

## RELS 335 Western Esotericism

(1:00 PM, ECTR 103, Spring 2009)

Dr. Lee Irwin

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Office Hours: Mon & Weds 3:00-5:00 (or by appointment)

**Course Description:** This is an advanced survey course on Western Esotericism covering the following topics in a roughly historical order: Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Grail, Alchemy, Rosicrucians & Masons, Esoteric Christianity, and contemporary, esoteric teachings/teachers. The learning-teaching strategy is to provide a general overview of each area and to show interconnections in a general pattern of historical development, including some of the problematic aspects of studying esotericism. The goal of the course is to provide students with an overview of the development and complexity of Western Esoteric traditions apart from mainstream religious teachings or institutions. We will not be studying normative Christianity, Judaism or Islam but esoteric traditions or schools that have developed in relation to these mainstream traditions, often in circumstances of oppression or institutional persecution. We will examine why these traditions have been persecuted and why they often have secret rites and an underground history. At the end of the course, we will consider the increased popularity of esotericism and its impact on New Religious Movements.

### Books:

Benz, Ernst. *Christian Kabbalah*. New Grail Publishing. 2004.

Cotnoir, Brian. *The Weiser Concise Guide to Alchemy*. Wiser Books, 2006.

Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*. Oxford University press, 2008.

Roberts, Jane. *The Magical Approach: Seth Speaks About the Art of Creative Living*. New World Library, 1995.

Salaman, Clement et al. *The Way of Hermes (The Corpus Hermeticum)*. Inner Traditions, 2004.

Versluis, Arthur. *The Wisdom of John Portage*. New Grail Publishing, 2003.

*E-Reserve articles*, on-line at: Library Homepage (click on) > E-reserves > Electronic Reserves and Reserve Pages > Pages by Department, Religious Studies > Irwin > RELS 335 (see handout for password).

**Requirements:** Students are expected to attend all classes and participate in class discussions, more than three cuts will lower your final grade. The course grade will be based on the following ten assignments: six abstracts (3% each = 18%), two analytic papers (16% each = 32%), a MidTerm (25%), and a Final (25%).

**Students are required to take exams when scheduled, no makeups will be given** unless there is a valid excuse. Conflicting exams schedules, lack of preparation, misplaced books, oversleeping (and so on) are NOT acceptable reasons for missing tests. Students must make up any missed assignments (or receive an F); if there is a problem contact me by email or phone.

**Honor Code:** Lying, cheating, and plagiarism are violations of the Honor Code and are not permitted at the College. 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. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration--working together without permission-- is a form of cheating.

**Disabilities:** If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter to me from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodation and the SNAP program, see: <http://www.cofc.edu/~cds/index.htm>.

**Grading:**

Numerical and letter grades will be used as follows: 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.

**Reading Assignments:** Readings should be done before the class for which they are assigned. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Bring the current book to class.

I. **Week One:** January 12, 14 16. Classical Sources of Western Esotericism

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 3-14; Salaman, pp. 13-45

B. Writing Assignment: **Abstract One, January 16; Goodrick-Clarke, all**

II. **Week Two:** January 21, 22, No Class January 19. Hermeticism and Gnosticism

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 15-32; Salaman, pp. 45-78

III. **Week Three:** January 26, 28, 30. Hermeticism & Alchemy

A. Reading Assignment: Cotnior, pp. 11-57

B. Writing Assignment: **Abstract Two, January 28; Cotnoir, 11-57**

IV. **Week Four:** February 2, 4, 6. Alchemy and the Opus Magnum

A. Reading Assignment: Cotnoir, pp. 60-103

V. **Week Five:** February 9, 11, 13. The Medieval Grail

A. Reading Assignment: Juliette Wood, "The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre."

B. Writing Assignment: **Abstract Three, Due February 11; Wood, all**

VI. **Week Six:** February 16, 18, 20. Renaissance Magic

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 33-47; Frank L. Borchardt, "The Magus as Renaissance Man."

B. Writing Assignment: **Paper One, February 18, Borchardt & Goodrick-Clarke**

VII. **Week Seven:** February 23, 25, 27. Renaissance Magic

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 49-70

B. **MIDTERM EXAM: February 27**

C. **SPRING BREAK: MARCH 2-6**

VIII. **Week Eight:** March 9, 11, 13 German Medical Alchemy

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 71-85; Versluis, 1-46.

B. Writing Assignment: **Abstract Four, March 11; Goodrick-Clarke, 71-85.**

IX. **Week Nine:** March 16, 18, 20. Theosophy and Christian Kabbalah

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 87-105; Versluis, 47-82.

B. Writing Assignment: **Abstract Five, March 20; Versluis, 27-76.**

X. **Week Ten:** March 23, 25, 27. Rosicrucians and Freemasons

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 107-153; Benz, pp. 1-48.

XI. **Week Eleven:** March 30, April 1, 3 Swedenborg and Oetinger

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 155-171; Benz, pp. 49-82.

B. Writing Assignment: **Abstract Six, April 1; Benz, 49-82.**

XII. **Week Twelve:** April 6, 8 Spiritualism and Ritual Magic

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke. pp. 173-209; Roberts, xvii-24.

B. NO CLASS: April 10

XIII. **Week Thirteen:** April 13, 15, 17. Modern Esotericism

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 211-228; Roberts, 25-74.

XIV. **Week Fourteen:** April 20, 22, 24. Modern Esotericism

A. Reading Assignment: ; Roberts, 75-134; E-Reserves, Dureen J. Hughes, "Blending with an Other: An Analysis of Trance Channeling in the United States."

B. Writing Assignment: **Paper Two, due April 17; Hughes & Roberts**

XV. **Week Fifteen:** April 27

A. Reading Assignment: Goodrick-Clarke, pp. 229-248

B. **Final Exam: Saturday May 2, 12:00-3:00, ECTR 103**