

Sophister Module Description Template 2025-26

Full Name: The Ghost Story

Short Name: The Ghost Story

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Professor Darryl Jones: drjones@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: HT

Year JS/SS: JS

Module Content:

Why do the dead come back? What do they have to say to the living? Do ghosts signify? Are ghosts moral agents, righting wrongs, correcting historical injustices, or bringing privileged knowledge from the other side? Or are they fundamentally purposeless entities, 'blobs of misplaced erudition' (in the words of the great genre specialist M. R. James), fragments of the past irrupting into the present? Where do ghosts come from? Who sees them, and why? Victorian spiritualists professed a belief in 'the survival of the human personality after death': is this a comforting belief, or a desolating one? Were women particularly prone to seeing ghosts, or being ghosts, or writing about ghosts? What is the role and meaning of the supernatural in the modern world?

In its modern form, the ghost story has flourished since the nineteenth century. Each week, we will look at one ghost story by a major writer in the genre. The set texts for classes are meant to be representative, but not exclusive, and students will be encouraged to read further:

Week 1: Charles Dickens, 'A Christmas Carol' (1843)

Week 2: Elizabeth Gaskell, 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852)

Week 3: Amelia B. Edwards, 'The Phantom Coach' (1864)

Week 4: E. Nesbit, 'Man Size in Marble' (1893)

Week 5: Henry James, 'The Turn of the Screw' (1898)

Week 6: M. R. James, 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' (1904)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: E. F. Benson, 'The Room in the Tower' (1912)

Week 9: Elizabeth Jane Howard, 'Three Miles Up' (1951)

Week 10: Marghanita Laski, 'The Tower' (1955)

Week 11: Christine Brooke-Rose, 'On Terms' (1965)

Week 12: Robert Aickman, 'Into the Wood' (1968)

Learning Outcomes:

The student will be expected to gain detailed knowledge and understanding of the genre of the ghost story, its major practitioners, and its social and cultural history,

Students studying this module will develop:

- critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts
- an ability to demonstrate knowledge of a range of texts, genres, and critical approaches
- an ability to discuss a range of texts in their intellectual, historical and critical contexts
- an informed awareness of formal and aesthetic dimensions of literature and an ability to offer cogent analysis of their workings in specific texts
- a sensitivity to generic conventions and to the shaping effects on communication of historical circumstances, and to the affective power of language
- an ability to articulate and substantiate an imaginative response to literature
- an ability to articulate knowledge and understanding of concepts and theories relating to the ghost story, and the supernatural
- an understanding of the literary marketplace, of professional authorship, and of popular literary genres
- an ability to demonstrate skills in critical reasoning, including the ability to assess other critical readings
- skills of effective communication and argument

Learning Aims:

- **Learning Aims:**
- Our aim is to read critically through a representative selection of ghost stories, treating them as aesthetic and literary objects on themselves, but also as cultural documents, offering insights into their times, places, and authors.

Assessment Details:

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

Preliminary Reading List:

Peter Ackroyd, *The English Ghost* (2010)

Catherine Belsey, *Tales of the Troubled Dead* (2019)

Scott Brewster and Luke Thurston, eds. *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story* (2017)

Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors* (1977)

Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (2007)
Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (2014)
Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self* (2010)
Helen Conrad O'Briain and Julie Anne Stevens, eds, *The Ghost Story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (2010)
Susan Owens, *The Ghost: A Cultural History* (2017)
Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1820-1940: A Cultural History* (2010)
Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism* (2012)

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.**