

SCAR 2M03 - DEATH & DYING: COMPARATIVE VIEWS
Fall 2020

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	1
COURSE OVERVIEW	2
COURSE OBJECTIVES	2
REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TEXTS	2
COURSE EVALUATION – OVERVIEW	3
COURSE EVALUATION – DETAILS	3
WEEKLY REFLECTIONS:	3
QUIZZES:.....	3
FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY:	3
WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS	4
WEEK 1 SEPTEMBER 8TH: INTRODUCTION.....	4
WEEK 2 SEPTEMBER 14 TH : “WESTERN” DEATH PRACTICES & THE <i>OTHER</i>	4
WEEK 3 SEPTEMBER 21 ST : DEATH & RITUAL.....	4
WEEK 4 SEPTEMBER 28 TH : CARE OF THE DEAD.....	5
WEEK 5 OCTOBER 5 TH : CARE OF THE DEAD.....	5
OCTOBER 12 TH FALL BREAK.....	5
WEEK 6 OCTOBER 19TH: BEREAVEMENT	5
WEEK 7 OCTOBER 26TH: BEREAVEMENT	5
WEEK 8 NOVEMBER 2 ND : THE SPECIAL DEAD	6
WEEK 9 NOVEMBER 9 TH : DARK TOURISM.....	6
WEEK 10 NOVEMBER 16 TH : DARK TOURISM.....	6
WEEK 11 NOVEMBER 23 RD : GENDER & DEATH.....	7
WEEK 12 NOVEMBER 30 TH : COMPARATIVE “WESTERN” PERSPECTIVES.....	7
WEEK 13 DECEMBER 7 TH : NO LECTURE. FINAL REVIEW / LIVE Q&A	7
STUDENT RESOURCES	8
CAMPUS RESOURCES	8
HOW TO CITE / AVOID PLAGIARISM.....	8
HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY & PUNCTUATION RULES	8
ONLINE DEATH-STUDIES RESOURCES	8
DEATH-STUDIES READING MATERIAL	8
COURSE POLICIES	9
SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS.....	9
GRADES	9
LATE ASSIGNMENTS.....	9
AVENUE TO LEARN	9
TURNITIN.COM	9
UNIVERSITY POLICIES	10

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY.....	10
AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION.....	10
COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT	10
ONLINE PROCTORING	11
CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS.....	11
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	11
REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK	11
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO).....	11
COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING.....	12
EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES	12

COURSE OVERVIEW

Through consideration of examples as diverse as Indonesian mummies, Tibetan corpse exposure, dark tourism, and North American death-care practices, students will discover how relationships to death and to the dead are formed by culture, politics, history and religion. In the first half of the course, students will situate death rituals and bereavement practices from around the world within their particular historical, religious, and cultural circumstances.

The second half of the course will examine themes from a more ethical and political lens. We will discuss the varied relationships to dead bodies, how gender affects to mortuary practices, and the moral and ethical ambiguities of dark tourism. Students will also consider how familiar “Western” practices are shaped by culture, politics, history and religion, including how Indigenous, Black and Queer experiences fit into our rich mosaic of death, dying and bereavement. Throughout the course students will be tasked with reflecting on their own experiences and assumptions through the creation of a course blog.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To provide students with an introductory survey of selected aspects of the cultural, historical, political and religious considerations of death, dying and bereavement.
2. To familiarize students with interdisciplinary perspectives around issues of death and dying within the fields of anthropology, religious studies, gender studies, geography, history, etc.
3. To cultivate analytical, reflective and critical thought regarding student’s own and others’ attitudes toward death, dying and bereavement.
4. To demonstrate an understanding of the complexities involved in funeral experiences and death rituals.
5. To challenge assumptions regarding contemporary “Western” funeral and burial practices, through gendered and racialized experiences in North America.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TEXTS

Journal articles can be found on the [McMaster Library](#) website. Book chapters are on Avenue as .pdf files.

Films will be accessible through Kanopy, Vimeo, YouTube, PBS or the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). Links will be posted on Avenue, and are available within this syllabus.

