

# ENG350W Seminar in Continental European Literature: The Uncanny

Dr. Jessica Barr  
jbarr@eureka.edu  
(309) 467-6337  
Office: Burrus Dickinson 301

Spring 2012  
Mondays, 6-8:45 pm  
Burgess 101  
Office phone: 6337

Office hours: Mondays 10-12, Wednesdays 1-3, and Thursdays 2:45-3:45.

## **Course description:**

In this course, we'll use the concept of "The Uncanny" (broadly defined) as a tool for approaching selected works of European literature, focusing on the late eighteenth century through the present (with a brief excursion into the Middle Ages). Using Freud's theory of the uncanny (or *unheimlich*) as a starting point—but by no means an endpoint!—in our discussion of creepiness, we'll consider the ways in which supernatural elements, particularly those which are somewhat disturbing, have been employed in literary fiction and why authors may have chosen to employ them.

Some of the major themes for the course include the German Romantic writers' interest in fairy tales and fantasy, the uses of fantastical elements in fiction to address contemporary social and political issues, and the development of narrative threads through retelling and adaptation of stories over a period of several centuries.

**Explanation of the W:** This is a "W"-designated course. As such, it requires a lot of writing, including a number of short papers which will build into your final paper for the course, giving you ample time to using writing itself as a process of discovery and learning. "W" courses are premised on the fact that writing deepens our thought process, and that it is through the analytic work involved in writing that we often come to our best ideas. In addition, this course is designed to increase your ability to research effectively for an English paper and to understand and synthesize literary theory and secondary scholarship about literature.

## **Objectives:**

By the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. Explain the use of cultural references and context in a story written in a time and place other than their own.
2. Engage literary theory (e.g. Freud's theory of the uncanny, Kristeva's theory of the abject) in dialogue with a work or works of literature in order to understand both texts (the theory and the literary work) more deeply.
3. Write a substantial paper that articulates and defends an original thesis about a literary work or set of works, engaging with other scholars' readings of that work and employing adequate textual support.
4. Respond constructively to others' ideas about and interpretations of literary works and engage in a productive, critically informed discussion of those works.

### **Course books:**

- Cixous, Hélène. *Dream I Tell You*. Trans. Beverley Bie Brahic. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Goethe, Tieck, Fouqué, and Brentano. *Romantic Fairy Tales*. Trans. Carol Tully. London: Penguin Books, 2000.
- Gogol, Nikolay. *The Diary of a Madman, The Government Inspector and Selected Stories*. Trans. Ronald Wilks. London: Penguin Books, 2005.
- Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Trans. Joyce Crick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*. Trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

### **Policies and expectations:**

**Absences:** Because we only meet 13 times this semester, each class meeting is crucial. If you miss only one class, you will not be penalized. However, more than one absence—for any reason—may result in a lowering of your final grade by as much as 10% (one full letter grade). Four or more absences (more than 25% of the course) will result in an automatic F.

**Late papers** are usually accepted, but usually with a penalty. If you have an excellent reason for turning a paper in late, contact me at least 48 hours before it is due. Otherwise, you should still hand in your paper, but be prepared to have points deducted for tardiness.

**Email:** If you have a question or concern about the course or an assignment, I strongly prefer that you come to my office hours or see me in class rather than email me. In my experience, questions can usually be addressed in a much more efficient and satisfactory manner in a face to face conversation. If you do email me with a question, be aware that I may simply ask you to come see me, or that—due to the volume of messages that I receive—I may not be able to respond immediately. Obviously, if you need to miss class or have an emergency, emailing me (and/or calling my office) is usually the best way to let me know.

