

Sophister Module Description Template 2023-24

Full Name: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in Drama and Narrative

Short Name: Spirit Possession in Drama and Narrative

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Björn Quiring, quiringb@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: HT

Year JS/SS: JS

Module Content:

Throughout history, the notion that the body and mind of a person can be “possessed” by outside forces has been a constant concern, and it has found its way into many literary works. The issue often becomes particularly prominent in times of social and economic crisis, when other forms of ownership and sovereignty are in jeopardy, for reasons that would be worthwhile to explore. Generally, the topic of “spirit possession” and of its treatment by various forms of exorcism raises diverse questions about the social construction of identity and of self-determination. For literary scholars, it is particularly interesting that the reading of books and the consumption of other media have occasionally been denounced as more subtle forms of demonic possession, impinging on the consumer’s subjectivity. An intricate dialectics of power and powerlessness, appropriation and reappropriation, is at work in the discourse on spirit possession. We will follow this discourse in literary works, as well as in theoretical texts and works of intellectual and socio-economic history, from antiquity to the 21st century.

Learning Outcomes:

- Read selected influential novels and plays from several literary epochs (Euripides, Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, Shirley Jackson, David Foster Wallace and others).
- Investigate possession as a social and political phenomenon in history (focusing particularly on the Loudun possessions in 1634 and the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692).
- Read some theoretical texts on the topic (Michel de Certeau, I. M. Lewis, Jean Starobinski).

Learning Aims:

- To gain a better understanding of the discourse on spirit possession and its impact on literary works throughout literary history.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1
- Name/Type of Component(s): 1 final essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 5000
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List:

- Crystal Addey, “Divine Possession and Divination in the Graeco-Roman World: The Evidence from Iamblichus’s *On the Mysteries*”
- Emerson W. Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience* (Excerpt)
- Giovanni B. Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in the Early Christ Groups* (Excerpt)
- Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*
- Samuel Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Excerpt)
- Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Excerpt)
- Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun* (Excerpt)
- Euripides, *Bacchae*
- Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare and the Exorcists”
- Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun*
- Shirley Jackson, *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*
- Joseph Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms* (Excerpts)
- I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Excerpt)
- Armando Maggi, *Satan’s Rhetoric* (Excerpt)
- Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*
- *Rituale Romanum* (Excerpt)
- William Shakespeare, *King Lear*
- Jean Starobinski, “The Struggle with Legion”
- David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King* (Excerpt)

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.