This course will analyze the cinematic adaptations of literary, mythological and global film sources that share the same genre—horror. From Murnau’s *Nosferatu* to Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal*, horror has proven to spawn its own storytelling archetypes, serving as strong subtext for race, faith, politics and sexuality.

We will explore how different horror auteurs deliver a unique vision from the same source material, as well as how this particular genre has transcended and influenced even the most “respected” mainstream directors. The sessions will not only cover the question of translating narrative components and theme, but also creating “mood” and the “sense of the ominous”.

Students will research and select on their own original horror source, and will be guided throughout the stages of an adaptation into a fully-developed feature length treatment— which will then generate a short film script in proper industry-standard format.

In-class screening excerpts will include *Dracula* [Todd Browning and F. F. Coppola], *The Thing* [John Carpenter], *Ringu* [Hideo Nakata], *The Mist* [Frank Darabont], *Let The Right One In* [Tomas Alfredson], *Rosemary’s Baby* [Roman Polanski], *The Fly* [David Cronenberg], *American Psycho* [Mary Harron], *Ju-On* [Takashi Shimizu], *Candyman* [Bernard Rose], *The Shining* [Stanley Kubrick], *The Hunger* [Tony Scott].

visit the course website: https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/
learning goals

Participants will experience their own writing journey, as they learn and articulate the craft of an adaptation to create a working horror screenplay— making emphasis on structure, character and mythology.

They will be exposed to the primal sources of the horror film genre, following their transmutation into a narrative screenplay form and final evolution into the stand-alone cinematic experience.

Students will become familiar with the archetypes of genre, and use them to challenge and subvert the audience’s preconceptions of how a story should be delivered.

They will be guided through the completion of a feature treatment, and become fluent with the screenwriter’s tools. This will give them the opportunity to further the work on their own final projects— and develop them into an industry-standard feature draft.

required texts

Robert McKee, Story
Christopher Vogler, The Writer’s Journey

suggested texts

Bram Stoker, Dracula
Ira Levin, Rosemary’s Baby

Hand-outs will include adapted feature and television screenplays, as well as selected readings from global authors and filmmakers.

course requirements + assessment

attendance and active class participation [25%] : students are expected to attend all classes and be on time. Active participation involves working out ideas through discussion and creative reasoning. Students are encouraged to expose their insight and perspective on the readings and screenings, as well as on each other’s work— but in return must propose their personal take on the issue they are addressing.

written assignments [15%] : participants will turn in a weekly response paper that will analyze a selected reading and deliver a proposal for its translation into script format, or a report on the research and progress of their individual adaptation project.

outline and evolution of the feature treatment [30%] : the first phase of the adaptation process covers the research, source proposal, pitch and full synopsis. The second part focuses on the development of a feature film treatment— the complete three act structure, main and secondary storylines, character arc and a fully-fleshed horror mythos.

video assignment [10%] : throughout the third phase of the course, students will develop a two-minute concept trailer that will serve as a presentation to the tone and visual treatment of their individual projects.

final presentation of the complete adaptation [20%] : the concluding individual project is a revised short film in proper screenplay format, which originates from the full feature film

visit the course website: https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/
treatment. The approach, tone, goals and execution of the adaptation will be the subject of class discussions.

**technology**

As the sessions progress, the use of cellphones, portable computers and tablet devices will be endorsed as digital tools for the research and assembling of the cinematic assignments.

Use of such devices outside the given parameters will result in the lowering of grading.

**expectation of academic integrity**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University.

Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating.

Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website: [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)

**list of screenings**

*the following is a list of suggested genre films and television shows— selected excerpts will be screened during the sessions, nevertheless it is advised that the students integrate the viewing of this material to the weekly hours assigned to the course.*

American Psycho [2000, Mary Harron]  
Ju-On [2000, Takashi Shimizu]  
The Silence of the Lambs [1998, Jonathan Demme]  
Candyman [1992, Bernard Rose]  
Hannibal [2013 - 2015, Bryan Singer]  
The Twilight Zone : Eye of the Beholder [1960]  
Rosemary’s Baby [1968, Roman Polanski]  
Bram Stoker’s Dracula [1992, F.F.Coppola]  
The Exorcist [1973, William Friedkin]  
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari [1920, Robert Weine]  
Nosferatu [1922, F.W. Murnau]  
Dracula [1931, Tod Browning]  
The Thing [1982, John Carpenter]  
The Shining [1980, Stanley Kubrick]  
In the Mouth of Madness [1994, John Carpenter]  
Ringu [1998, Hideo Nakata]  
The Hunger [1983, Tony Scott]  
Let The Right One In [2008, Tomas Alfredson]  
The Fly [1986, David Cronenberg]  
The Mist [2007, Frank Darabont]

visit the course website: [https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/](https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/)
SYLLABUS

Keep in mind that the current Syllabus is a proposed road map. And that even though we may know our destination, the mystery of the Journey is what makes the trip worth taking.

CLASS #1 Wednesday, September 7th

“Be afraid... Be very afraid.” The Fly [1986]

introduction, overview and goal of the course. nightmares captured on film: the horror genre in the history of world cinema. tools and weapons of the screenwriter. stages of a screenplay. the politics of adaptation. the purpose of fear: what makes horror work.

CLASS #2 Wednesday, September 14th

“People are basically good; decent. My god, David, we’re a civilized society.” “Sure, as long as the machines are working and you can dial 911. But you take those things away, you throw people in the dark, you scare the shit out of them: no more rules.” The Mist [2007]

the [re]search for an original source. analyzing the translation from the introspective literary form to the dynamic cinematic structure. the three-act paradigm, part one: breaking down the contemporary storytelling template for film and television— the first forty pages.

reading, The Mist, by Stephen King

assignment: three adaptation proposals— sources and approach.

visit the course website: https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/
CLASS #3 Wednesday, September 21st

“If you didn’t kill him, then who did, sir?” “Who can say. Best thing for him, really. His therapy was going nowhere.”

