

English 4323: Southern Literature
Southern Gothic
Spring 2023
Dr. Jeffrey Scraba

Our exploration of Southern Literature will focus on perhaps its best known and most distinctive genre: Southern Gothic. Adapting the 19th-century Gothic of ghosts and ancestral curses, Southern Gothic engages the traumas of slavery, racism, the Civil War, Reconstruction, poverty, and marginalization through both supernatural and realistic motifs: haunted spaces, grotesque characters, violent encounters, family dramas, and non-linear time. The first objective of the course is to study this fiction as a response to and reflection of historical conditions: with particular attention to the ways in which these novels work through problems of race, gender, class, and sexuality, we will investigate how they reflect Southern culture in the 20th and 21st centuries. The second objective of the course is to study the emergence and codification of genre: we will explore how the new genre of Southern Gothic comes into existence by adapting older forms, how the implicit rules of this new genre become established, and how writers experiment with these new rules. Among the writers we encounter will be William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Toni Morrison, Daniel Woodrell, Monique Truong, Jesmyn Ward, and Poppy Z. Brite.