COURSE EVALUATION – OVERVIEW

Each student is responsible for completing all the assigned weekly readings and watching the posted video lectures and films. These will prepare you for the weekly reflection posts and course assignments. PowerPoint slides will be made available before the video lectures are posted each week. Video lectures will be uploaded to YouTube, but will be taken offline after exactly one week.

COURSE EVALUATION – DETAILS

Weekly Reflections: Using PebblePad+, students will create and maintain a blog throughout the semester in order to reflect on the course readings each week. Students will write a poignant and concise reflection based on a theme or element from that week's readings. The weekly reflection can be personal, and involve creative elements including poetry, photography, music, or images found on the internet, but must relate to the readings for that week. Reflections are not graded on grammar, but students are still expected to write coherently and clearly.

- **Due Dates:** Weekly reflections due by Mondays at 9pm.
- **Requirements:** Minimum of 60 words to a maximum of 250 words. Must cite the course readings.
- **First Reflection:** First reflection due by Monday September 14th at 9pm. Introduce yourself, detail your reasons for taking this course, and what you hope to get out of this course.

Quizzes: Three online multiple-choice quizzes will be posted on Avenue. The questions will relate to course material (films, lectures, readings) from before the date of the quiz. Students will have **24 hours to initiate each quiz** on Avenue, and **one hour to complete each quiz once initiated.**

- **Quiz 1:** October 19th, 12pm – October 20th, 12pm.
- **Quiz 2:** November 16th, 12pm – November 17th, 12pm.
- **Quiz 3:** December 7th, 12pm – December 8th, 12pm.

Final Take-Home Essay: Dark tourism/Thanatourism is travel to encounter death, and has become a primary means of cultural engagement for many of us, though it remains a morally and ethically ambiguous practice. For example, does gazing at death and “foreign” practices create healthy relationships to death, or does it add to the disparity between *us* and *them*? Where do we draw the line between visiting the site of a recent tragedy, taking selfies at a Holocaust memorial, or visiting a centuries-old catacomb?

This short-essay assignment will consist of two parts:

- 1- **Scavenger Hunt:** Choose a dark tourist site anywhere in the world, including North America, and consider the following: What is the history of this site? What is culturally / religiously / politically significant about this site? Are there contentious actions occurring there? You will find your site and provide details using a combination of online and academic sources.
 - 2- **Critical Analysis:** Using course readings, argue for and against the practice of dark tourism as a Western tourist. How might visitors to your chosen site and locals benefit from the experience, or not? In your final paragraph, offer your own opinions and reflections on the practice of dark tourism.
- **Due Date:** Due during exam period. TBD.
 - **Format:** Detailed instructions will be posted to Avenue.

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week 1 September 8th: Introduction

Overview & how to succeed in an online course. Initial exploration of death studies, and what we mean by the terms culture and religion.

Film:

- Death Around the World (2:45min) - https://youtu.be/JPcp58i_5Nw

Readings:

- Ing, Michael D. K. 2014. "Religious Studies as Comparative Religion." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47(2): 113-22.
- Laqueur, Thomas. 2015. "Do the Dead Matter?" in *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press. 35-54.

Week 2 September 14th: "Western" Death Practices & the *Other*

Thinking through our positionality in relation to the world around us.

Readings:

- Fabian, Johannes. 1972. "How Others Die--Reflections on the Anthropology of Death." *Social Research*. 39 (2). 543-67.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." In, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press. 1-21.
- Walter, Tony. 2017. "Pervasive Death." In *What Death Means Now: Thinking Critically about Dying and Grieving*. Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press. 107-14.

Week 3 September 21st: Death & Ritual

Death as a rite of passage for the living and dead.

Film:

- Sky Burial: A Tibetan Death Ritual (11:25min) - <https://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/sky-burial-tibetan-death-ritual>

Readings:

- van Gennep, Arnold. 2017. "The Rites of Passage." In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. 34-43
- De Orellana, Margarita, Michelle Suderman, Dominique Dufétel, et al., 2011. "Day of the Dead Ritual Serenity." *Artes De México*, 62: 65-80.

