

Witchcraft Episodes in Britain and America, 1500-1700

Instructor: John Sainsbury

Seminar: Tuesday, 9:00 AM-12:00 PM, GL 207

Office Hours: Monday, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM or by appointment

The course will examine witchcraft episodes in relation to religious change, socioeconomic tensions, and gender relations. Attention will also be paid to how witchcraft accounts might be “read.” The principal focus will be on the witch hunts in England, Scotland, and New England - for which there is accessible documentary material - but there will also be some consideration of the witch-craze in continental Europe, the heartland and source of the phenomenon.

Course Requirements: Seminar leadership and participation 40%; Book Review 20%; Essay 40%

The **review** (recommended length 850-1,000 words) should be of Sharpe, The Bewitching of Anne Gunter; or Reis, Damned Women; or of another book selected in consultation with the instructor. The deadline for submission of the book review is **October 1**.

The **essay** should draw on primary material to the extent that resources allow. There is no maximum/minimum length for the essays, but students should aim for 4000-5000 words. The deadline for essay submission is **November 26**. Essays submitted after that date incur a 3% penalty per weekday. No essays will be accepted after **December 9**.

Texts (in bookstore): James Sharpe, Witchcraft in Early Modern England; Elizabeth Reis, Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England [limited quantity]; James Sharpe, The Bewitching of Anne Gunther [limited quantity] Other readings are on reserve in the library and/or available on Sakai. Note the following primary materials, which will be of special value for essays:

For England:

Gibson, M., Early Modern Witchcraft: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing [library reserve]

Haining, P., ed., The Witchcraft Papers: Contemporary Records of the Witchcraft Hysteria in Essex [library reserve]

Stearnes, John, A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft (1648) [Sakai]

Early English Books Online (EEBO) – an online database of nearly everything published in English 1473-1700

For Scotland [library reserve]:

James I, Daemonologie

Larner, Christine, *et al*, ed., A Sourcebook of Scottish Witchcraft [library reserve]

For New England [library reserve]

Boyer, Paul, and Nissenbaum, Stephen, The Salem Witchcraft Papers, 3 vols., 1977
Burr, George Lincoln, ed., Narratives of the Witchcraft Papers, 1648-1706, 1914
Hall, David, ed., Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A
Documentary History, 1991
Mather, Cotton, The Wonders of the Invisible World

Seminar 1, September 10

Introduction and seminar organization

Showing of film: "Burning Times"

Seminar 2, September 17

Origins of the Witchcraze

Did the medieval persecution of Jews, heretics, and lepers yield parallels and precedents for the witch-hunt in continental Europe? [R. Moore] What forms did diabolism (worship of the Devil) allegedly take? (The classic documentary statement of the witch-hunters' demonology is Malleus Maleficarum.) Norman Cohn is emphatic that the construction of diabolism originated exclusively with the witch-hunters and their intellectual forbears, but a different view is implied in the work of Carlo Ginzburg. See, for example, his essay "Deciphering the Sabbath," in Ankarloo and Henningsen, Early Modern European Witchcraft, Ch. 4. How did elite and popular views of witchcraft differ and/or correspond?

Documentary Sources:

Malleus Maleficarum (Extract A)

Hurrell, Martha, "The Witches Meeting," in Haining, P., ed., The Witchcraft Papers.

Readings:

Sharpe, J. Witchcraft in Early Modern England, Chs. 1, 2.

Levack, B. The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe, esp. Chs. 2, 3.

Cohn, N. "The Myth of Satan and his Human Servants."

Ginzberg, Carlo, "Deciphering the Sabbath," in Ankarloo and Henningsen, Early
Modern Witchcraft, Ch. 4

Moore, R., The Formation of a Persecuting Society, Ch. 1 ("Persecution")

Supplementary:

Cohn, N., Europe's Inner Demons

Seminar 3, September 24

Witchcraft, Maternity, and Sexuality

How should we interpret the lurid sexual imagery in the Malleus Maleficarum? To what extent, and in what ways, were accusations of witchcraft a projection of male sexual anxieties? What graphic evidence is yielded in Baldung's representation of witches? How can we account for the fact that many witchcraft accusations originated from women accusing other women? How do these accusations connect with "women's own desires, fears and anxieties about the household and maternity?" [Purkiss] How were witchcraft confessions infused with sexual or scatological imagery? Were these confessions necessarily "scripted" by interrogators? Historians have often assumed that midwives were especially vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. How did this apparently faulty assumption come about?

