

ENG 199 – “True Fictions”
TR: 10-11:20
Office Hours W: 12-4
Email Contact through Canvas Inbox

Dr. O'Kelly
301 GER
Office 206 PLC

Course Description: Ever since *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was marketed as “found footage” documenting the last few days of missing—and presumably dead—film students, the horror genre has been dominated by an endless barrage of films pretending to be discovered footage of actual events. These films have been so popular that the “found footage” style now appears in a wide range of genres, from police procedural and science-fiction to romantic comedy. Why do contemporary humans find fiction that pretends to be real so appealing? While the “found footage” trend is ostensibly a 21st century phenomenon, fiction posing as truth is nothing new. This course will trace the development of such fiction, whether written or filmed, from its prominence in 19th century prose to documentary-styled novels, films, and radio programs that span the 20th century. We will conclude with an extended examination of the predominance of “found footage” films in the new millennium that arguably parallel the rise of reality television, YouTube, and the camera phone.

Course Objectives: This course will help you hone your critical analytical and writing skills in relation to literature and film, with an emphasis on close reading both written texts and visual media. You will reflect on how and why we decide on what constitutes reality and, further, how such decisions often result from literary and filmic techniques. In addition, you will improve your ability to think critically about all the forms of media that you encounter in your daily life. You will also give a group presentation and lead class discussion before selecting your own found footage film to present on in the course’s final section.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation:	10%
Group Presentation:	20%
Reading and Lecture Quizzes:	15%
Photography Analysis:	5%
Literary Analysis Essay:	10%
Found Footage Presentation:	10%
Found Footage Final Essay:	30%

Coursework and Grading

Attendance: I take attendance every class. You are allowed two absences without penalty. Each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade from your final grade (i.e. A to an A-, A- to B+) except in the instance of a documented medical or family emergency. **On a fifth unexcused absence, you may automatically fail the course.** If you miss a class, obtain notes from a classmate and review them in detail before contacting me with any specific questions about those notes or the text.

Participation (10% of overall grade): You are expected to participate in class discussion. Productive, regular participation will benefit your overall grade for the course (even beyond the participation component of the grade). You must show respect for the ideas and opinions of other students. Disrespectful or disruptive classroom conduct (side conversations, use of electronic devices for purposes unrelated to class) will result in a marked absence for that day’s class. Laptops and tablets for notes and readings are permitted in class, but cell-phone use is not allowed. Under no circumstances should your phone be on your desk during class. Texting, instant messaging, shopping, and all other internet use unrelated to class is distracting to and disrespectful to your fellow students and instructor. If you violate this policy, you will be asked to leave class and marked absent, which will negatively impact your final grade.

Reading and Viewing: Complete all reading and/or viewing assignments before class and bring the assigned reading with you. I strongly encourage you to mark important passages and take notes in your book to prepare for discussion and writing assignments. **Always bring the assigned reading to class. Electronic texts are fine, provided that they are on a dedicated reading device (not on your phone).** View assigned films before class (unless specifically stated on the syllabus). I will provide information for online viewing on Canvas. Films may require online rental.

Required Texts:

Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1966) Vintage International: 9780679745587
 James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)
 Penguin: 9780140184020
 Orson Welles: *The War of the Worlds* (radio drama, 1938) [link on Canvas]
 H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1898) Signet Classics: 9780451530653
 All other assigned reading will be available on Canvas.

Required Films

Levan Gabriadze, *Unfriended* (2015)
 Anthony Mann and Alfred L. Werker: *He Walked By Night* (1948)
 Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez: *The Blair Witch Project* (1999)
 Peter Watkins: *The War Game* (1965)

Reading/Viewing Quizzes (15% of overall grade): There will be 8 short quizzes to test reading, viewing, and lecture comprehension. Quizzes will take place during the first 10 minutes of class each Thursday (weeks 1-8). **There are no makeup quizzes, but I will drop your lowest weekly quiz grade from the final grade calculation.** Quizzes will be through Canvas and can be taken on phones, tablets, or computers. After the quiz is complete, please put away electronic devices. If you are unable to take quizzes electronically, let me know as soon as possible and I will make arrangements for a paper quiz.

