FM 311 Dreadful Pleasures: Horror Films

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
Course Times: Tuesday, 15.15 – 16.45 / Wednesday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening) / Friday, 11.00 – 12.30
Email: m.hurst@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Monday, 13.30 – 15.00, Friday, 13.30 – 15.00

Course Description

It is both confusing and fascinating to see how many people seem to cherish terror and horror in films. Since the rise of the gothic novel in the 18th century, horror fiction found a growing number of trembling and jittering consumers. Today the genre of horror is one of the most successful film genres in our popular culture, attracting crowds (especially adolescent viewers) and provoking debates about the significance of horror fiction as part of social and cultural discourses. Why Horror? It seems that “in Europe as in America” horror films are “part of a great historical dialogue between Enlightenment and Irrationalism” (S. S. Prawer: Caligari’s Children. The Film as Tale of Terror. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 1980). Classical horror films – like The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920; dir. Robert Wiene), Nosferatu (1922; dir. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau), Dracula (1931; dir. Tod Browning) or Frankenstein (1931; dir. James Whale) – have become esteemed works of art and part of the international canon of cinema, whereas recent (and more extreme) films of the genre are usually met with reservations or are rejected as cheap trash, the misanthropic excesses of a commercial culture industry. What is the attraction of nightmarish stories, creepy scenes and shocking images? What do monsters, vampires, zombies represent, and what kind of pleasure do they provide? In this course we explore and discuss central topics and elements of the horror genre, the aesthetics of the macabre, classic examples of cinematic tales of terror and different kinds of (cultural, sociological, psychological) meaning in the specific art form of horror. The course consists of both seminars and evening film screenings.

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history and film analysis.
Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared and to participate actively in the class discussions. They should also take advantage of the office hours to discuss any questions or concerns related to the class or their academic work.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Absences will significantly affect the grade for the course. Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence. Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class. Illness leading to inability to attend classes, or submit work, must be reported to the College Registrar; a medical certificate should be submitted to
the Registrar in such a case. Bard College Berlin cannot offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, whether the absences are on documented medical grounds or not.

(Writing) Assignments
Students prepare and give a presentation on a film/topic according to the schedule and write a mid-semester essay (2000 words) based on the topic of the presentation, due on Monday, October 19, 18.00. A final essay (4000 words) is due in week 15 (Monday, Dec 14, 18.00); the topic of this final essay will be a film interpretation. A list of film titles will be provided from which students choose one for an interpretation.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers
All assignments and written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown
Participation: 25 %
Presentation: 25 %
Mid-semester Essay: 25 %
Final Essay: 25 %

Schedule
Week 1 (August 31 – September 6):
Why Horror? Introduction (1)

Week 2 (September 7 – September 13):
Why Horror? Introduction (2)

Week 3 (September 14 – September 20):
Meeting the Other: Strangers, Freaks, Aliens (1)

Week 4 (September 21 – September 27):
Meeting the Other: Strangers, Freaks, Aliens (2)

Week 5 (September 28 – October 4):
Mark of the Vampire: Count Dracula and His Heirs (1)

Week 6 (October 5 – October 11):
Mark of the Vampire: Count Dracula and His Heirs (2)
Week 7 (October 12 – October 18):
„It’s Alive!” Frankenstein, Mad Scientists and Artificial Creatures

Mid-semester essay deadline: Monday, October 19, 18.00
Fall Break: October 19 – 23

Week 8 (October 26 – November 1):
Deadly Twins & Transformations: Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde, Werewolves & Cat People

Week 9 (November 2 – November 8):
Haunted Places

Week 10 (November 9 – November 15):
Satan’s Children

Week 11 (November 16 – November 22):
Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner: Nights of the Living Dead

Week 12 (November 23 – November 29):
Descent Into Subjectivity: Explained Supernatural and Irrational Rationalism

Week 13 (November 30 – December 6):
Modern Horror: Slashing with Chainsaws on Friday, the 13th

Week 14 (December 7 – December 13):
Post-Modern Horror: Scream and scream again

WEEK 15: Completion week (December 14 – December 18)
Final essay due Monday, December 14, 18.00

Suggested Reading / Selection: