

Witchcraft & Magical Performance in London

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: LNDN 3235

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: xxx

Course Description

Witchcraft & Magical Performance in London will chart the representation of the occult in the city from the Early Modern period to the present day. Focusing particularly on the performance and presentation of occult and magical phenomena and its reception by the general public and social elites during specific time periods, the course will offer students the opportunity to understand why magic has fascinated us and continues to do so. Class study will be combined with site visits to venues such as the Society for Psychical Research or the British Magic Circle, and a live performance of the magical or ghostly in London.

Course Objectives

The course will explore topics as diverse as witchcraft and its representation on the Early Modern stage; the rise of magic and magical performance in the eighteenth century; the growth of female mediumship in the Victorian period; Escapology and the presentation of the magical body on the stage. These topics will be investigated using a range of analytical methods, including Freud's concept of The Uncanny and modern anthropological theories regarding death, burial and liminal states of being. Class work and field work will combine to offer a rich educational experience of this fascinating and growing area of scholarly research.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will have encountered a range of texts, images, and performances that depict the perception of the occult during different time periods. Using a range of analytical tools, students will understand the origins of witchcraft and 'witch panics'; the success of séance and Spiritualism and the challenge offered both to mainstream religion and to science; the fascination with magic and the transformative power of the body in performance. Students will understand how representations of the occult are connected, and how they overlap with concepts of the liminal, belief and scientific ideas. Students should demonstrate: open-mindedness, critical acumen, responsibility and accountability, independence and interdependence, goal orientation, self-confidence, resilience, appreciation of differences.

Methodology

My Education: out-of-class activities and a link to either credit or to the participation grade

All students will attend a live performance during the course. This may be a performance by a leading magician or illusionist or a play or work upon a supernatural theme. They will also explore a variety of locations connected to magic or the occult, such as the Society of Psychical Research or the Magic Circle. Students will be asked to lead a discussion inspired by the key themes and ideas of the course.

Required Reading / Materials

- *The Uncanny* by Sigmund Freud (Penguin)
- *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* by Mike Parker Pearson (Sutton)
- *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Keith Thomas (Peregrine)
- *Murder Most Foul: Hamlet Through The Ages* by David Bevington (Oxford)
- *Talking To The Dead* by Barbara Weisberg (Harper)
- *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England* by Janet Oppenheim (Cambridge)
- *Ghost of Futures Past* by Molly McGarry (UCP)
- *The Victorian Supernatural* eds. Bown, Burdett, Thurschwell (Cambridge)
- *Hiding The Elephant* by Jim Steinmeyer (Random House)
- *Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film* by Barry Curtis (Reaktion)
- *The Elegant Universe* by Brian Greene (Vintage)

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Class participation	10%
A test based upon the weekly readings issued	20%
A presentation with notes, led by the student, on one of the field studies	20%
A final paper of 2000 words (a response to a published prompt statement)	50%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

GRADING PENALTIES FOR WORK SUBMITTED LATE

Assignments received after the due date will be reduced by five percent (5%) of the possible grade for the piece of work being assessed per day, up to seven (7) days after the due date. Work submitted more than seven (7) days after the due date will not be marked, unless arrangements have been made prior to the due date for an extension.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Participation is a vital part of your grade: CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Students are also expected to participate actively and critically in class discussions, and the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. Students must read assignments BEFORE the class, and come in on time. If you need to miss class for medical reasons or for a family emergency, please let the Faculty Chair know in advance of meetings, so plans can be made accordingly—you will need to provide evidence of the reason for your absence. If you miss any meetings without an excused absence from CAPA, your final grade will be dropped accordingly. Students are responsible for making up any missed assignments.

Your participation mark is based on your preparation for class and your input into group discussion in all classes (excluding the class of your presentation—for which you will get a separate mark). You will need to demonstrate that you have read and thought about the set material for each week. Participation in class discussion will be marked on the constructiveness of your input to the class discussion and debate.

Students will be assessed via four assignments:

1. Classroom participation in discussions and activities: **10%**
2. A test at midterm based upon the weekly readings and in-class texts: **20%**
3. A presentation based upon one of the field studies we will undertake during the semester. Students will also submit a 1000 word text based on this response. This presentation will be the prelude to a class discussion the student will lead: **20%**
4. A final paper (2000 words) in response to a prompt issued in the class following semester break. The prompt will address one of the key topics of the course: **50%**

Course Content

Unit 1

Making the Ghost

- In this first class, we will examine the key terms of the course and consider its broad overview. We will then proceed to ask ourselves what the term 'ghost' means, and in what contexts it has been used historically. How did an Early Modern audience understand the idea of a spirit, and how does that contrast with Victorian and 21st Century versions of the concept?
- Reading: *The Uncanny* by Sigmund Freud

Unit 2

Haunted Places, Haunted Subjects

- Here we will discuss the significance of Freud's work *The Uncanny*, and begin to apply it as an analytical tool. The most popular location for spirits is, of course, the 'haunted house', but why is it houses that are haunted, and why does the domestic location lend itself so regularly to invasion by the supernatural?
- Film: *The Haunting*, Dir. Robert Wise (excerpt)
- Reading: *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* by M. Parker Pearson (Chapter 2).