Group Presentation and Discussion leading (20% of overall grade): With a group, you will present on one day's assigned reading/viewing to the class to facilitate discussion. Powerpoint or Google Slides presentations are highly recommended. If your group would like me to project the presentation for you, you must send it to me at least one hour before class begins.

The presentation component should last ~15 minutes and will include:

- (1) A key passage or scene from the assigned literary work or film (you should read through and/or summarize the passage or play the scene in class) and a close reading of that scene that pays particular attention to the language of the passage or the mise-en-scene, framing, camera movement, or editing of the film scene, considering how the passage or scene functions within the overall work and how it represents or interrogates the work's representation of reality.
- (2) A comparison of that key passage or scene with another significant component of the assigned reading or film (such as a similar passage or a contrasting scene).
- (3) A comparison of the passage or scene with a previous course text with careful analysis of how they might be understood together and how bringing them together enhances your interpretation of the assigned reading.

You should conclude your presentation by posing 2 or 3 specific questions you would like the class to address in discussion. Your group will then facilitate class discussion (and respond to any questions/comments) for ~15-20 minutes. You may also choose to develop a short in-class activity as a segue into discussion. Feel free to use the chalkboard or whiteboards, and any other resources in the classroom. I encourage you to begin work on your presentations early and am happy to discuss them with you in office hours beforehand. Students will sign up during Week 1 on Canvas. You must present on the scheduled day.

Photography Report (5% of overall grade): During Week 4, we will examine some photographs in relation to the essays we read by Bazin and Sontag. You will choose one photograph and write a two page essay on how you think it represents and/or distorts reality. I'll provide more specific suggestions when we discuss Bazin and Sontag.

Literary Analysis Essay (10% of overall grade): You will write a three page literary analysis essay (on Wells, Johnson, or Capote). I will hand out prompts and guidelines at least two weeks prior to the due date.

Find Your Own Found Footage Presentation (10% of overall grade) and Paper (30% of overall grade): With a partner, you will choose a found footage genre film and give a 10 minute presentation on it to the class. Your presentation should focus on how the film is representative of the found footage genre and how it resembles or differs from the films and novels we've discussed in class. I will provide a list of films, but with approval, you may select a found footage film that isn't on the list.

In addition, you will write a 5-7 page analysis essay on the film that will be due during finals week. In this essay you will examine how the found footage form of the film relates to its content and, perhaps, how the film resembles or differs from previous course material. I will provide guidelines at least three weeks prior to the due date.

Writing Guidelines: Papers must be double spaced and in 12 point standard font with one inch margins and minimal, single spaced headers (i.e. name, date, course title or number). As the English department's learning objectives state, essays must be focused and in clear, grammatically correct prose. Proofread your essays several times before submission. Citations should follow MLA format. Submit all writing assignments to Canvas in DOCX format. Canvas does not process Pages or ODT files. It is your responsibility to ensure that your essay has been uploaded correctly before the deadline. If you submit an essay in an incorrect format, you will not receive feedback on it. *Late papers will not receive feedback and will be marked down one-third of a letter grade per day, including weekends (E.g., from A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). I will not accept late final papers.*

The English Department's assessment procedure is built around six desired learning outcomes:

1. Read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. Draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. Perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
4. Write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. Employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

Academic Integrity: All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Do not turn in work prepared for other classes. Document all sources consulted, including websites and other Internet content. Plagiarism will result in failure for the course and additional sanctions as determined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards:
<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards.aspx>

Accommodations for students with disabilities: In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to

register with the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu> to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Email: To ensure receipt and a quicker response, please contact me through Canvas message (“Inbox”), rather than through e-mail. I am happy to respond to questions, etc. through Canvas. It may, however, take me at least 24 hours to respond to you during the school week. Response time will be longer on the weekend.

Emergencies: UO Emergency Management & Continuity Program (UOEMC) has an entire website dedicated to helping students, staff and faculty become better prepared in the event of an emergency: <http://emc.uoregon.edu/>. Although this website offers a wide range of helpful tips, including how to create your own emergency supply kit to updates on any recent alerts, three recommendations pertain to this class: confirm that you are signed up for emergency alerts (for both emails and text messages), practice at least two routes out of this classroom so that you already know them in the event of an evacuation (there are evacuation maps available in most hallways that you can consult to help you identify the best routes) and know the evacuation assembly area. For emergency assistance on campus call 911. For non-emergency assistance on campus call 541-346-2919. Never assume others have called when you witness an emergency situation that endangers yourself or others.

