

**RS 258 Seminar in Religion in America**  
**Winter 2012**  
**Topic: "Modern" Spiritualism**

Professor Catherine L. Albanese  
Winter 2011

Tuesdays 12:00-2:50 pm  
HSSB 3024

***Seminar Description***

"Modern" spiritualism was the fond designation of nineteenth-century American aficionados for the movement that swept through American culture beginning after 1848. By invoking the term "modern," believers and practitioners were expressing their conscious intent to separate what they were experiencing from the spiritualisms of the past. *Their* spiritualism, they thought, was at the cutting edge of science, and it was also intimately interwoven with programs of social reform, especially for women.

This seminar will explore this nineteenth-century American form of spiritualism through the reflections of those involved and then through late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical scholarship. Who became spiritualists and why? How did their movement reflect and shape its historical context? What were its ramifications for later religious developments? How did the spiritualist imaginary play out in terms of an American spiritual aesthetic? How did it mediate between an era of orthodox Christian faith and an unfolding cultural landscape in which challenges were eroding the faith of the past seemingly from all sides?

We will attend to these and related questions in and through reading, discussion, and critical reflection in the seminar.

***Seminar Readings***

- Eliab W. Capron, *Modern Spiritualism* (Kessinger Publishing, 2003). Selections.  
Emma Hardinge [Brittan], *Modern American Spiritualism* (University of Michigan Library, 2006). Selections.  
Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse* (Cornell University Library, 2009).  
Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Beyond the Gates*, in *Three Spiritualist Novels* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *The Gates Between*, in *Three Spiritualist Novels* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).  
Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Indiana University Press, 1997).  
Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2d ed. (Indiana University Press, 2001).  
Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (University of Virginia Press, 2003).

Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (University of California Press, 2008).

Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

### ***Seminar Requirements***

#### ***Pass/Fail***

One or more short presentations of seminar readings.  
Weekly short written responses to readings (1-2 pp.).

#### ***Letter Grade***

One or more short presentations of seminar readings.  
Weekly short written responses to readings (1-2 pp.).  
Two substantial papers—one reviewing the primary-source readings and reflecting on them critically, and one reviewing the secondary-source readings and reflecting on these critically. First paper is **due February 7**. Second paper is **due March 14**. Each paper should be about 10-12 pages in length and should conform to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition, in its documentation. (Alternate projects may be proposed, subject to the discretion of the instructor.)

### ***Seminar Schedule***

- Jan. 10            Eliab W. Capron, *Modern Spiritualism* (1855; reprint, Kessinger Publishing, 2003). Omit Chapters VII, X, XI, XII, and Appendix.
- Jan. 17            Emma Hardinge [Brittan], *Modern American Spiritualism* (University of Michigan Library, 2006). Omit Chapters IX through XII, Chapters XIV and XV, Chapters XVII through XX, Chapter XXVI, Chapters XXIX and XXX, Chapter XXXII, Chapter XXXVIII, Chapters XL and XLI, Chapters XLIII and XLIV.  
*Do read Chapters I, II, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, XIII, XVI, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXXI, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII, XXXIX, XLII, XLV, XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII, XLIX.*
- Jan. 24            Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse* (Cornell University Library, 2009).
- Jan. 31            Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Beyond the Gates*, in *Three Spiritualist Novels* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).

- Feb. 7 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Between in Three Spiritualist Novels* (University of Illinois Press, 2000). Critical assessment of primary sources—discussion of student papers.
- Feb. 14 Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Indiana University Press, 1997).
- Feb.21 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2d ed. (Indiana University Press, 2001).
- Feb. 28 Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (University of Virginia Press, 2003).
- Mar. 7 Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (University of California Press, 2008).
- Mar. 14 Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Critical assessment of secondary sources—discussion of student papers.

***Additional Information***

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**NB. I do not accept papers as email attachments! Thanks.**