

# English 4360G

## Weird Science: Representations of the Supernatural in Late-Victorian Fiction



Department of English & Writing Studies  
Western University  
Winter 2017  
STVH 3166, Wednesdays 12:30-3:30

### **Instructor**

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:30-11:30 and Thursday 1:30-

### **Course Description**

The late-nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic revival of interest in the supernatural in Great Britain. In an age caught between, in Arnold's words, "two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born," many Victorians took an avid interest in automatic writing, astral projection, telekinesis, telepathy, faerie photography, and a host of other phenomena that suggested the possibility of a realm beyond the material, a realm that science seemed on the verge of disclosing much as it had the remote regions of space and the interior organization of

the microbe. Nor was this interest restricted to the readers of obscure journals and penny dreadfuls. Major writers such as Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson and Vernon Lee, scientists such as Alfred Russel Wallace, and philosophers such as Henri Bergson and William James all dedicated considerable energy to such investigations. But perhaps it is Freud who best summed up the vibrant sense of promise that characterized this period of interest in the occult. If I had my life to live over again, he wrote in a letter in 1921, I should devote myself to psychical research rather than to psychoanalysis.

This course focuses on the ways in which late-Victorian fiction imagined the encounter between the scientific and the fantastic, those phenomena which challenged the limits of rational enquiry, such as telepathy, mesmerism, mind-control, shape-shifting, automatic writing, and, of course, ghosts, faeries, and vampires. The fantastic, we will argue, was not only of considerable literary interest in its own right, but was the cultural site through which such vexed categories as gender, class, race, and national identity were both contested and consolidated in the popular journalism, short stories, and novels of the period.

### Required Texts

*(Available at the Book Store)*

Haggard, H. Rider. *She* (Broadview)

Marsh, Richard. *The Beetle* (Broadview)

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Broadview)

Lee, Vernon, *Haunting and Other Fantastic Tales* (Broadview)

*(Available as a course pack distributed in class)*

#### *The Supernatural Short Stories of*

*Charles Dickens*. Ed. Michael Hayes. London: Calder, 1978. 144-59.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Parasite: A Story*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1895.

The Great God Pan *The Great God Pan and the Inmost Light*. London: John Lane, 1895.1-109.

*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 1  
(1882-83): 7-12.

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### Assignments and Grade Distributions

English 4360G is conceived as a seminar course, a learning space in which the students share with the instructor the responsibility for the production of knowledge, that is to say, for how we will approach the assigned texts and the nature of the conclusions that we will draw from them. Participation is a vital part of the course; each student should feel enfranchised to make his or her views known, while, at the same time, respecting the importance of the views and opinions of the other members of the seminar. Participation will count for ten percent of your final grade. In

having read the assigned material, and make occasional contributions to the discussion. To



Originality of argument, the ability to support the argument with reference to the primary text, rhetorical persuasiveness, syntax, grammar, spelling, and accurate bibliographic citation will *all* be factors in the grading of the essay.

All bibliographic notation will employ the MLA method of parenthetical notation and a works cited page. Please consult a standard style guide such as the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, which is available in the reference shelves of the D.B. Weldon Library. A good online guide to the MLA method can be found [here](#).

**Assignments will be submitted electronically through the owl site, and are due by 4:30 on the due date. Only one version of a paper maybe be submitted; be sure the one you upload to owl is the one you wish to be graded. Papers handed in late without prior permission will be deducted 2 per cent per day late, including weekends. Papers handed in after the assignment is returned will not normally be accepted.**

**Please keep at least one copy of each of your papers. Save each file on a usb key, drop box, external drive, or other form of back up media. Retain all returned, marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.**

### **Academic Accommodation Policy**

Students seeking academic accommodation for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of

nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found [here](#).

The full policy is set out [here](#).

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [MentalHealth@Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Plagiarism**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the

detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

### **Email**

Questions and concerns about the course may be communicated to the instructor by email. I will try to respond within one business day; email over the weekend will be returned the following Monday. Please note, however, that email is not the most ideal medium for the discussion of difficult conceptual material, such as is often the focus of queries regarding an English course. If you miss a class and would like to catch up, or are having difficulties with an assignment, please do consider seeing me during my office hours, or, if those times are not convenient, making an appointment to meet at some alternative time.

### **Lecture and Reading Schedule**

TBA