I do not respond to Instant Messaging, and prefer that you not contact me that way.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty constitutes a major breach of the trust that exists between the instructor and the student. It includes passing off another's ideas as one's own, any attempt to gain information about a test or exam prior to the test or exam date without the instructor's consent, and providing unauthorized assistance on a test, exam, paper, or other assignment to another student. Copying text directly off of the Internet obviously constitutes cheating, but so does rewriting materials found on-line in one's "own words" without proper attribution. Any time that a person uses—in any way—another person's words or ideas

without appropriately crediting them is an instance of plagiarism. Cheating on any assignment—no matter how seemingly trivial—will result in a failing grade for this course. Students who fail for academic dishonesty will not have the option of withdrawing. If you have any doubt about what plagiarism means, or about how to appropriately document sources in your work, please contact me; I will be happy to help.

### **ADA Statement**

Any Eureka College student with a disability or other special circumstances requiring accommodations or other considerations in order to successfully complete the requirements of this course is requested to identify him/herself to the instructor and discuss the matter privately. This disclosure should be made within the first week of the course.

### **Learning Center**

The Learning Center, located on the first floor of Alumni Hall, provides academic services to all Eureka College students. Consultations are available in the areas of math and writing. Study groups, individual academic counseling and course specific tutoring sessions are also available by contacting Jason Zimmerman, Director of the Learning Center, by e-mail or by calling 6520. The Learning Center's hours will be posted around campus within the first two weeks of classes.

I strongly encourage you to take your papers to the Learning Center's Writing Tutors; this is an excellent—and free—service that can greatly improve the effectiveness of your written work.

### **Grades:**

Grades will be determined according to the following rubric:

Presentation	100
What is “the uncanny”? – 2 pages (1/23)	50
Freud explication – 3 pages (2/6)	100
Exploration of a Theme – 5 pages (2/27)	200
Kristeva explication – 3 pages (4/2)	100
Final paper – 9+ pages (5/7)	250
Moodle discussion posts (2—50 pts each)	100
Participation	75
Vocabulary Building	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>

A = 900-1000, B = 800-899, C = 700-799, D = 600-699, F = 0-599.

See the last pages of the syllabus for descriptions of the assignments.

**Course synopsis (subject to change):**

Please note that assignments are listed on the days that they are due.

1/16	<b>MLK Day – No class</b>
1/23	E.T.A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman” Marie de France, “Eliduc” and “Yonec” (readings are in handouts available in the Humanities office) <b>Writing assignment (due on Moodle by 12 pm): What is “the uncanny”?</b>
1/30	Freud, “Screen Memories,” “The Creative Writer and Daydreaming,” “Family Romances” <i>Grimm’s Fairy Tales</i> : “The Story of the Youth who went forth to learn what Fear was” (29-39), “The Three Little Men in the Wood” (78-83), “Hänsel and Gretel” (86-94), “The Three Snake-Leaves” (94-98), “The Seven Ravens” (137-39), “The Robber Bridegroom” (200-205), “The Juniper Tree” (220-230) <b>Group 1 Moodle discussion</b> (due 11:59 pm on Saturday, 1/28)
2/6	Freud, “The Uncanny” Goethe, “The Fairy Tale” <i>Grimm’s Fairy Tales</i> : “Cinderella” (121-28), “The Girl Without Hands” (160-66), “The Godfather” (206-208), “Frau Trude” (208-209), “Fitcher’s Bird” (216-220), “Tales of the Paddock” (480-82), “The Willful Child” (534-35) <b>Writing: Explication of Freud</b>
2/13	Tieck, “Eckbert the Fair” Fouqué, “Undine” Brentano, “The Tale of Honest Casper and Fair Annie” <b>Group 2 Moodle discussion</b> (due 11:59 pm on Saturday, 2/11)
2/20	Mann, “Death in Venice” <b>Group 3 Moodle discussion</b> (due 11:59 pm on Saturday, 2/18)
2/27	<i>Persona</i> [film] <b>Writing: Exploration of a Theme</b>
3/5	Mann, “Mario and the Magician” <sup>*</sup> ; “The Blood of the Walsungs” <sup>*</sup> ; “Tristan” <sup>*</sup> <b>Group 1 Moodle discussion</b> (due 11:59 pm on Saturday, 3/3)
3/12	<b>Spring Break – No class</b>
3/19	Gogol, “The Nose,” <sup>*</sup> “The Overcoat,” <sup>*</sup> “Diary of a Madman” <sup>*</sup>
3/26	Kafka, “The Metamorphosis” <sup>*</sup> <b>Group 2 Moodle discussion</b> (due 11:59 pm on Saturday, 3/24)
4/2	Kristeva, “The Abject” (handout) Kafka, “The Judgement” and “In the Penal Colony” <b>Writing: Explication of Kristeva</b>
4/9	<b>Easter Monday – No class</b>
4/16	<i>The City of Lost Children</i> (film) <b>Draft 1 of paper due on Moodle; online workshops throughout the week</b>
4/23	<i>The Andalusian Dog</i> (film) Cixous, <i>Dream I Tell You</i> <b>Group 3 Moodle discussion (on Cixous)</b> (due 11:59 pm on Saturday, 4/21)

4/30	<i>Little Otik</i> (film); “Otesanek” (handout) <b>Draft 2 of paper due on Moodle</b>
------	--

**Final paper due in my office or mailbox (#118) by 10:00 am on Monday, 5/7.**

**Presentations:** Each pair of students will have a text to present. (Presentation options are indicated above with an asterisk.) In your presentations, you will provide the class with the cultural context needed to fully understand the story. You will be responsible for researching geographical, historical, and cultural references that appear in the text—these might include specific locations or historical events, or they might be more general, such as types of artwork or the socioeconomic situations of a class of people in the location and period in which the story is set—and explaining these to the class. As appropriate, you should also make connections between these references and the larger themes or ideas of the text itself.

One week before your presentation, you must email me a list of the references that you and your partner intend to look up and explicate. If I see any major gaps in your list, I’ll let you know; this will also enable me (to some extent) to keep you from going down fruitless paths. But don’t count on me to do your work for you—if you send me a shoddy list, that *will* affect your presentation grade. Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes long.

**Vocabulary Building:** I expect you to look up words that you don’t know and to write down their definitions. Please use a reliable dictionary (not dictionary.com or the equivalent; I suggest the *OED online*, available through Melick’s database page, or a physical dictionary). Every week, I will call on a few people to tell us what words they have looked up and/or ask the class to define particular terms that have come up in the readings. (You may also post your words in the Vocabulary forum on Moodle; this will ensure that you get credit even if I don’t call on you.) You will be given full credit under this category if you can demonstrate that you have looked up words that you didn’t know every time that you’re called on. The purpose of this assignment is to develop the habit of routinely noting the definitions of unfamiliar words, thereby deepening your comprehension of the texts and expanding your own vocabularies.

**Moodle discussions:** Each student will be put into a group of 4-5 (Groups 1, 2, 3). These groups will be responsible for posting 400+-word Moodle entries on their two designated weeks; these entries are intended to prepare us for and spark discussion during class. They should be thought of as exploratory papers, and they will be graded. Moodle discussion posts are due on the Saturdays before class. I expect everyone in class to read and be prepared to comment on the posts for that week. Anyone is welcome to add comments and discussion to the Moodle posts; such comments will count towards your Participation grade.

**Final paper:** This paper will be an extended discussion of a work or works of literature from the course that engages to some extent with either Freud or Kristeva and also with secondary scholarly sources. Possible (broad) topics might include the role of art and/or the artist, doubles, bad mothers, incest, representations of dread, etc. **There will also be a “creative” option for this paper:** If you choose, you may write your own uncanny story in partial fulfillment of the Final Paper requirement. If you do so, you must also produce a 5+-page analysis of the ways in which the course readings and discussions shaped the creation of your story; this will be a *critical essay* that will in many respects resemble a more formal academic paper. Guidelines for both options will be discussed in more detail later in the semester.