

EngLit 1790  
Fall 2003  
Lowenstein, A.

1

**FILM AND LITERATURE:  
POE, WELLS, AND THE NATURE OF THE FANTASTIC**  
ENGLIT 1790 (CRN 29942), Fall 2003, Tuesdays 6-10pm, CL 444  
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

Office Hours: CL 517F, Tuesdays 3-5pm, and by appointment

Office Phone: 412-624-6524

Email: [alowen@pitt.edu](mailto:alowen@pitt.edu)

**Course Description.** What happens when film and literature strive to represent the fantastic, or that which is beyond our realm of everyday understanding and experience? This course approaches this question through a consideration of both cinematic and literary texts attached to the names of two of the acknowledged masters of the fantastic: Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and H.G. Wells (1866-1946). The literature of Poe and Wells, as well as the rich variety of cinematic adaptations, appropriations, and variations on their work, touches on genres such as science fiction, horror, mystery, and the Gothic. But whatever generic label we choose, their work always returns us to the question of the fantastic. The literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.” How is this “hesitation” addressed in film? In literature? We will study cinema and literature together not to prove one “better” than the other, but to enhance our understanding of the difficulties associated with representing the fantastic. Demanding readings will open up our discussion of such questions, and students will pose (and answer) questions of their own in essays, journals, and presentations. NOTE: This is a W-designated (writing intensive) course – students will be responsible for at least 25 pages of writing and revisions over the semester.

**Prerequisites.** Film Analysis is **STRONGLY** recommended; a working knowledge of the textbook *Film Art* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson will be assumed. Students will be expected to speak and write about the interaction between film technique (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound) and film narrative using the technical vocabulary presented in *Film Art*.

**Course Requirements.** Grades will be determined through evaluation of the following (percentages are rough, not exact): a mid-term essay (20%); an oral presentation based on independent research (15%); a final essay based on revising the mid-term (40%); and attendance/participation/weekly journal entries (25%). Because your grade depends heavily on a number of different factors, passing the course requires that you **MUST**: attend all lectures and screenings; have all reading assignments and journals completed before that week’s class; participate actively by raising questions and observations during class; and turn in all assignments by the deadlines specified in the course schedule, as **NO** late assignments will be accepted. Come to each class prepared with written questions/comments to share based on your weekly journal entry. Journal entries are due each week, must be at least one single-spaced, typed page each, and must answer the following questions: What are the main points of this week’s readings? How do this week’s readings cause you to reflect upon previous films/readings/discussions in the course? How would you relate your reflections to this week’s unit title on the syllabus? Arriving late or

leaving class early counts as an absence, and more than TWO unexcused absences may result in automatic failure of the course. No plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will be tolerated – any such activity may result in expulsion. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Course Texts** (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve):

The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the course schedule:

- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, sixth edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001)
- Ken Gelder, ed., *The Horror Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000) [HR]
- Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981)
- Edgar Allan Poe, *Great Short Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) [GS]
- Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970)
- H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, ed. Nicholas Ruddick (1895; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001) [TM]
- H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, ed. Brian Aldiss (1896; London: Everyman, 1993) [ID]
- H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (1897; New York: Penguin Putnam, 2002) [IM]
- H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1898; London: Everyman, 1993) [WW]
- Course Packet (available only at the Book Center) [CP]

### Course Schedule

#### WEEK 1, AUG. 26 – INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTING THE FANTASTIC

Screening: *Time After Time* (Nicholas Meyer, 1979, USA) 112m

In-Class Writing Exercise

#### WEEK 2, SEPT. 2 – THE FANTASTIC AS THE DECLINE OF REASON

Screening: *House of Usher* (Roger Corman, 1960, USA) 85m

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” [GS]; Tzvetan Todorov, “Definition of the Fantastic” [HR]; José B. Monleon, “1848: The Assault on Reason” [HR]

#### WEEK 3, SEPT. 9 – CINEMA AS FANTASTIC TIME MACHINE

Screening: *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936, Great Britain) 92m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* [TM, chs. 1-8]; William Johnson, “Introduction: Journey into Science Fiction” [CP]; Terry Ramsaye, “From ‘Paul and *The Time Machine*’” [CP]; H.G. Wells, “From the Filmscript of *Things to Come*” [CP]; Anonymous, “*Things to Come*” [CP]; Elizabeth Bowen, “*Things to Come: A Critical Appreciation*” [CP]

