

ENG 357  
Prof. Rivett  
Office Hours: Tu 2 – 4 (or by appointment)

M, W 11:00 – 12:20  
McCosh B42a  
8 - 4066

## The Supernatural in American Literature

The 1692 Salem witch trials defied rational explanation. How does one reconcile invisible specters flitting through the night or inflicting harm on young girls with religious orthodoxy and scientific modernity? Beginning with the crisis exposed by Salem, this course charts how a supernatural domain of sleepwalking, ghosts, and transcendence persists throughout American literary history. We read novels about Salem alongside the more general appearance of supernatural phenomena in slave narratives, Native American prophecies, and ghost stories. Oscillating between spirit and matter, the supernatural interrogates what haunts America.

### Reading/Writing Assignments

- Attendance and participation (15%)
- 5 – 6 page midterm paper (30%)
- Midterm exam (25%)
- 8 – 10 page final paper (30%)

### Required Texts

Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*  
Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*  
William Apess, *Son of the Forest*  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Scarlett Letter*  
Shirley Jackson, *Haunting of Hill House*

### Schedule of Reading

#### Week One

1/31 – Introduction – spirit photography

2/2 – Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*

*The Death of the Devil?*

#### Week Two

2/7 – Mather, Brand Pluck'd out of the Burning; Parris, "Christ Knows How Many Devils there are"

2/9 – Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding

Supernatural Revivals

### Week Three

2/14 – Jonathan Edwards, "Divine and Supernatural Light" and "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

2/16 – John Wesley, "The Extraordinary Case of Elizabeth Hobson;" Edwards, Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God; Sarah Edwards

Enlightenment Ghost Stories and the Rise of the Novel

### Week Four

2/21 – Oliver Goldsmith, Cock Lane Ghost and A Debate Proposed in the Temple Patrick Society

2/23 – Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland (1 – 94)

2/25 – 5-6 pp. paper due by 5:00 in my box

### Week Five

2/28 – Brown, Wieland (94 – 224)

3/2 – Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"

Race and the Supernatural

### Week Six

3/7 – William Apess, Son of the Forest

3/9 – Zilpha Elaw, Memoirs

SPRING BREAK

Gothic Tales and Historical Romance

### Week Seven

3/21 – Poe, “Fall of the House of Usher,” “Mesmeric Revelation,” and “The Case of M. Valdemar”

3/23 – Charles Wyllys Elliott, “Mysteries; Or, Glimpses of the Supernatural;” Hawthorne, “The Custom House” in *Scarlett Letter* (pp. 76 – 115)

### Week Eight

3/28 - Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Scarlett Letter* (pp. 117 – 208)

3/30 - Hawthorne, *Scarlett Letter* (pp. 208 – end)

Spiritualism

### Week Nine

4/4 – Midterm Exam

4/6 – Melville, “The Apple-Tree Table” and Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*

Return of the Ghost

### Week Ten

4/11 – Turn of the Screw (154 – 199)

4/13 – Turn of the Screw (199 – end)

### Week Eleven

4/18 – Henry James, “The Jolly Corner” (pp. 123 – 153)

4/20 – William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*

### Week Twelve

4/25 – Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

4/27 – Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

Final Paper Due on Dean’s Date (8 – 10 pp.)