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

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:
-- 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
WEEK 4, SEPT. 16 – EVOLUTION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FANTASY
Screening: *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960, USA) 103m

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

WEEK 7, OCT. 7 – FREAKERY AS FANTASY
Screening: *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (John Frankenheimer, 1996, USA) 95m
***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
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, "Horrality – 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***