_The Silence of the Lambs_ [1991]

the three-act paradigm, part two: a study on the Second and Third Acts. constructing the body, crescendo and closure. **the core of an adaptation:** main and secondary plotlines, character and environment, narrative beats, setting up points of no return. **the Archetypes of Horror.**

reading, _Story_, pp. 3 - 99

**assignment:** adaptation proposals— pitches and synopsis.

CLASS #4 Wednesday, September 28th

“We all go a little mad sometimes.”

_Psycho_ [1960]

**character transmutation:** nature, design and evolution. the boundaries in a point of view, levels of change and conflict. female and male roles in horror— origins and purposes. **the construction of the ominous**— using our mythology as a source for antagonism and exposition.

reading, _Who Goes There_, by John Campbell

_Story_, pp. 100 - 131

**assignment:** final adaptation proposal— pitch and synopsis.

CLASS #5 Wednesday, October 5th

“They will say that I have shed innocent blood. What’s blood for, if not for shedding?”

_Candyman_ [1992]

**in-class discussion and revision— from synopsis to outline.** opening up the extended storyline into a Three Act Paradigm. mapping out the workflow for the development of a full treatment. **individual break-down of the adaptation process.**

reading, _Writer’s Journey_, pp. 1 - 80

**assignment:** extended synopsis— the three act story points.

visit the course website: https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/
CLASS #6  Wednesday, October 12th

“What an excellent day for an exorcism.” “But wouldn’t that drive you out of Regan?” “It would bring us together.” “You and Regan?” “You and us.”

_The Exorcist [1973]_

comparing and analyzing contrasting adaptations from the same source material. integrating the cinematic resources into the written word. text and subtext. story and theme. deconstructing the horror genre and sub-genre rules to subvert the audience’s expectations.

reading, _Dracula_, chapters 2 - 5
_Story_, pp. 135 - 154

assignment: feature treatment outline, acts one and two.

CLASS #7  Wednesday, October 19th

“Sometimes there is no right thing— you just have to pick the sin you can live with.” _Horns [2013]_

leaving room for the unexpected. act structure and reformulation. the sacrificial choices: what to loose and what to keep from the original source, exploring the narrative trails and their consequences. building new layers in plot and structure. finding and executing the tone and mood of an adaptation.

reading, _There Are More Things_, by Jorge Luis Borges
_The Rats in the Walls_, by H. P. Lovecraft

assignment: feature treatment outline, acts two and three.

CLASS #8  Wednesday, October 26th

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” _The Shining [1980]_


In 2000, he produced the ground-breaking supernatural thriller “Final Destination”, which triggered a genre franchise of five feature films.

reading, _Writer’s Journey_, pp. 81 - 141

assignment: feature treatment, first draft.

visit the course website: [https://wp.nyu.edu/darknesssspeaks/](https://wp.nyu.edu/darknesssspeaks/)
CLASS #9  Wednesday, November 2nd

“I’m twelve. But I’ve been twelve for a long time.”  

Let The Right One In [2008]

in-class discussion and revision— the evolution of each individual adaptation. revisiting the source, pitch and synopsis. narrative stages within the treatment. character, plot and setting.

assignment: feature treatment, second draft.

reading, Writer’s Journey, pp. 142 - 228
  Hannibal, Episode 101 “Aperitif”

CLASS #10  Wednesday, November 9th

“I feel like I’ve dragged you into my world.” “I got here on my own. But I appreciate the company.”

Hannibal [2013]

sequence structure: break down and study. selecting story points from the treatment and developing them into a self-contained, industry-standard presentation. outline, treatment and scriptment. feature and television format. creating a concept video for the final projects.

assignment: the short film scriptment, video presentation.

reading, Story, pp. 233 - 259

CLASS #11  Wednesday, November 16th

“Man is the warmest place to hide.”

The Thing [1982]

working under a deadline. clearing up your mind and setting your priorities. turning suspense and narrative tension into dramatic exposition. working with the unknown and the unseen. character and dialogue. pacing.

assignment: the short film screenplay, first draft.

reading, Story, pp. 334 - 373

[November 23rd : Thanksgiving Recess / University Holiday : no classes scheduled ]

visit the course website: https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/
CLASS #12  Wednesday, November 30th

“For the dead travel fast.”  

_Bram Stoker’s Dracula_ [1992]

_The screenwriter as an executive producer:_ rewriting the material to create a viable screenplay. the shooting schedule. _guerrilla screenwriting:_ turning production limitations into creative advantages— from the development stage. the screenwriter’s resources. the WGA.

**assignment:** the short film screenplay, second draft.

CLASS #13  Wednesday, December 7th

“Good morning. You are one day closer to the end of the world.”  

_The Omen_ [1976]

_the purpose of fear, redux._ elevating your screenplay: integrating your point of view into the rewrite. bringing the subtext to the front narrative line. in-class screening and revision: the concept video.

**assignment:** the short film screenplay and feature treatment, revisions. video presentation and one-sheet art.

CLASS #14  Wednesday, December 14th

“Are you trying to get me to be his mother?” “Aren’t you his mother?”  

_Rosemary’s Baby_ [1968]

final class meeting. presentation and discussion of the final projects. screening of the _concept videos._

**assignment:** short film screenplay and feature treatment, final drafts. video presentation and closed one-sheet art.

visit the course website: _https://wp.nyu.edu/darknessspeaks/_