

RELS 335 Western Esotericism

(MW 2:00-3:15 ECTR 219, Fall 2016)

Dr. Lee Irwin

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Office Hours: 11:00-1:30 Mon & Weds (or by appointment)

Course Description: This is an advanced survey course on Western Esotericism covering the following topics in historical order: Ancient Mysteries, Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Grail, Alchemy, Rosicrucians & Masons, Esoteric Christianity, and contemporary, esoteric teachings. The learning-teaching strategy is to provide a general overview of each area and to show interconnection 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 new popularity of esotericism and its impact on New Religious Movements.

Books:

Cotnoir, Brian. *The Weiser Concise Guide to Alchemy*. Newport, MA: Weiser Books, 2006.

Dan, Joseph. *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Fortune, Dion. *The Training and Work of the Initiate*. Newport, MA: Weiser Books; Revised Edition, 2000.

Salaman, Clement and Dorine van Oyen. *The Way of Hermes: New Translations of The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*. VT: Inner Traditions, Paperback, 2004.

Versluis, Arthur. *Entering the Mysteries: The Secret Traditions of Indigenous Europe*. New Cultures Press, 2016

Von Stuckrad, Kocku. *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*. NY: Routledge; **2nd edition**, 2016.

Plus THREE required articles on OAKS/Contents/Required Articles

Requirements: Students are expected to attend all classes and participate in class discussions, more than three cuts can lower your final grade. The course grade will be based on the following NINE assignments: SIX abstracts/summaries (5% each = 30%), TWO analytic papers (15% each = 30%), TWO exams (20% + 20%).

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. Two missed assignments will result in your being dropped with a WF.

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.

Writing Lab: Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more information, please call 843.953.5635 or visit <http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab/>.

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>.

Grade Scale: 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. I regard a B grade as normative for meeting all class requirements and assignments; a higher grade requires more effort while an A grade represents outstanding performance; lower grades reflect not meeting class requirements in the normative sense.

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:** August 24, Sources of Western Esotericism
A. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 1-11; Versluis 1-31
- II. **Week Two:** August 29, 31 The Ancient Mysteries
A. Reading Assignment: Versluis, 32-82
B. Reading Assignment: Versluis, 83-123

C. **Abstract One Due, August 31:** Versluis, pp. 83-123.
- III. **Week Three:** September 5, 7 Greco-Roman Esotericism
A. Reading Assignment: Versluis 124-182;
B. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad 12-17; Salaman 17-24
- IV. **Week Four:** September 12, 14. Gnosticism & Hermeticism
A. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 18-30
B. Reading Assignment: Salaman, 30-52

B. **Abstract Two Due, September 14:** Salaman 30-52.
- V. **Week Five:** September 19, 21. Hermeticism & Alchemy
A. Reading Assignment: Salaman, 52-87
B. Reading Assignment: Cotnoir, 11-40
C. **Pass out Paper One Assignment, September 19**
- VI. **Week Six:** September 26, 28. Alchemy & Medicine
A. Reading Assignment: Cotnoir, 41-77
B. Reading Assignment: Cotnoir, 78-103

C. **Paper One Due, September 26,** Hermeticism and Alchemy
- VII. **Week Seven:** October 3, 5. The Grail Traditions
A. Reading Assignment: Juliette Wood, "The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre." (PDF in OAKS)

B. **EXAM ONE, October 5 (Mysteries, Hermeticism, Alchemy)**

- VIII. **Week Eight:** October 10, 12 Jewish and Christian Kabbalah
A. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 31-43;
B. Reading Assignment: Dan, 1-35
- C. **Abstract Three Due, October 12**, Dan 1-35.
- IX. **Week Nine:** October 17, 19. Jewish and Christian Kabbalah
A. Reading Assignment: Dan, 37-59
B. Reading Assignment: Dan, 61-112
- X. **Week Ten:** October 24, 26. Renaissance Esotericism
A. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 44-61
B. Reading Assignment: Dai Kateuchi, "John Dee's Scrying Magic." PDF on OAKS
- C. **Abstract Four Due, October 26**, Kateuchi, all.
- XI. **Week Eleven:** October 31, November 2. Renaissance Esotericism
A. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 62-98
B. Reading Assignment: Frank L. Borchardt, "The Magus as Renaissance Man."
(PDF on OAKS)
- XII. **Week Twelve:** November (7, **no class**) 9. Rosicrucians and Freemasons
A. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 99-112
B. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 113-121
- XIII. **Week Thirteen:** November 14, 16. Rosicrucians and Modern Esotericism
A. Reading Assignment: Fortune, 17-56
B. **Pass out Paper #2 Assignment, November 14**
- C. **EXAM TWO, November 16** (Kabbalah, Renaissance, Rosicrucians)
- XIV. **Week Fourteen:** November 21. Modern Esoteric Groups
A. Reading Assignment: Fortune, 59-96
- B. **Abstract Five, Due November 21**, Fortune 59-96.
- XV. **Week Fifteen:** November 28, 30. Modern and New Age Esotericism
A. Reading Assignment: Fortune 99-125
B. Reading Assignment: Von Stuckrad, 122-146
- C. **Abstract Six, Due November 30**, Von Stuckrad, 122-132
- XVI. **Week Sixteen:** December 5, Conclusions
- A. Writing Assignment: **Paper Two, due April 5**, Kabbalah, Magic, Rosicrucians