Readings:

Malleus Maleficarum, "Concerning Women who copulate with Devils," and "Midwives"

Briggs, R., "Men against Women: the Gendering of Witchcraft," from Witches and Neighbours

Harley, D., "Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch."

Hults, L., "Baldung and the Witches of Freiburg: The Evidence of Images."

Klaits, Joseph, Ch. 3 of Servants of Satan

Purkiss, Diane, "Women's Stories of Witchcraft in Early Modern England: the House, the Body, the Child."

Willis, D., "(Un)Neighborly Nurture," Ch. 2 of Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England

Seminar 4, October 1

Reading Witchcraft Accounts/Possession and Exorcism

What were the connections between belief in witchcraft and the state of medical science? How were those suffering from "demonic possession" distinguished from those afflicted by "natural illness"? Who made these determinations? What remedies were available for victims of "demonic possession"? How did Catholics, Puritans, and non-Puritan Anglicans differ with respect to the validity and efficacy of exorcism? We will also discuss the methodologies for reading witchcraft accounts in Marion Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, Chs. 2, 3.

Documentary Source:

MacDonald, M., ed., Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London

Readings:

Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness, Ch. 8

J. Sharpe, "Demonic Possession and the Politics of Exorcism," Ch. 7 of The Bewitching of Anne Gunter.

L. Roper, "Exorcism and the theology of the body," Ch. 8 of Oedipus and the Devil

D. Harley, "Explaining Salem: Calvinist Psychology and the Diagnosis of Persecution"

R. Sawyer, "'Strangely handled in all her lym's': Witchcraft and healing in Jacobean England."

Seminar 5, October 8

Male Victims of the Witch-hunt

In what situations were men accused and prosecuted for witchcraft? Answers to that question may shed an oblique light on the witchcraze in general, precisely because men represented only a small proportion (the precise proportions differed regionally) of those persecuted. Presumably such men exhibited characteristics that cut across gender lines and connected them, at least in the minds of their persecutors, with female victims, and/or they had attributes that compromised those qualities of "maleness" that provided protection for most men. What were these characteristics and attributes? Who generally made the accusations? What was the alleged relationship between male "witches" and female ones. If a man was accused of witchcraft was he more or less likely than a woman to be prosecuted? If prosecuted, more or less likely to be convicted? If convicted, more or less likely to be executed? Does the comparatively low incidence of witchcraft accusations against men in England suggest that they were less vulnerable to charges of maleficium than to charges of diabolism, or were there other factors at work here. What explains the high incidence of male victims in Finland?

Case Studies:

Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., Salem Witchcraft Papers (make your own selection of interesting cases)

Hall, D., ed., Witch-hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England. Search for male witches.

Larner, C., ed., A Sourcebook of Scottish Witchcraft: Thomas Black (no. 381), John Glass (no. 673)

Haining, ed., Witchcraft Papers: the Witchcraft Apprentice (pp. 43-45), An Alleged Witchcraft Plot against Queen Elizabeth (pp. 46-48), The Witches Meeting (pp. 136-38), An Experiment in Necromancy (pp. 187-89).

Readings :

Heikinen, A. and Kervinen, T., "Finland: the Male Domination," in Ankarloo and Henningsen, eds., Early Modern European Witchcraft

Demos, J., "John Godfrey and his Neighbors"

Larner, C., "Who were the Witches?"

October 14 – 18 FALL BREAK

Seminar 6, October 22

Witchcraft in England: Origins and Character

How was witchcraft treated in England before 1563? What was the context and impact of the 1563 legislation? What do you understand by the term maleficium? To what extent were witchcraft cases in England (as compared to the continent) based on maleficium? How did it, and subsequent legislation, differentiate between different kinds of sorcery? Who were the alleged witches and who were their accusers? We should look for patterns with respect to age, gender, occupation, socioeconomic status, social standing, and previous attributions of criminality for both accusers and accused. How significant were socioeconomic tensions and changing attitudes towards the poor?

