

**McMaster University**  
**Department of Religious Studies**  
SCAR 2SG3: Spirits, Ghosts, and Demons

SPRING TERM 2021

**\*Preliminary Course Outline – Subject to Revision**



**Instructor:** Dr. Meredith Reddy

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**Lectures:** Online class (asynchronous)

**Office Hours:** Consultations by email/phone, or by appointment

### **Course Description**

This course will examine the conceptualizations and roles of spirits, ghosts, and demons in a range of cultural, contemporary, and historical settings. Special attention will be paid to how demons and spirits influence human health and well-being.

### **Learning Outcomes**

It is expected that students will familiarize themselves with a range of historical objects and traditions that illustrate the important role of the supernatural within human culture. Students will also become conversant with ways of contextualizing and thinking about spirits, ghosts, and demons within religious, scientific, and medical frameworks. And finally, students will become informed about the important role of technology and media in shaping perceptions of the supernatural.

**Required texts**

Readings for this course will be made available on Avenue to Learn and the electronic holdings of the Mills Library.

**Class Format and Expectations**

The class will be offered in an online, asynchronous format. (Videos and files will be made available on Avenue to Learn). As such, students are expected to be responsible for independently following the assigned readings and working in a self-directed manner, viewing the class lectures, and submitting the assignments, according to schedule. Regular participation will also be expected in the form of written contributions to the online class discussions posted on Avenue.

## Course Evaluation – Overview

Reflection paper	15%
Participation	20%
Case Study Paper	30%
Independent Research Paper	35%

## Course Evaluation – Details

### Reflection Paper – “Do you believe in ghosts?” 15%

**2 pages, double-spaced, standard font**

**Due on Turnitin on May 12**

This short reflection paper should articulate your own view on the subject of ghosts, spirits, and demons. What do you believe about the reality of these supernatural entities? If you consider them to be entirely hoaxes, you might articulate your theories about what lies behind persisting cultural beliefs in these manifestations, or you might speculate about how (and why) such hoaxes are carried out. Alternatively, if you consider supernatural entities to be true or if you have personal stories to analyze, you can flesh these ideas out within your paper. There is no right or wrong response, as the subject is a mystifying and often deeply personal one, and the course will be examining a range of perspectives on this material. The purpose of the paper is to allow you to reflect upon the subject and to identify your own frame of reference at the outset of the course.

### Participation 20%

Regular weekly participation in our class discussions (which will be available through Avenue to Learn) is expected. Topics will be posted for the week, and students are expected to engage in thoughtful ways with the assigned material during that timeframe. Your comments do not need to be lengthy (and generally, the more succinct the better), but should still reflect an understanding of the lecture content and readings, as well as an engagement with the class content.

You will have five days (Mon-Fri of any given week in the term) to participate in the assigned weekly discussion topics (after Friday at 5:00pm the discussion for that week will be closed).

\*The expectation is that students will participate to some extent every week, although you may find you have more to contribute some weeks, and less in others. Your participation mark will be based on a general assessment of your overall engagement in the class.

### Case Study Paper – The Margery Case 30%

**Papers should be 3-4 pages in length, standard font, and double spaced.**

**Due May 28 to Turnitin**

For this paper, students are asked to reflect upon the “Margery Case”. It was widely reported in newspapers and journals, so you should be able to find various printed records of the case by searching through the library holdings and through online databases. (A report on the case by Walter Franklin Prince is also included in the readings for Week Four). Your paper should a) briefly summarize the key events involved, and b) offer a thoughtful analysis of this strange case. Your response should outline how you believe such a case should be viewed. Is it, in your view, a case of malevolent hoax, psychological disturbance, or expression of spiritual/ritual meaning? Or something else altogether? You may also comment upon any of the aspects of the Margery Case that interest you, such as the gender relations at play, power dynamics, or theatricality/performativity.

You are free to draw upon other readings from this course in formulating your analysis of the Margery Case. Please cite your sources carefully, using a standard format, such as Chicago Manual of Style or MLA.