Recommended Study Habits and University Resources: University accreditation standards require at least 2 hours of work outside of class for each credit earned. This means that you are expected to dedicate ~8 hours/week of *outside of class* work. This will usually mean reading the assigned texts, but will also include time spent completing assignments, writing papers, and working on larger projects. Numerous campus resources are available which you should avail yourself of if you desire assistance with academic or extra-academic issues. For a full list, please see the Canvas document “University Resources”; I will also discuss relevant resources throughout the quarter.

Writing Associates: Writing Associates are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course. They are peer tutors who can work with you one-on-one on your writing assignments. They are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They can help you understand the process of writing about literature and criticism and show you how to make your written work for this class more clear, correct, and effective. To make an appointment with a Writing Associate, go to <http://english.uoregon.edu/writingassociates/>

WARNING: Readings and viewings may contain explicit depictions of sex, violence, adult themes, coarse language, and material that some might find offensive. If you think that this might be a problem for you, please come talk to me about whether we can find a solution, or if this is the best class for you.

Course Schedule (additional critical readings will be added to the syllabus on Canvas):

Found Fiction

- 4/4: Introduction
- 4/6: Edgar Allan Poe: “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman: “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)
Background information on the epistolary novel: excerpt from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897)

Fictional History and News

- 4/11: H.G. Wells: *The War of the Worlds* (1898), read chapters 1-12 (through page 73).
- 4/13: Wells: *The War of the Worlds*, finish Book 1 (through page 123)
- 4/18: Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, finish book.
Orson Welles: *The War of the Worlds* (radio drama, 1938)

The Fictional Autobiography

- 4/20: James Weldon Johnson: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), read chapters 1-5 (through page 64)
- 4/25: Johnson, *Autobiography*, finish book.

Reality and the Photographic Image

- 4/27: André Bazin: "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" [Canvas]
Susan Sontag: "In Plato's Cave" from *On Photography* [Canvas]

Documentary Film Noir

- 5/2: Anthony Mann and Alfred L. Werker: *He Walked By Night* (1948) **Photography Analysis Due**
Borde and Chaumeton: "Towards a Definition of Film Noir" [Canvas]
Familiarize yourself with film analysis vocabulary using the Yale Film Analysis Guide:
<http://filmanalysis.yctl.org/> [this week's quiz may include questions on the Guide]

Docufiction / True Crime

- 5/4: Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood* (1966), Part 1: "The Last to See Them Alive" (through pg. 74)
- 5/9: Capote: *In Cold Blood*: Pt. 2: "Persons Unknown" (through pg. 155)
- 5/11: Capote: *In Cold Blood*: Pt. 3: "Answer" (through pg. 248)
- 5/16: Capote: *In Cold Blood*: Pt. 4: "The Corner" (finish book)

Pseudodocumentary

- 5/18: Peter Watkins: *The War Game* (1965) [In-Class Screening] **Literary Analysis Essay Due**
Murphy, "The War Game: The Controversy" [Canvas]
Additional reading on Watkins and Pseudodocumentary on Canvas.

The Found Footage Horror Film

- 5/23: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez: *The Blair Witch Project* (1999)
Marketing materials for *Blair Witch* including original website and "Heather's Journal"
Additional reading on found footage and *Blair Witch* phenomenon on Canvas.
Wrap up discussion of Watkins and Pseudodocumentary/Mockumentary.
- 5/25: Myrick and Sánchez: *The Blair Witch Project* **Signup for Found Footage Presentation**
Additional Readings on Canvas.

Computer Screen Found Footage

- 5/30: Levan Gabriadze, *Unfriended* (2015)
Additional Reading on Found Footage and Slasher Films on Canvas

Find Your Own Found Footage

- 6/1: Student presentations on a contemporary found footage film of your choice.
Workshop thesis statements for final essay.
- 6/6: Student presentations on a contemporary found footage film of your choice.
Workshop introductions for final essay.
- 6/8: Presentations Continue