What was the perceived connection between cunning folk and witches? How well does a “social control” model apply to England (see Gregory article)? How receptive were the magistrates to accusations of witchcraft? Why was Reginald Scot sceptical of such accusations?

Documentary Sources:

St. Osyth Witch Trial (also in Haining, ed., Witchcraft Papers)
Scot, R., Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584; reprinted 1886)

Readings:

Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, Chs. 14-17
Davies, O., "For Good or Evil," Ch. 2 of Cunning Folk.
Gregory, A., "Witchcraft, Politics and 'Good Neighbourhood' in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye."
Holmes, C., "Women, Witnesses, and Witches."
Sawyer, R., " 'Strangely handled in all her lym's': Witchcraft and Healing in Jacobean England."
Sharpe, J., Witchcraft in Early Modern England, especially Chs., 3, 4.

Seminar 7, October 29

Film: *Witchfinder-General*

Seminar 8, November 5

Witchcraft in England during the Civil War; the Matthew Hopkins Crusade

Witchcraft prosecutions seemed to be in decline by the 1630's. Why did they escalate in the mid-1640's? What was the impact of Civil War? What do we know about Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne? Was this episode of the witch-craze consistent with previous ones, or did it have special characteristics? Did it, for example, have a demonological element, unusual for England? Should we assume that witchcraft confessions were “scripted” by the witchfinders, or were accused witches complicit in their production? In this context, consider carefully the case of Margaret Moore and her state of mind when she “confessed.”

Documentary Sources:

Anon., The Labours of Satan
Hopkins, Matthew, Discovery of Witchcraft
Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft (1648)

Readings:

Gaskill, M., "Witchcraft and power in early modern England: the case of Margaret Moore."
Macfarlane, A., "Witchfinding movement of 1645."
Sharpe, J., "The devil in East Anglia: the Matthew Hopkins trials reconsidered."
Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic (Check index for references to Matthew Hopkins)

Seminar 9, November 12

The Scottish Witch-hunt/King James and Witchcraft

Historians have tended to link Scotland with the mainstream continental experience of witchcraft, while seeing England as distinctive. Is this perception justified? If so, what precisely were the differences? Was demonology more developed in Scotland than in England, where the emphasis was, supposedly, on maleficium? accusations.) Was the source of witchcraft accusations different? Was the Scottish witch-hunt more centrally directed than the English one? What differences were contingent on the diverging ecclesiastical polities of the two countries? How did England and Scotland compare with respect to statute law and judicial process, and what were the implications of any differences? What special circumstances were involved in the "Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662"?

We shall be paying particular attention to the attitudes and role of James VI (of Scotland) I (of England). What were some of the main features of his Daemonologie? What were its intellectual sources? How were James's views on witchcraft connected with issues of family, dynasty, and statecraft? Did his attitude to witchcraft change when he became King of England as well as of Scotland?

Documentary Sources:

James I, Daemonologie

Larner, Sourcebook of Scottish Witchcraft

Readings:

Clark, S., "King James' Daemonologie ..." in Anglo, S., The Damned Art

Sharpe, J., "Anne Meets the King," Ch. 8 of The Bewitching of Anne Gunter

Larner, C., Enemies of God, esp. Ch. 6 (The Pattern of Witch-hunting, II), Ch. 9 (The Process from Accusation to Execution), Ch. 14 (Scottish Witchcraft in its Comparative Setting)

Larner, C., "James VI and I and Witchcraft," Witchcraft and Religion.

Levack, B., "The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-62."

Willis, D., "James among the Witch-Hunters," (Ch. 4 of Malevolent Nurture)

Seminar 10, November 19

Witchcraft and New England Puritanism

Was there a *distinctive* Puritan ideology in seventeenth-century New England that shaped or influenced the witch hunt there? Did it involve defining heresy in ways that equated religious heterodoxy, especially Quakerism, with the devil's work? Was there in New England Puritanism a misogynistic ideology of "womanhood" that left women especially vulnerable to the stigma of witchcraft? Karlson's account also points to economic factors in the stigmatization of certain women. Should her findings cause us to revise the image of the witch as necessarily poor and economically marginal? Accounts of Puritan ideology inevitably converge with accounts of Puritan institutions, notably the church and its clergy. Here the Mather family figure prominently. What do Cotton M's writings tell us about his attitude to witchcraft, spectral evidence, and demonic possession? What does he have to say about those who *deny* the reality of witchcraft? How did the Mathers relate the incidence of witchcraft to the spiritual state of New England? Did the Mathers contribute to an ideology of womanhood as identified by Karlson and Reis? Finally, we should seek to place New England witch-hunting in a comparative setting: Was it unique or similar to what we know of the witch-craze in England and Scotland?

