Professor Patricia Crain  
Wednesday, 2:00-4:30, Spring 2019  
First-Year Seminar

Seeing through Ghosts
From *Hamlet* to Harry Potter, ghosts have long haunted books and film. This seminar asks them questions: What do they want? What do we owe them? When and where do they appear? What are they good for? What do writers and readers use them for? We begin with one of the most famous ghosts in the Western canon, the ghost of Hamlet’s father, to lay the groundwork for our own thinking and responding to the spectral. With the help of Freud’s essays on “The Uncanny” and “Mourning and Melancholia,” and Jacques Derrida’s concept of “hauntology,” we will then pivot to nineteenth-century and contemporary literature—the invention of the “ghost story,” the use of ghosts to confront the history and legacies of slavery in the United States, and a contemporary novel’s cross-cultural exploration of U.S. history and Tibetan Buddhism. In addition to *Hamlet* (and we will keep an eye out for performances in New York), texts include Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “The Lost Ghost,” Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and George Saunders’s *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

Students will work collaboratively, sharing responsibilities for leading discussions and reporting on research, and deciding together on a final day of reading/screening. Frequent writing assignments will include one personal essay, on-line forum posts, a final research essay, and opportunities for work in creative genres.

**Writing.**

- **Weekly:** Post to the discussion forum about your reading every week by 9pm Tuesday. You get a free pass for three weeks, including the week of your report (see next section).
- **Co-authored bibliography for your in-class report** (see the next section)
- **3-page essay, due Fr. 2/22, 9pm via email.**
- **a personal essay/poem/short-short story about ghosts, hauntings, mourning, memorializing, or related topics (about 5 pages) due Th. 3/14, 9 pm via email.**
- **3-page essay, due Fr. 4/5, 9pm via email**
- **Seminar essay or creative project, in stages:**
  - Be prepared to speak for a few minutes about what you’re thinking of for your final project in class on April 10
  - Essay proposal/project description and bibliography, 2-3pp due Fr. Apr 19
  - Final essay/project, 10pp, by email; 5:00 Wednesday May 14; note that creative projects will include 1-2 pages providing an analytic frame for the work.

**Speaking.**

- The class will be run seminar-style, which is to say that we all will be responsible for producing knowledge during class sessions. Read attentively before class, join the conversation on the NYUClasses forum, and come to class ready to share your insights and questions, and to listen to and learn from the group.
• We’re all analog in class, with occasional exceptions or to make reasonable accommodation. No phones or non-class media, ever.
• In addition, everyone will work in pairs (or trios) on an in-class report connected to the week’s topic.
  o Class presentations should be **no longer than 10 minutes**
    - That’s about 5 pages of double-spaced text, if you work from a script
  o **Provide** biographical/cultural information that you think will open up the text;
  o **Hand in and post** a bibliography of your topic (in MLA style) to hand out to the class
  o **Focus on one or two passages** in the text to raise questions for discussion
    - An interesting oral presentation will find something surprising or complex in a text, and offer a way to “unpack” it—not solve it, but open it up, investigate it.

**The fine print.**

**Plagiarism.** All of your work for the course must be yours; when you get an idea from somewhere else, including from *any* online source, credit the source. Any academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and have other possible consequences. Please see the [statement on Academic Integrity](#).

**Attendance** at every class session is required. Any unexcused absence or lateness may lower your grade. At three absences you will fail the course. If you miss a class, get notes/assignments from a classmate.

**Religious Observance.** As a nonsectarian, inclusive institution, NYU permits members of any religious group to absent themselves from classes without penalty when required for compliance with their religious obligations. The policy and principles to be followed by students and faculty may be found here: The University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays ([http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html))

**Accommodation.** If you have any disability or health or family situation that you think I should know about, please come see me in confidence. Any student who needs a reasonable accommodation based on a qualified disability is required to register with the [Moses Center](#) for Students with Disabilities.

**Late work.** As a rule I won’t accept late work. If you’re falling behind, getting overwhelmed, or otherwise run into deadline trouble, come talk to me and we’ll make an arrangement for you to catch up.

**Grades.**

Class participation: 20% (15% in-class discussion; 5% in-class presentation [this grade includes assessment of the bibliography for your presentation])

Writing: 80% (10% forum posts; 10% each 3-page essay; 20% free essay assignment; 5% final proposal and 25% final essay)

**Books** will be available at the NYU Bookstore; other readings/screenings will be available as indicated on the syllabus. *Please use these editions only.*


Schedule of Reading and Writing
*(NB: subject to change as our work evolves)*

I. Hamlet

Week 1 W 1/30
**Introductions**: “Who’s there?”
**Reading** before class: *Hamlet*, Act I pp7-72, 32 pages [nb: verso pages are notes]
**Screening** (all screenings before class): choose a full-length version to watch over the first three weeks: Branaugh, 1996; BBC version 1980; Royal Shakespeare version, 2009.

Week 2 W 2/6
**Reading**: *Hamlet*, Acts 2-3 (pp. 73-185, 56 pages)

Week 3 W 2/13
**Reading**: *Hamlet*, Acts 4-5 (pp 189-287, 50 pages)

Week 4 2/20
**Readings**: Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (16pp, pdf); Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (39pp, pdf)
**In-class screenings** of ghost passages from various versions of *Hamlet*: Kozintsev, 1964; Gielgud/Burton, 1964; Almereyda, 2000; et al.

**Writing**: 3-page *Hamlet* close reading due Fr 2/22, 9pm

II. Ghosts and Children

Week 5 W 2/27
**Reading**: Mary Wilkins Freeman, “The Little Lost Ghost” (20pp; pdf)
**Screening**: *The Sixth Sense* (1999)

III. Hauntologies: Slavery and U.S. History

Week 6 W 3/6
**Reading**: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, to p. 75

Week 7 W 3/13
**Reading**: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, pp76-195

**Writing**: 5pp personal essay, poetry, short-short story, due Thursday, 3/14, 9pm

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 W 3/27
**Reading:** Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987), pp200-323 (to the end)

Week 9 W 4/3  
**Reading:** George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, pp3-74

**Writing:** Essay 2, on *Beloved* 3 pages, due Fr, April 5, 9p.m.

Week 10 W 4/10  
**Reading:** continue reading *Lincoln in the Bardo.*  
**Library practicum** in Bobst and Fales  
**Writing:** be prepared to discuss ideas for final project

Week 11 W 4/17  
**Readings:** George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (75-176)

**Writing:** final project proposal due Friday, 4/19  (2-3pp)

Week 12 W 4/24  
**Readings:** George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (177-246)

Week 13 W 5/1  
**Readings:** George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (247-343)

Week 14 W 5/8  
**What (or who) remains?:** Class will decide as a group on reading/screenings/topics for the final day of class.

**Writing:** Final project due by email and/or hardcopy 5:00 Wednesday May 14