

**Department of History,  
University of Manitoba  
Hist. 4000/7772  
Topics in History:**

**Religion, Demons, and Science in Early Modern Britain**

Dr. Paul Jenkins

**Course Description:**

The early modern world was full of magic, wonders, demons, spirits, and other apparitions. This course explores the so-called “disenchantment” of that world, a fascinating and complex process long said to have helped pave the way towards secularization and Modernity. Developments in early modern Britain have often been singled out for their importance in that process, which Anglo-American scholars have traditionally linked it to the Protestant Reformation and a highly influential narrative of progress that traces the ultimate triumph of rationalism over “superstition” in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

But in reality neither the decline of magic and spirits, nor the rise of secular Modernity was so straightforward. The guiding premise of this seminar is that “early modernity” is a Janus-faced transitional period that looks backwards as well as forwards. Emphasis will be placed on the pivotal seventeenth century. This was a period fraught with ambivalence, tension, even contradiction; one defined by the “long Reformation” at least as much as the “early Enlightenment”. Consequently, religious explanations for spiritual affliction often proved more sophisticated and satisfying than more practical medical and psychological diagnoses, while “scientific” debates surrounding the mysterious, invisible forces of magnetism and gravity directly intersected with mystical questions of demonic and spiritual agency. Understanding how and why such beliefs endured and converged will be a major focus of this seminar.

By engaging with early-modern beliefs in magic, wonders, and spirits, together with the controversies they touched off, students will delve deep into the religious and intellectual temperaments, values and priorities, fears and anxieties that shaped so much of the history of this critical period. While considerable emphasis will be placed on modern historiographical problems and debates, this will be balanced with an examination of some of the period’s most notable demonological and scientific controversies, as well as important witch trials and cases of demonic possession. This course will also be truly British in scope, as students will compare and contrast beliefs in demons, witches, and spirits throughout the British Isles, especially in England and Scotland.

No prior knowledge of early modern demonology or Britain is required. However, attentive reading of the assigned texts and active participation in class discussions are essential.

**Course Format:**

This is a discussion-based seminar course. This places the responsibility for learning on you; if you do not come prepared both you and your classmates will suffer. It is expected, therefore, that you read, critically engage and question the material, and come to class ready to discuss the weekly themes. Naturally, since participation is such a central element of this course, attendance is also expected.

**Required Texts:**

Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief* (2004).

William E. Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics and Providence in England 1657-1727* (2010).

Philip C. Almond, *The Lancashire Witches: A Chronicle of Sorcery and Death on Pendle Hill* (2012).

**Recommended Text:**

Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (2007).

Additional books, together with a wide variety of articles and primary sources will be available through the library. In most cases they will be accessible in electronic format. However, in a few instances the book will be placed on reserve, and you are expected to be organized and to co-operate with your classmates in order to ensure that everyone has a chance to prepare for class.

**Evaluation:**Students Registered in Hist. 4000

Book Review (800-1000 words) – 20%  
Research Essay Proposal – 10%  
Research Essay (4000 words) – 40%  
Seminar Participation – 30%

Students registered in Hist. 7772

Review Essay (1500 words) – 20%  
Research Essay Proposal – 10%  
Research Essay (5500 words) – 40%  
Seminar Participation – 30%

Evaluative feedback will be provided prior to the Voluntary Withdrawal deadline of March 20, 2013.

**Research Essays:**

You are free to choose between two different formats for this assignment.

1 – You can choose to research a specific topic, controversy, or trial/case related to the themes and subjects of the course. In this case, you will be expected to make extensive use of primary material, and relate it to the appropriate historiography.

2 – You can choose a historiographical essay, in which you are expected to identify and critically analyze theoretical and methodological questions, interrelate key debates and approaches, and do so in a way that meaningfully engages with the course material. You can make use of some the sources examined in class, but you are also expected to cast out more widely and supplement these with new ones as well.

**Grade Scale**

A+	90-100%, Outstanding	C+	65-69%, Satisfactory
A	80-90%, Excellent	C	60-64%, Adequate
B+	75-79%, Very Good	D	50-59%, Marginal
B	70-74%, Good	F	49% or below, Failing

Students who wish to appeal a grade given for term work must do so within 10 working days after the grade for the term work has been made available to them.

Uncollected term work will become the property of the Faculty of Arts and will be subject to confidential destruction

**Students should familiarize themselves with** the University's regulations re plagiarism, cheating and impersonation found in Section 8 of the General Academic Regulations in the online Academic Calendar and Catalog and the Faculty of Arts regulation (online at [http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/student/student\\_responsibilities.html](http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/student/student_responsibilities.html)) which reads:

The common penalty in Arts for plagiarism on a written assignment is a grade of F on the paper and a final grade of F (DISC) (for Disciplinary Action) for the course. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as purchase of an essay and repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five (5) years from registration in courses taught in a particular department/program in Arts or from all courses taught in this Faculty.

The Faculty also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism or to other experts for authentication.

The common penalty in Arts for academic dishonesty on a test or examination is F for the paper, F (DISC) for the course, and a one-year suspension from courses acceptable for credit in the Faculty. For more serious acts of academic dishonesty on a test or examination, such as repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department or program in Arts or from all courses taught in or accepted for credit by this Faculty.

### **Class Schedule:**

- 1 – Introduction
- 2 – Historiography I
- 3 – Historiography II

### **Religious Reformation and the Spiritual Realm: Orthodoxy, Conscience, and the Natural Order**

- 4 – Redefining the Supernatural and the Rise of the Demonic
- 5 – Maleficence, Morality, and (demonic) Temptation
- 6 – Psychology and the Soul: Possession, Delusion, and “Enthusiasm”
- 7 – Case Study Unit I – Demonizing Fairy lore, Second Sight, and other Traditional Beliefs
- 8 – Case Study Unit II – Cases of Diabolism, Conscience, and “Enthusiasm”

### **Science, Rationalism, and the Spiritual Realm: Debating Witches, Spirits, and other Occult Forces**

- 9 – Occult Forces and Experimental Philosophy
- 10 – Medicalizing and Psychologizing Spiritual Affliction
- 11 – Sceptics, Atheists, and Free-Thinkers
- 12 – Case Study Unit III – Scepticism, Coffee-houses, and the Anti-Sadducee Campaign
- 13 – Case Study Unit IV – The Occult Laboratory: Spirits, Invisible Forces, and Science