Hist 118. Witchcraft and Possession (and cross-lists in Anthro, Religious Studies, and Gender Studies)
Fall 2013—revision and readings may change
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TTh 3:00-4:30, College Hall 314
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College Hall 311-D

This course explores the society and culture of the modernizing world by focusing on its most widespread, intensely debated, and tension-filled aspects: witchcraft and possession. The mere mention of the terms, or of such close cousins as demonology, sorcery, exorcism, magic, and the witches’ Sabbath, raises clear historical challenge. Namely, how can the analysis of witchcraft—including beliefs, patterns of accusation, the general social position of “victims,” the intensity and timing of “witch hunts,” and its articulation with religious practice, law, language, gender, social marginalization, and property—lead us to a more humane understanding of culture and lived experience? Given that these terms and issues had no fixed meanings for any past societies or for present imagination, how can we arrive at usable language for analysis?

These are some of the questions that we will explore. In addition, as recent scholarly work on early modern witchcraft makes abundantly clear, we will be considering vital questions of methodology and theoretical approaches to the history of society and religious practice as we progress. But there is another challenge, too: how does the work on the history of witchcraft square with such Pagan groups as Wicca, Druid, Celtic revivalists, and other Goddess worshippers, among other forms of New Age spirituality.

The requirements for the course include: 1. regular contributions to class discussion of comments and questions critically engaged with the readings for the week (10%); 2. a mid-term examination (on Thursday October 25, 30%); 3. a paper (no less than 7 pp, no more than 10) due in class on Thursday Nov. 8 (20%) This paper will consist of a compare/contrast exercise that chooses two of the required books covered up to that point. I recommend that the books can be chosen from any combination of: Salem Possessed, The Bewitching of Anne Gunter, Night Battles, and The Possession at Loudon. However, if any of you would like to work on any recommended texts or titles from the course bibliography, you must let me know and it is also up to you to locate them; and 4. A final examination, scheduled for Friday Dec. 14 (more later on its location, 40%).
The books for this semester, except for one or two, are available at House of Our Own Books, located at 3920 Spruce Street:


Note: on the syllabus below, all readings marked by an asterisk (*) are on the course blackboard site.

1. (August 29 September): Introduction to course

**Part I. Continuity and Change**

2. (Sept. 3, 5) Transforming self and society


*Berger and Ezzy, Teenage Witches: Magical Youth and the Search for Self.*

3. (Sept. 10, 12) Witchcraft, community faction, law (with cuts from The Crucible)
Req.: Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*.


4. (Sept. 17, 19) England: Cultural Themes of Local Witchcraft


**Part II. Psycho-History and Local Knowledge**

5. (Sept. 24, 26) Making a witch
Acting like a witch:
Talking like a witch:

Looking like a witch


6. (Oct. 1, 3). Witch Hunting


7. (Oct. 8) Multiple causality, local variation


NO CLASS ON Th OCT. 10: FALL BREAK

**Part III. Possession, Gender, Belief**

9 (Oct 15, 17) Witchcraft and Shamanism in Native North America


Mexico:


Brazil:

Surinam, Barbados, and Salem:

10. (Oct. 22) MIDTERM EXAM.


*Req.*: Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudon*.


12. (Nov. 5, 7) Exorcism: with screening cuts from *The Exorcist.*

13. (Nov. 12, 14) The persistence of belief
Req.: Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage.*


**Part IV. Our World of Spirit**

14. (Nov. 19, 21) Paganism: Wicca, Druid, Norse


15. (Nov. 26) Witchcraft and Modern Belief I


16. (Dec. 3, 5). Witchcraft and Modernity II
Req.: John Swanton, essay on Tlingit mythology, and supportive texts from Swanton, *Tlingit Mythology*


17. Conclusion of course: Debate, Current problems, and review for final exam.