### **Independent Research Paper**

**35%**

**4-5 pages, standard font, double-spaced**

**Due June 14 to Turnitin**

Students must select one case to examine and analyze, involving spirits, ghosts, or demons. Choose a case that interests you, where you feel you have something to say! There are numerous fascinating cases to choose from, and you are encouraged to select a case that has not been covered fully in class discussion. You may opt to examine either an historical case or a contemporary one.

Your paper should seek to:

- a) provide a clear outline of the historical context for the case in question (including any relevant photographs, documentation, or related images in an appendix).
- b) offer an analysis of its cultural significance. In this, your essay should examine the case closely and articulate how you believe the case should be understood as an object of cultural study. In particular, does the case highlight matters of human health/healing or does it reflect specific cultural/religious traditions? Does the case strike you as being similar or different from examples shown in class?

This paper will involve doing some basic research into the case in question, using library and electronic resources. It is expected that students will develop a clear thesis in presenting their ideas.

## Weekly Course Schedule

### **Week 1 • May 3 – 7**

#### Assigned viewing

- Lecture 1 Introduction
- Lecture 2 Haunted History – an overview of the study of ghosts, spirits, and demons

#### Readings for week:

1. Marina Warner, “Introduction: The Logic of the Imaginary,” in *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford University Press, 2006. Available on Avenue to Learn.

### **Week 2 • May 10 – 14**

#### **First Assignment Due on Turnitin on May 12**

#### Assigned viewing

- Lecture 3 Magic, spirits of healing, and the rational turn of the Enlightenment
- Lecture 4 Ghost stories and spaces of haunting

#### Readings for week:

1. Terry Castle, “Spectral Politics: Apparition Belief and the Romantic Imagination,” in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Available on Avenue to Learn & full text of Castle’s book is available online at Mills Library.
2. Jeannie Banks Thomas, “The Usefulness of Ghost Stories,” in *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, ed. by Diane Goldstein et al., Utah State University Press, 2007. Available on Avenue to Learn
3. Alex Owen, “The Geography of Haunting,” in *The Haunted: The Social History of Ghosts*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007. Available on Avenue to Learn

#### Recommended further reading:

Joseph Taylor, *Apparitions; or, The Mystery of Ghosts, Hobgoblins, and Haunted Houses Developed*, London, 1815. Available on Avenue to Learn & online through Mills Library

### **Week 3 • May 17 – 21**

### Assigned viewing

- Lecture 5      Demonic possession and exorcism
- Lecture 6      Marian apparitions and sites of miraculous healing

### Readings for week:

1. Robert A. Scott, "Apparitions," in *Miracle Cures: Saints, Pilgrimage, and the Healing Powers of Belief*, University of California Press, 2010. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#)
2. Philip C. Almond, "Introduction," & "Two Possessed Maidens in London: The Story of Agnes Briggs and Rachel Pinder," in *Demonic Possession and Exorcism*, in *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and their Cultural Contexts*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#).

## **Week 4 • May 24 – 28**

### **Second Assignment Due May 28 to Turnitin**

#### Assigned viewing

- Lecture 7      The Victorian spiritualists – séances, ghost photography, and mourning
- Lecture 8      Mediumship and ectoplasm

#### Readings for week:

1. Warner, "Spectral Rappers, Psychic Photographers," in *Phantasmagoria*, 2006. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#).
2. Alex Owen, "Star Mediumship: Light and Shadows," in *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, University of Chicago Press, 1989. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#).
3. Walter Franklin Prince, "A Review of the Margery Case," *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 37 (3), 1926: 431-441. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#).