## WEEK 4, SEPT. 16 – EVOLUTION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FANTASY

Screening: *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960, USA) 103m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* [TM, chs. 9-epilogue]; “The Evolutionary Context: Biology” [TM, pp. 157-183]; “The Evolutionary Context: Society” [TM, pp. 184-203]; Darrin Scot, “Filming *The Time Machine*” [CP]

## WEEK 5, SEPT. 23 – DREAMING THE FANTASTIC

Screening: *The Black Cat* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1934, USA) 65m; *The Crime of Dr. Crespi* (John H. Auer, 1935, USA) 63m

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat” [GS]; Edgar Allan Poe, “The Premature Burial” [GS]; Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie” [HR]

## WEEK 6, SEPT. 30 – MONSTROSITY AS FANTASTIC HYBRID

Screening: *Island of Lost Souls* (Erle C. Kenton, 1933, USA) 70m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* [ID, introduction-ch. 13]; Marie-Hélène Huet, “Introduction to *Monstrous Imagination*” [HR]; reread “The Evolutionary Context: Biology” [TM, pp. 157-183]

## WEEK 7, OCT. 7 – FREAKERY AS FANTASY

Screening: *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (John Frankenheimer, 1996, USA) 95m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* [ID, chs. 14-22]; Mary Russo, “Freaks” [HR]; reread “The Evolutionary Context: Society” [TM, pp. 184-203]

\*\*\*MID-TERM ESSAY DUE\*\*\*

## WEEK 8, OCT. 14 – THE FANTASTIC ECONOMY OF VAMPIRISM

Screening: *The Pit and the Pendulum* (Roger Corman, 1961, USA) 80m

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Pit and the Pendulum” [GS]; Edgar Allan Poe, “Berenice” [GS]; Franco Moretti, “Dialectic of Fear” [HR]

## WEEK 9, OCT. 21 – THE SCIENTIST AS SEEKER OF THE FANTASTIC

Screening: *The Invisible Man* (James Whale, 1933, USA) 71m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* [IM, chs. 1-17]; Robert C. Cumbow, “Prometheus: The Scientist and His Creations” [CP]

## WEEK 10, OCT. 28 – FANTASIES OF THE SELF-MADE MAN

Screening: *Hollow Man* (Paul Verhoeven, 2000, USA/Germany) 112m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* [IM, chs. 18-epilogue]; Mark Seltzer, “The Serial Killer as a Type of Person” [HR]

## WEEK 11, NOV. 4 – THE GOTHIC AS FANTASTIC

Screening: *Tales of Terror* (Roger Corman, 1962, USA) 90m

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” [GS]; Edgar Allan Poe, “The Cask of Amontillado” [GS]; Teresa A. Goddu, “Introduction to *American Gothic*” [HR]

**WEEK 12, NOV. 11 – WAR AS FANTASTIC**

Screening: *The War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskin, 1953, USA) 85m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (WW, Book I, chs. 1-17); Robert Bloch, “The Special Effectiveness of George Pal” [CP]

**WEEK 13, NOV. 18 – THE FANTASTIC AND THE SPECTACLE OF HORROR**

Screening: *Xtro* (Harry Bromley Davenport, 1983, Great Britain) 82m

Reading: H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (WW, Book II, chs. 1-10); Philip Brophy, “Horrorality – The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films” [HR]

**WEEK 14, NOV. 25 – MASS DEATH AND THE FANTASTIC**

Screening: *The Masque of the Red Death* (Roger Corman, 1964, USA) 86m

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death” [GS]; Edgar Allan Poe, “Hop-Frog: or, The Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs” [GS]; Gregory A. Waller, “Introduction to *American Horrors*” [HR]

**WEEK 15, DEC. 2 – CONCLUSION: HISTORY AS FANTASTIC?**

Screening: *The Conqueror Worm* (Michael Reeves, 1968, Great Britain) 98m

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Conqueror Worm” [GS]; reread Tzvetan Todorov, “Definition of the Fantastic” [HR]

\*\*\*FINAL ESSAY DUE\*\*\*