

## ***Fall/Winter 2018-2019***

**AP/EN 4573 3.0N (W)**

### ***Victorian Ghosts***

**Course Director:**

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**Delivery Format:**

Online

**Time:**

Online

**Description:**

The Victorians loved their ghost stories. "Serious" writers like Charles Dickens wrote one ghost a year in the latter years of his career, probably the most famous of which is *A Christmas Carol*. Ghost stories seemed to be ubiquitous, especially in the weekly magazines that could be purchased in railway stations. In an age driven by literary realism, empirical philosophy, burgeoning medical and scientific knowledge, and the systematic recruitment of scientific knowledge into the service of industry, it is both surprising and understandable that ghosts held so much attention in the popular imagination. Sometimes the *very idea* of the existence of a ghost is the only subject or theme of the story. In those cases "the problem of belief" appears as a struggle between intuitive conviction and faith on the one hand, and skepticism and scientific-philosophical rationalism on the other. In other stories, however, the literary complexity is increased; the problem of belief remains, but ghost is also signifier of other things. Occupying the nexus of religion, (para)psychology, literature, culture, and ideology, the ghost story became a destabilizing metaphor for many displaced cultural practices and anxieties. It's not uncommon to encounter themes of gender de-stabilization and dysphoria, domestic violence, crimes of greed and passion, and erotic fantasies of forbidden pleasures.

The Victorian era (1838-1901) was characterized by the birth and rise to prominence of the ghost story. Starting with Dickens whose *Pickwick Papers* contained a number of fragments of ghost stories, the genre seemed to increase in popularity until, by the *fin de siècle* it matured into a widespread literary phenomenon. This course explores the emergence and evolution of the Victorian ghost story both as a literary art form and as cultural and with specific attention

to Jung and Gothic theorists such as Todorov, Cornwell, Twitchell, and others. Students will be encouraged to approach the texts from their preferred methods of analysis. Writers studied include Charles Dickens, Amelia Edwards, Wilkie Collins, Mary E. Braddon, Margaret Oliphant, R. Murray Gilchrist, E. Bulwer-Lytton, Edgar Allan Poe and Ambrose Bierce.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. An improved understanding of the tensions and contradictions in Victorian society and its fascination with the supernatural
2. A greater appreciation for the short story as a genre
3. A greater appreciation for the ghost story as a genre
4. A deeper understanding of the Victorian legacy to modern horror stories and film
5. Improved ability to perform single-text exegesis and analysis
6. Improved ability to perform comparative textual analysis

### **Category:**

C

### **Historical Requirement:**

Period II

### **Requirements:**

Short paper as seminar: (15%)

Participation / Peer Support: (15%)

Major Essay: 30%

Test 1: 20%

Test 2: 20%

There is no formally scheduled exam in this course. Both tests will be administered online.

### **Reading List:**

Cox, Michael and R. A. Gilbert, Eds. *The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* ISBN-10: 0192804472 or ISBN-13: 978-0192804471. Amazon has all kinds of new and used copies too.

In order to keep costs down I've tried to choose readings that are available free online. Links to these resources are to be found in the [weekly schedule of readings](#).

Last, but not least, there's *The Complete Ghost Stories of Charles Dickens* which is also on reserve for you (PR 4553 H26 1982), but where possible I try to provide public domain (copyright free) links to the Dickens readings.

### **Open To:**

YR 4 Honours