Week 4 September 28th: Care of the Dead

Remembering and caring for the dead in modernity.

Readings:

- Tsuji, Yohko. 2018. "Evolving Mortuary Rituals in Contemporary Japan" In, *A Companion to the Anthropology of Death*. 17-30
- Van Der Geest, Sjaak. "Between Death and Funeral: Mortuaries and the Exploitation of Liminality in Kwahu, Ghana." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76, no. 4 (2006): 485-501.

Week 5 October 5th: Care of the Dead

Cemetery spaces & modern life.

Readings:

- Klaufus, Christien. "Deathscape Politics in Colombian Metropolises: Conservation, Grave Recycling and the Position of the Bereaved." *Urban Studies* 53, no. 12 (2016): 2453-468.
- O'Neill, Kevin Lewis. 2012. "There Is No More Room: Cemeteries, Personhood, and Bare Death." *Ethnography* 13(4): 510-30.

October 12th Fall Break

Week 6 October 19th: Bereavement

Quiz #1

Emotional responses to death across cultures.

Film:

- Nagoro: The Valley of Dolls (6:30min) - <https://vimeo.com/92453765>

Readings:

- Lange, Katharina. 2012. "'There Used to Be Terrible Disbelief': Mourning and Social Change in Northern Syria." In *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, edited by Dupret Baudouin, Pierret Thomas, et al. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 31-39.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1999. "Death." In *Life and Death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press. 124-48.

Week 7 October 26th: Bereavement

Living with the embodied and conceptual dead.

Readings:

- Auchter, Jessica. 2015. "Corpses." In *Making Things International 1: Circuits and Motion*, edited by Salter Mark B. University of Minnesota Press. 129-40.
- Kohn, Tamara, Michael Arnold, Martin Gibbs, et al. 2018. "The Social Life of the Dead and the Leisured Life of the Living Online." In *Leisure and Death: An Anthropological Tour of Risk, Death,*

and Dying, edited by Kaul Adam and Skinner Jonathan. Louisville: University Press of Colorado. 227-45.

- Topsfield, Jewel. 2017. "Life Among the Dead." *Sydney Morning Herald*.
<https://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2017/toraja-death-ritual/>

Week 8 November 2nd: The Special Dead

Dead monks & holy bones.

Readings:

- Freeman, Charles. 2011. "The Incorruptible Flesh of the Martyrs." In *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, 15-23. Yale University Press. 15-23.
- Granoff, Phyllis. 2008. "Relics, Rubies and Ritual: Some Comments on the Distinctiveness of the Buddhist Relic Cult." *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali*, Nuova Serie, 81(1/4): 59-72.
- Taylor, Christopher S. 1998. "Saints, Ziyāra, Qiṣṣa, and the Social Construction of Moral Imagination in Late Medieval Egypt." *Studia Islamica*, no. 88: 103-20.

Week 9 November 9th: Dark Tourism

Quiz #2

Death & Ethics in Practice.

Film:

- Vultures of Tibet: The Tradition of Sky Burial (21:38min) -
<https://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/vultures-tibet>

Readings:

- Adams, Kathleen M. 2018. "Leisure in the "Land of the Walking Dead." In, *Western Mortuary Tourism, the Internet, and Zombie Pop Culture in Toraja, Indonesia*". 97-121.
- Reynolds, Daniel P. 2018. "Picturing the Camps." In *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York: NYU Press. 71-112.

Week 10 November 16th: Dark Tourism

Death & Ethics in Theory

Readings:

- Johnston, Tony. 2015. "The Geographies of Thanatourism." In, *Geography* 100 (1): 20-27.
- Koleth, Maria. 2014 "Hope in the Dark: Geographies of Volunteer and Dark Tourism in Cambodia." *Cultural Geographies* 21(4): 681-94.
- Schäfer, Cyril, and Ruth McManus. 2018. "Memento Mori and Tourist Encounters with Authentic Death in European Ossuaries." In *Leisure and Death: An Anthropological Tour of Risk, Death, and Dying*, edited by Kaul Adam and Skinner Jonathan. Louisville: University Press of Colorado. 163-89.

