

One story next to another

One of the exciting challenges for this year's faculty learning community (FLC) on narrative has been to explore and apply the idea of narrative in multiple, surprising, yet still relevant ways. With this in mind, for the final issue of *fire* this semester, we have Scott Covell, who teaches many works of Gothic literature and film, share an example of how he approaches narrative—and the idea of side-by-side storylines—in the teaching of critical thinking. This is followed by an article co-authored by two other FLC members. It considers how team teaching can elevate both classroom and institutional practice, as it allows instructors to put their teaching stories next to each other, and in this way, contribute to the larger educational story of the college.

Alterations in Narrative and What Is Truly Haunting About *The Haunting of Hill House* Scott Covell

English professor or not, I'm generally not someone who automatically maintains that a novel or other written text is far superior to its cinematic equivalent; in fact, I'm often singing the praises of film adaptations. For one thing, by viewing an adaptation of a written work, students can gain valuable insight into the written text's themes, plot, and character development. Filmic alterations in a narrative can furnish ripe material for critical analysis, challenging students to not just list differences, but to analyze what those differences may mean in changing our understanding of the text. Moreover, like Kubrick's masterpiece version of Stephen King's *The Shining*, the changes can bring out the key features while creating a better artistic entity. A recent high-quality and popular adaptation, the Netflix mini-series *The Haunting of Hill House*, based on the 1959 novel by Shirley Jackson, made some noteworthy choices in altering some fundamental and perhaps even more intriguing elements of the original text.

In the Netflix series, Theodora and Evelyn are estranged sisters. Theodora is clearly and passionately a lesbian as we see in the first episode when she picks up a young woman at a nightclub and brings her back to her older

sister's guesthouse, where she currently resides. Meanwhile, Evelyn is experiencing a nightmarish journey elsewhere, coming back to the old haunted Hill House where the family grew up: a house that beckons for her to return for reasons unknown. Theodora's unabashed sexuality is never an important factor in the series. In Shirley Jackson's novel, however, the lesbian motif is extremely important, though ambiguous. First of all, in the novel Theo and Evelyn are not sisters, nor is there a third older sister, nor are either clearly lesbian. At the time of the book, as has been suggested by multiple sources, Jackson could not have included strong lesbian characters, so this element was carefully subtle in the novel and thus more intriguing in some ways.

In the novel, as part of a ghost hunting sort of experience, both young women—strangers—are invited to Hill House as part of an experiment by a Dr. Montague. Useful for students in terms of character contrast, and also in terms of examining gender stereotypes, Evelyn is seen as plain, shy, innocent, and neurotic, while Theo is portrayed as beautiful, sophisticated, and brash. The two begin a sort of love-hate relationship, and within the haunting dynamics of the house they struggle with their new friendship. Whereas the house in the Netflix series appears to offer a variety of both nightmares and ghostly friendships for the family to work through, the house in the novel appears to focus mainly on Theo and Evelyn, binding them in scary moments as if testing them, or in Evelyn's case, working to drive her to joining the spirits in the house by preying on her insecurities and suppressed love of women.

Outside the house one night, in the last section of the novel, the two are drawn into a bizarre nightmare scenario crafted by the house and its spectral inhabitants. Walking together they come upon a ghostly picnic featuring a young family with children. Overwhelmed by the strange mirage conjured up by the house, the two—particularly Theo—are horrified and deeply affected by the sight. For a moment their subconscious desires speak out through the ghostly dream, accompanied by the sudden realization that they could never be lovers and have a family and thus must suppress these important feelings. But while Theo returns to her usual pursuit of male lovers, Evelyn is cast adrift from this moment of potential love of another and is instead spurned by her. This incident leads to her death in the book; if she is not

welcomed by living humans, she is at least welcomed by the cold stone arms of the house and its ghosts in death.

Perhaps the frank portrayal of lesbianism in the Netflix series shows how far society has progressed, rendering the “tragic Other” of a closeted character a thing of the past. Or maybe the series tosses a lesbian motif into the air as merely a sort of quirky hip sensibility, one which strips the original narrative of its real thought-provoking gravitas. Either way, it is really the tension of these two depictions—one literary, one filmic—that promotes even more critical discussion and debate among students.

Team Teaching: A Reflection

Mark Hoffer (*English*) and Noah Stepro (*History*)

Our joint work in this FLC this year has been preceded by two years of team teaching, from 2015 to 2017. But even before that, in 2012, we had worked together in a faculty professional development event, one that explored narrative forms and the idea of who gets to speak for whom. So we already knew that our discipline-specific approaches could cast helpful and insightful light on each other. Just imagine taking that dynamic from a three-hour event, we thought, and putting it into a long-term collaborative project. We were eager.

The first item to decide was whether or not to link two classes, keeping them more or less intact. This “learning community” approach would mean the same cohort of students would enroll in both sections, and we would be present in each other’s class. This approach has the advantage of creating structural equality between the two courses, but the disadvantage of compelling students to make room in their schedules for two separate classes. This linkage inherently creates a larger time commitment for the students, which is often the reason that paired courses in learning communities have less enrollment.

Then there was the issue of pay. The learning community approach would allow us to be paid for our regular assignment, but what about compensation for the time we are spending in each other’s class? A stipend is one option, but that money needs to come from somewhere. So we decided to embed one of the disciplines in the other. Hoffer was English Chair, and with his reassigned time and reduced load, he had 1.5 LHE of overload. That meant he could give this LHE to Stepro—and that meant we could equally split the pay for a three-unit class.

Next we thought about which English class could really benefit from a semester of team teaching and decided

that *all* of them could. But a 200-level course would take the burden of “teaching” composition off of the History instructor and allow him to encounter a higher level of critical thinking, research abilities, and writerly finesse among the students. Hoffer was scheduled to teach Gender, Image, and Rhetoric in Fall 2015 and Literature and Film in Spring 2016. The specific, elevated focus of each course was a benefit, allowing for history-friendly course themes such as representation and spectacle.

We taught these two courses and then, the following year, Honors versions of them—learning environments which seemed even more ideal for team teaching. Each class within the four semesters was an experience we both enjoyed. Judging from the feedback we received, students liked them immensely as well. Hoffer was still the instructor of record, and the ultimate evaluator of student performance, but we shared lecture, group-work facilitator, and grading and feedback duties equally. We took turns taking home greenbook and typed paper sets. We shared our results electronically and discussed with candor what we individually believed each grade should be. We found that we were more often than not on the same page (literally!) when it came to grading, and any differences we had in terms of scoring we talked through, often learning a lot from each other in this give and take. Perhaps most importantly, we were able to model respectful, inquiry-based academic exchange in our team-taught classes.

Life intervened, as it tends to do. Eventually Hoffer was no longer Chair, with overload LHE at the ready, and Stepro had less availability for teaching a night class. But we went to a conference together in early 2017, the Santa Barbara Mission conference, which Stepro had interest in as a local pastor, and Hoffer was curious about as he was gearing up to teach a new basic skills course that would address the student as a whole-person learner in a purposeful, awareness-based classroom community. This new English course—100A: Academic Strategies—was obviously, entirely secular, and focused on revision and portfolio essay writing, but Hoffer sensed that positivity and inclusivity were things that he could encounter and study in many diverse settings, including those outside his own wheelhouse.

That exciting, defamiliarizing attempt to connect two separate things is the real endeavor of team teaching. It asks a lot of the participants, but it rewards them profoundly. It fosters dialogue, openness, patience, and maturity—all the things that make any college learning environment a success. And in the case of these two grateful instructors, it gave us a memorable, enriching experience to reflect on. **f**