## **Week 5 • May 31 – June 4**

#### Assigned viewing

- Lecture 9      Scientific perspectives on the supernatural
- Lecture 10     Recording ghosts, electronic voice phenomenon, and ghost hunting

***\*Note that the last day for withdrawing from classes without academic penalty is June 2***

#### Readings for week:

1. Warner, "Phantoms to the Test: The Society for Psychical Research," in *Phantasmagoria*, 2006. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#).
2. Castle, "Contagious Folly: An Adventure and Its Skeptics," in *The Female Thermometer*, 1995. [Available on Avenue to Learn](#).

3. Sarah Juliet Lauro & Catherine Paul, “‘Make Me Believe!’: Ghost-Hunting Technology and the Postmodern Fantastic,” *Horror Studies*, vol. 4 (2013): 221-239. [Available on Avenue to Learn.](#)
4. Sean McCloud, “Conjuring Spirits in a Neoliberal Era: Ghost Reality Television, Third Wave Spiritual Warfare, and Haunting Pasts,” in *Religion and Reality TV: Faith in Late Capitalism*, eds. Mara Einstein and Diane Winston, New York: Routledge, 2018. [Available on Avenue to Learn and as an e-book through Mills Library.](#)

Recommended for further reading:

Guilherme Brambatti Guzzo, “Houdini Among the Spirits: A Lesson in Critical Thinking,” *Think*, vol. 18 (52), 2019: 47-58. [Available on Avenue to Learn.](#)

## **Week 6 • June 7 – 11**

Assigned viewing

- Lecture 11     Haunting in the age of mass media and social media
- Lecture 12     Modern demons and conspiracy theory

Readings for week:

1. Jeffrey Sconce, “The Voice from the Void,” in *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, Duke University Press, 2000. [Available on Avenue to Learn.](#)
2. Vladislav Šolc, “Dark Religion and Conspiracy Theories: An Analytical Viewpoint,” *Jung Journal*, vol. 13 (2019): 14-34. [Available on Avenue to Learn.](#)

## **Week 7 • June 14 – 18**

**Final papers due June 16 to Turnitin**

Assigned viewing

- Lecture 13     Case Studies: Canadian ghost stories and other notable paranormal cases
- Lecture 14     Final reflections on haunting and healing

Readings for week:

1. John Robert Colombo & Jillian Hulme Gilliland, *Ghost Stories of Canada*, Toronto: Dundurn, 2000. [Selection available on Avenue to Learn.](#)

# CLASS POLICIES

## **Submission of Assignments**

For this course term work should be submitted electronically, as indicated in the specifications for the class assignments. Generally, written work will be submitted through Turnitin, although submissions will also be made through Avenue to Learn for contributions to class discussion. If you have any concerns about these requirements, please email the course instructor to make other arrangements.

Please note that the staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments.

## **Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D
0-49	F



## **Policy on missed work, extensions, and late penalties**

All term work must be submitted by the assigned date. A penalty of 2% per day of lateness will be applied to any late submissions. Work will not be accepted beyond one week after the due date (unless granted an extension due to special considerations). If you have a serious medical emergency or death in the family, it is your responsibility to contact me immediately and to provide acceptable documentation for your absence. Extensions or other accommodations will be determined by the instructor and will only be considered if supported by appropriate documentation.

MSAF may be used as a means of reporting absences due to minor medical situations of less than 5 days, using the Student Absence Form at [www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/](http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/). If you are unable to use the MSAF, you should document the absence with your faculty office. In all cases, it is your responsibility to follow up with the instructor immediately to see if an extension or other accommodation will be granted, and what form it will take. There are no automatic extensions or accommodations. Please see “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work” in the Undergraduate Calendar.

## **Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation McMaster University, Department of Religious Studies, SCAR 2SG3 may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

## **Use of Turnitin - Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection**

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic

integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

## **Academic Integrity Statement**

All students are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

## **Conduct Expectations**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online. It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

## **Email Communication**

It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.

Please also ensure that all written communication is formal, professional, and respectful in nature, avoiding overly casual language or slang. Your subject heading also should identify the course code.

## **Modifications to Course Outline**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

## **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult [McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

## **Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## **Copyright and Recording**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

## **Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.