Unit 3

Boundaries & the Liminal

- Our focus this week is on the presentation of the ghost in the Early Modern period, with a particular focus on Shakespeare's presentation of the ghostly and the undead. What did audiences in the 17th Century make of the Ghost in Hamlet, and how did his appearance challenge Protestant orthodoxies offered by the period's ideological elites?
- Text: *Murder Most Foul: Hamlet Through The Ages* by David Bevington (Chapter 2).
- Film: *Hamlet*, Dir. Laurence Olivier (ghost scenes)
- Reading: *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Keith Thomas (Chapters 14 & 15).

Unit 4

Magic & Faith

- What was witchcraft, and how did it come to be, literally, demonized? How did simple, rural practices designed to assist nature and gain divine favor morph into the 'maleficium' of the English witch trials of the Civil War period? We'll look at an early English play to understand the complex relationships of magic and faith.
- Text: *The Second Shepherds Play* (excerpt: Mak's spell)
- Reading: *The Witch of Edmonton* by Rowley, Dekker and Ford

Unit 5

Magic & Malice

- The witch: an image that has haunted the western imagination since the Medea of Euripides. Usually a woman, the witch 'does harm remotely'. But how did witchcraft come to be gendered, and were there male witches, too? The idea of what a witch happened to be was far from stable, and in the work of Reginald Scott, we find a definition of the witch that appears extraordinarily enlightened.
- Text: *The Discovery of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scott (excerpt)
- Reading: *The Tempest*

Unit 6

Field Study: The National Gallery

- For this class, we will meet at the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square to view a series of images of the demonic, magical and spiritual from the Medieval to the Victorian. Central to our study will be Holbein's masterpiece **The Ambassadors**, with its astonishing 'death's head' image. Painted over four hundred years ago, the revelation of this image (dependent on the viewer's position before the painting) still generates a powerful effect on the viewer.

Unit 7

Magic, Science, or Sorcery?

- Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Shakespeare's Prospero offer us very different images of the powerful mage operating upon the boundary between science and magic. In this class, we'll consider the importance of the mage and the origins of the 'natural scientist'. What exactly did the development of science owe to magic and occult practice?

- Film: *The Tempest* dir. Derek Jarman (excerpts)
- Reading: *Ghosts of Futures Past* by Molly McGarry (Chapter 1); *The Darkened Room* by Alex Owen (Chapter 2). Presentations will be given in the second half of this class.

Unit 8

Semester Break

Unit 9

Mediumship: Tea & Table-Turning

- This week, we will look at the astonishing case of the Fox Sisters, American teenagers who invented quite possibly by accident, a new religion: Spiritualism. Exporting the religion to London, the 'séance' became a social event for adventurous Londoners. Far from the sinister activity of modern horror movies, the original séance was a means of reconnecting the living and departed family via Tea and Table-Turning!
- Text: *Report on Spiritualism* by the London Dialectical Society (Accounts of Home and the Davenportes)
- Reading: *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England* by Janet Oppenheim (Chapters 1 and 2)
- A test based upon the readings will be given in the final 40 minutes of this class.

Unit 10

Field Study: The Society for Physical Research (Spr) in Kensington

- We will meet in class this week for a preparatory talk on the setting up of the SPR or Society for Psychical Research in London in 1882. Far from being a fringe organisation, the group was established by some of the leading academic minds of the day, including Henry and Nora Sidgwick (the American SPR President was William James, brother of Henry!) Departing from class at CAPA, and walking barely 100 yards, we will visit the headquarters of the Society in Marloe's Road, still active today, and receive a guided tour of the SPR's extraordinary library
- Prompt statements for your final paper will be issued in this class!

Unit 11

Mesmerism & Materialisation: Victorian Ghosts

- During the late-Georgian and Victorian periods, the ghost became a staple in novels, short-stories and plays of the period. But what was this new ghost like, and how did it reflect anxieties about philosophy and science? At what point did science purge itself of 'the supernatural' to the point where interested scientists 'lost caste' by researching in this field?
- Film: *The Stone Tape* (BBC Film)
- Text: *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England* by Alex Owen (Star Mediums).
- Reading: *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible* by Jim Steinmeyer.

Unit 12

Workshop: Home & Houdini, a Magic Masterclass with Illusionist Darren Lang

- In this class, we welcome one of the UK's finest magicians and designers of illusions, Darren Lang, to class at CAPA. Darren has performed a wide-range of magic acts and also designed theatrical illusions for shows in London's West End and in the regions. He will show us some classic illusions originating from the French magician Houdin and help us to understand how magicians create the impossible, and what compelled them to do so in the first place.

Unit 13

Modernist Ghosts

- In the 20th Century, the Victorian fascination with providing spaces for the dead receded, and Modernism sought to de-clutter spaces and put the dead back where they belong. But an idea is difficult to bury entirely, and in the cinema of the 20th Century, the ghost returned with a spectacular and complex vengeance. Using Cocteau's extraordinary film *Orpheus* as our central text, we will examine the journey of the ghost in Modernity.
- Film: *Orpheus* by Jean Cocteau
- Text: *Dark Places* by Barry Curtis (Chapter 4: Unreal Estate)

Unit 14

Summing Up

- In this class we will draw together the strands of our study in the presentation of the occult and the magical and consider how ideas of remote power and the ghostly continue to fascinate us in the age of quantum physics. Is the occult simply science we don't yet know, or does its existence say something more profound about our need for belief in something greater than ourselves?
- Text: *The Elegant Universe* by Brian Greene (Chapter 10: Quantum Geometry)
- Your final paper is due in this class.

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).