Week 11 November 23rd: Gender & Death

Women's emotional & death work.

Readings:

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death." In, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25: 187-205.
- Rundblad, Georganne. 1995. "Exhuming Women's Pre-market Duties in the Care of the Dead." *Gender and Society* 9 (2): 173-92.

Week 12 November 30th: Comparative "Western" Perspectives

Black, Indigenous, & Queer death.

Film:

- World Channel. 2020. "Prudent Paranoia" Why are Medical Conspiracy Theories So Prevalent in African American Communities? (8:54min) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u9V1YxeFjE>

Readings:

- Çalışkan, Dilara. 2019. "'Nobody Is Going to Let You Attend Your Own Funeral': A Funeral for a Trans Woman and Naming the Unnamed." In *Women Mobilizing Memory*, edited by Altýnay Ayşe Gül, Contreras María José, et al. New York: Columbia University Press. 206-18.
- Razack, Sherene H. 2000. "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George." In *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*. 15 (2): 91-130.
- Rich, M. 2016. "The Privilege of a Good Death" - <https://deadmaidens.com/2016/11/27/the-privilege-of-a-good-death/>

Week 13 December 7th: No Lecture. Final Review / Live Q&A

Quiz 3

Final Essay Due Date & Format TBD.

STUDENT RESOURCES

CAMPUS RESOURCES

[Food Collective Centre](#) / [Indigenous Student Services](#) / [Sexual Violence Response Coordinator](#) / [Equity and Inclusion](#) / [Online Learning Support](#) / [Writing Support](#) / [Student Success Centre](#)

HOW TO CITE / AVOID PLAGIARISM

- [How do I Cite Sources? – MLA / Chicago / APA](#)
- [Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism](#)

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY & PUNCTUATION RULES

- [How to Write an Essay](#)
- [13 Rules for Using Commas](#)
- [How to use the Semi-Colon](#)

ONLINE DEATH-STUDIES RESOURCES

- Order of the Good Death - <http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/>
- TalkDeath – <https://www.talkdeath.com/>
- The Collective for Radical Death Studies - <https://radicaldeathstudies.com/>
- Death Reference Desk - <https://www.deathreferencedesk.org/>
- Death & Culture Network - <https://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/death-and-culture/>

DEATH-STUDIES READING MATERIAL

Classic and contemporary work. Support your [local bookstores!](#)

- Ariès, Philippe. 1981 *The Hour of Our Death*. New York: Knopf.
- Becker, Ernest. 1973. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press.
- Berger, Peter & Justin Kroesen. 2016. *Ultimate Ambiguities: Investigating Death and Liminality*. New York: Berghahn.
- Chidester, David. 1990. *Patterns of Transcendence: Religion, Death, and Dying*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub.
- Davies, Douglas. 2002. *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. London: Continuum.
- Fletcher, Kami & Allan Amanik. Editors. 2020. *Till Death Do Us Part: American Ethnic Cemeteries as Borders Uncrossed*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Green, James W. 2008. *Beyond the Good Death: The Anthropology of Modern Dying*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Holloway, Karla F. C., 2002. *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories: a Memorial*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Mitford, Jessica. 1963. *The American Way of Death*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Plato, and John Burnet. 1967. *Plato's Phaedo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (or any edition)
- Troyer, John. 2020. *Technologies of the Human Corpse*. MIT Press.
- Walter, Tony. 1994. *The Revival of Death*, London: Routledge.

COURSE POLICIES

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

All written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue in .docx or .pdf format (NO .pages).
Quizzes to be completed online.

GRADES

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK GRADE

90-100 A+
85-90 A
80-84 A-
77-79 B+
73-76 B
70-72 B-
67-69 C+
63-66 C
60-62 C-
57-59 D+
53-56 D
50-52 D-
0-49 F

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Student's should contact their TA or professor if they plan on handing in an assignment late.
Students will lose 1 point a day for every day the final take-home essay is late.

AVENUE TO LEARN

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

TURNITIN.COM

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, including lectures by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email