Documentary Sources:

Mather, Cotton, The Wonders of the Invisible World

Mather, Cotton, "Memorable Providences," from Burr, ed., Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases

Hall, David, ed., Witchhunting in Seventeenth-Century New England, esp. ch. 5, but scour for other cases.

Readings:

Heyrman, C., "Specters of Subversion, Societies of Friends: Dissent and the Devil in Provincial Essex, Massachusetts."

Karlson, C., The Devil in the Shape of a Woman, Chs. 1, 3, 5 [note pp. 179-81 on Cotton Mather]

Reis, E., "Women's Sinful Natures and Men's Natural Sins," Ch. 1 of Damned Women.

Starkey, M., "The Devil and Cotton Mather," Ch. 20, The Devil in Massachusetts.

Wering, R. " 'Reformation is Our Only Preservation: Cotton Mather and Salem Witchcraft.' "

Supplementary:

Demos, John, Entertaining Satan, read selectively

Kittredge, G.L., Witchcraft in Old and New England.

Seminar 11, November 26

Salem Witchcraft

What was the role of Tituba in precipitating the crisis? How and why in Salem narratives (according to Rosenthal) has her role become mythologized? How can one account for the behaviour of the adolescent female accusers and for the response to their accusations? To what extent does the Boyer and Nissenbaum book support the general thesis that it was socioeconomic tensions in village communities (experiencing the birthpangs of nascent capitalism) that drove the witchcraze? In what ways was Salem deviating from the Puritan ideal of community? What was the basis of factionalism within Salem and how did this connect with disputes over an independent church for Salem village? What mechanisms were at work that made the Salem outbreak the most extensive in the American colonial experience? To what extent was the crisis driven by the fact that Massachusetts was engaged in a debilitating conflict with Indians on their northern frontier?

Documentary Source:

Hall, D., Witch-hunting in seventeenth-century New England, Ch. 18 (DOCS.)

Readings:

Boyer, P. and Nissenbaum, S., Salem Possessed

Demos, J., "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England."

Norton, M. B., "Conclusion: New Witch-land," from In the Devil's Snare.

Rosenthal, B., "Dark Eve," Ch. 1 of Salem Story.

Seminar 12, December 3

Why the Witchcraze came to an end

On the face of it, a simple explanation is that the belief in witchcraft ended because of the "Scientific Revolution" of the late seventeenth century. But were science and a belief in witches *necessarily* opposed? (On this issue, consider the Webster-Glanvill debate discussed in the Jobe article.) In what ways was growing scepticism among elites (especially those who controlled the judicial process) responsible for the decline in witchcraft prosecutions? How was the end of the witchcraze in England connected with (i) changing attitudes to religious dissenters (especially Quakers) and (ii) party politics? Did the end of the witchcraze mean an end of witchcraft beliefs? How did the social and religious climate change in Salem after the witchcraze there?

Readings:

Bostridge, I., "Witchcraft Repealed."

Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Possessed, pp. 217-21

Elmer, P., " 'Saints or sorcerers': Quakerism, demonology and the decline of witchcraft in seventeenth-century England."

Guskin, P., "The Context of Witchcraft: the Case of Jane Wenham."

Jobe, T.H., "The Devil in Restoration Science," Isis (Sept. 198

Sharpe, J., Witchcraft in Early Modern England, Ch. 5

Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, Ch. 18.

Supplementary:

Monter, William, European Witchcraft, Part 4 (“The Decline of Witchcraft”)

Trevor-Roper, Hugh, European Witch-Craze..., Ch. 5 (“Decline”)

Shapiro, B. Probability and Certainty in 17th Century England, Ch. 6 (“Witchcraft”)