grasp of the materials or subject. The essay is disorganized, obscure, full of grammatical errors and is unscholarly.

F (0-39%): Failure Grade. Total misunderstanding. The student seems to have no grasp of the materials or subject. The essay is disorganized, obscure, is full of grammatical errors and is unscholarly. Any cases of plagiarism will be submitted to the Dean with my request that a mark of zero be assigned.

Comments on Extensions/Lateness, Plagiarism, and Other Details:

Due dates and late penalties

You have all the assignment instructions and due dates from the first day of class, so there will be no extensions, except for Accommodations confirmed by Student Accessibility Services via their email notice to me.

If assignments are late, your grade will be reduced by 5 marks including Saturdays and Sundays. This also includes handing in on the day. For example, if you hand in a short assignment after the *start of class* on the due date, you will have 5 late marks deducted as though it is a day late. Any work more than 7 days late will not be accepted without appropriate documentation.

Plan your term now, so you don't find yourself struggling to meet deadlines at the last minute.

Academic Misconduct and Disciplinary Procedures

Make yourself aware of the University's policy on Academic Misconduct, and comply with the policy's expectations: see "IX. Academic Misconduct in the *Academic Calendar*, <http://csdc.lakeheadu.ca/Catalog/ViewCatalog.aspx?pageid=viewcatalog&catalogid=25&chapterid=7015&loaduserredits=False>

AND

"The Code of Student Behaviour and Disciplinary Procedures:"

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/policies/student-related/code-of-student-behaviour-and-disciplinary-procedures/node/1046>

GenAI Use Prohibited

Generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI or GenAI) is a category of AI systems capable of generating text, images, or other media in response to prompts. These systems include ChatGPT and its variant Bing (built by OpenAI) and Bard (built by Google) among several others. Other Generative AI models include artificial intelligence art systems such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E.

Any use of GenAI systems to produce assignments for this course is not permitted. All work submitted for evaluation in this course must be the student's original work. The submission of any work containing AI generated content will be considered a violation of academic integrity ("Use of Unauthorized Materials").

Please ask me any questions in relation to plagiarism, if you're unsure.

Remember to cite *all* information and ideas that you get from the readings, the films, and the discussions, including paraphrased information (non-directly-quoted ideas and concepts).

Assignment Logistics: word limits and formatting

I will stop marking assignments when I reach their word limit. Edit carefully.

Use one of the following citation styles. Online examples are available, so I expect to see no errors in the formatting and application of in-text citations, or your Works Cited / References page:

MLA: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

APA: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Chicago:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmoss_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

Campus resources

There are a number of support resources available to you on campus:

Student Accessibility Services

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas>

Indigenous Student Services

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/current-students/student-services/tb/aboriginal-services>

Academic and Other Supports can be accessed via the Student Homepage

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students>

and the Student Success Centre's Academic Support Zone

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/academic-success/student-success-centre>