

# RELS 450 Senior Seminar

Dr. Lee Irwin, Religious Studies  
4-B Glebe Street, Room 201  
Religious Studies Department, Spring 2008  
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Office Hours: Mon, Tues & Weds 3:00-5:00  
(or by appointment)

**Course Description:** This seminar will focus on the topic of “magic” in Western Esotericism from the period of the late Greco-Romans to contemporary American society. The concern of the course will be to grapple with the theoretical issues surrounding the history, practice, and cultural reactions to magic. The course will center on the Renaissance period in Europe as well as a few select examples of more contemporary magical schools. Several theoretical perspectives will be emphasized: the historiography of magic, the hermetic worldview and its critics, spiritual and demonic magical theory, textuality of magic, occult classifications, social contextualism, subversion and persecution, category formation, and magical aesthetic/ritual expressions. The approach will be historical and morphological, we will look at the historical dynamics and the structural ideations which have offered a contested counterpoint to both scientific and religious attitudes. We will also look at several specific examples of magical practitioners - explicitly, Marsilio Ficino, John Dee, and Dion Fortune. We will also explore various definitional problems, both for insiders and outsiders, in such areas as occultism, alchemy, astrology, and angelic symbolism.

## **Books:**

Bailey, Michael. *Magic and Superstition in Europe” A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*. MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

Drury, Nevill. *The History of Magic in the Modern Age: A Quest for Personal Transformation*. NY: Carroll & Graf, 2000.

Fortune, Dion. *Applied Magic*. NY: Samuel Weiser, 2000.

Szonyi, Gyorgy. *John Dee’s Occultism: Magical Exaltation Through Powerful Signs*. NY: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Walker, D. P. *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

## **Requirements:**

Students are expected to attend all classes, you are allowed TWO cuts, every cut there after will be a 5% deduction in the final grade. Presentations and doing the reading in this seminar are crucial, this is not a lecture course but a discussion seminar that requires you to prepare for each class. Therefore, requirements are based on a consistent record of discussion and analysis of readings. The following are the basics for determining your grade: **12 abstracts** (between 150-200 words each, on a weekly basis, with at least one abstract for each author), each worth 2% (24%); **2 class presentations** of assigned readings, with an outline and three discussion questions for each presentation (each worth 15%, thus 30%); one **critical response paper** (15%), a carefully constructed research **proposal** with annotated bibliography (6%), and a final 15-20 page **research paper** (25%). I will not accept late assignments beyond three class days, all late assignments will be graded down 10%; any missed assignments will receive an F (55%).

**Honor Code:** Lying, cheating, and plagiarism are violations of the Honor Code and are not permitted at the College. Students may not work on papers together, that is a violation of the Honor Code. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly to the Dean of Students. A student responsible for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure based on dishonesty.

**Grading:**

Numerical/letter grades: A+ = 100-97; A = 96-93; A- = 92-90; B+ = 89-87; B = 86-83; B- = 82-80; C+ = 79-77; C = 76-73; C- = 72-70; D+ = 69-67; D = 66-63; D- = 62-60; F = 59 or lower.

**Reading Assignments:** Reading assignments must be done **BEFORE** the class for which they are assigned; as this is a seminar class I expect students to have read the assigned materials and be prepared to discuss them. A. = Tuesday, B. = Thursday of each week.

**Reading Assignments:****I. Week One:** January 10 Magic, Academia, and Hermeneutics

A. Reading Assignment: Bailey 1-7; Szonyi 3-17

**II. Week Two:** January 15 / 17

A. Reading Assignment, Jan 15: J. Z. Smith, "Trading Places." In *Relating Religion*, pp. 215-229. IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [[on Irwin RELS Homepage](#)]

B. Reading Assignment, Jan 17: Bailey, pp. 1-42 / **Abstract 1 Due**

**III. Week Three:** January 22 / 24 Historiography of Magic, High Middle Ages

A. Reading Assignment, Jan 22: Bailey, pp. 43-75 / **Abstract 2 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Bailey, pp. 76-106

**IV. Week Four:** January 29 / 31 Historiography of Magic, Late Middle Ages

A. Reading Assignment: Bailey, pp. 107-140 / **Abstract 3 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Bailey, pp. 141-177 / **Critical Response 1 Due**

**V. Week Five:** February 5 / 7 Magical Theory in the Renaissance

A. Reading Assignment: Walker, pp. 3-35 / **Abstract 4 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Walker, pp. 36-72

**VI. Week Six:** February 12 / 14 Magical Theory in the Renaissance

A. Reading Assignment: Walker, pp. 74-106 / **Abstract 5 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Walker, pp. 107-144

**VII. Week Seven:** February 19 / 21 Historiography of Magic, Renaissance

A. Reading Assignment: Bailey, pp. 179-213 / **Abstract 6 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Walker, pp. 145-185 / **Critical Response 2 Due**

**VIII. Week Eight:** February 26 / 28

A. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 19-37 / **Abstract 7 Due**

B. SPRING BREAK MARCH 3-7:

IX. **Week Nine:** March 11 / 13 Renaissance Mage, John Dee

A. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 41-78

B. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 79-104 / **Abstract 8 Due**

X. **Week Ten:** March 18 / 20

A. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 105-151 / **Abstract 9 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 155-179

XI. **Week Eleven:** March 25 / 27

A. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 181-215 / **Abstract 10 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 215-240 / **Critical Response 3 Due**

XII. **Week Twelve:** April 1 / 3

A. Reading Assignment: Szonyi, pp. 270-299 / **Abstract Due 11, Chpt 8**

B. Reading Assignment: Bailey, pp. 215-247; Drury, pp. 189-210

C. **Paper Proposal/Annotated Bibliography: Due April 3**

XIII. **Week Thirteen:** April 8 / 10

A. Reading Assignment: Drury, pp. 37-88 / **Abstract 12 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Drury, pp. 89-142

XIV. **Week Fourteen:** April 15 / 17

A. Reading Assignment: : Fortune, pp. 1-49 / **Abstract 13 Due**

B. Reading Assignment: Fortune, pp. 50-110

XV. **Week Fifteen:** April 22

A. Reading Assignment: Drury, pp. 143-188 / **Abstract 14 Due**

B. **Final Paper Due:** April 22