

21.211

Writing Assignment Theories of Witch Hunts

A great many theories have been advanced to explain the witch hunts in Europe and colonial New England. In addition, dramatic and literary presentations of the crazes often suggest implicit theories. For this assignment most students will take one theory or account, usually one that emphasizes a single cause or slant on the subject.

See the list of books on reserve in the course syllabus for some topics. For other topics, the books you want will be on the shelves in the Humanities Library. If you can't find an important source, I may have a copy you can consult, but only as a last resort.

A few students will instead take one topic and contrast two or more theories or approaches to that topic (see below, page four).

Discuss the theory or presentation chosen. How does it explain the witch hunt in question? What features of the craze does it play up or play down? How adequate is the explanation? Be sure you communicate the main features of the explanation without getting mired down in excess detail. The theories in question vary from plausible and sophisticated to simplistic and silly, but in all cases discuss them critically. Make absolutely sure that you consider the theory in the light of the required reading for the course, especially Levack. It will be disastrous to ignore a discussion in the required reading relevant to your topic.

Try to go to the heart of the theory, its implications, and its strengths and weakness. Do not get bogged down in details, especially not in your class presentation.

Write a paper of at least three double-spaced pages. In addition, be prepared to give a concise summary and critique of the theory in class.

Written assignment due November 4.

For class presentations on Europe, you must be ready by October 17

For class presentations on Salem, you must be ready by November 13

FOR EUROPE

1. WITCHES AS PAGAN WORSHIPPERS. Margaret Murray, *The God of the Witches, The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (paperback copies published by Oxford U. Press widely available) See also older editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, for criticism.

- 2. LAWYERS AS WITCH HUNTERS.** Elliot Currie, "Crimes without Criminals," *Law & Society Review* 3:1, 1968, reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol.3.
- 3. WITCHES AS COMMUNAL CLOTH WEAVERS.** Jane Schneider, "Rumpelstiltskin's Bargain," in A. Weiner & J. Schneider eds., *Cloth and Human Experience*, chap.6 (also intro. to volume)
- 4. WITCHES AS HALLUCINOGEN USERS.** Michael Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, chap.8. See critique in Robin Briggs, *Neighbors and Witches*.
- 5. WITCHCRAFT SCARES AS AN ELITE PLOT.** Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches*, pp.207-240. Cf. H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch hunting in southwestern Germany, 1562-1684*
- 6. WITCHES AS PERSECUTED HOMOSEXUALS.** Arthur Evans, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counter Culture*. (I have a copy to loan.)
- 7. WITCHES AS MIDWIVES AND CURERS.** Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, "Witches, Midwives, and Nurses" (Humanities Library may have copy.) Mary Nelson, "Why Witches were Women," in *Women, a Feminist Perspective*, Jo Freeman, editor. Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, chap. 6, "from Healers into Witches." Be sure to see criticisms in Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, p.5. See also Briggs in required reading.
- 8. REAL SATANIC WITCHES WERE REALLY HURTING PEOPLE.** The (supposed) Reverend Montagu Summers, any of his works. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, for commentary.
- 9. WITCHCRAFT, INTELLECTUALS, AND MOUNTAINS.** Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch Craze*. A classic statement on the subject. Consider especially the role of intellectuals, parallels with recent events, and environmental and racial determinism. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* on the issue of early alpine witchcraft.
- 10. WITCHES AS REBELS.** J. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*
- 11. WITCHES AS LOONIES, ACCUSERS AS HYSTERIC.** Johann Weyer, *On Witchcraft*, esp. pp.96ff, 270-278, 289ff. Nicholas Spanos, "Witchcraft in Histories of Psychiatry"; George Rosen, "Psychopathology in the Social process"; R.E.Hemphill, "Historical Witchcraft & Psychiatric Illness" all reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol. 3.
- 12. A NOVEL OF WITCHCRAFT.** Michael Kunze, *Highroad to the Stake*
- 13. THE REALITY OF WITCH CULTS.** Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*

14. WITCHES, PAST AND PRESENT. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, Margot Adler, *Drawing down the Moon*, and other works

15. ANIMALS AS WITCHES. E.P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (I have a copy).

FOR NEW ENGLAND

1. WITCHCRAFT WAS REALLY BEING PRACTICED. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem*. Barrett Wendell, 1892, "Were the Salem Witches Guiltless?" reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol. 8, pp.267-285. See also H.C.Erik Midelfort, "Were there really witches?" reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol.3.

See esp. Rosenthal's commentary in *Salem Story*.

2. HALLUCINOGENIC POISONING. Linda Caporae, *Science*, 4/02/76, p.26; N.P. Spano and J. Gottlieb, *Science*, 12/24/76, p.1390. Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *Poisons of the Past*

3. AN EPIDEMIC OF ENCEPHALITIS. Laurie Winn Carlson, *A Fever in Salem*.

4. EVIL GIRLS & MARTYRED CHRISTIAN WOMEN. Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft* (1867), See commentary in Rosenthal.

5. THE AFFLICTED GIRLS AS HYSTERICIS. Ernest Caulfield, "Pediatric Aspects of the Salem Witch Tragedy" *American Journal of the Diseases of Children* 65:788-802, reprinted in: Marc Mappen, *Witches and Historians*, Compare Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story*.

6. "WITCH HUNTS" & McCARTHYISM. Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*. See also the volumes of critical essays on this play.

7. WITCHCRAFT AND PSYCHOANALYSIS. John Demos. *Entertaining Satan*, pp.153-210.

8. WITCHCRAFT AND THE LAW. David T. Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts*, chap.7; Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*; Rosenthal, *Salem Story*. (also required readings in Levack and B&N)

CONTRASTING THEORIES

For the few of you who will take this option: Discuss the differences and similarities among the competing theories or interpretations of a single topic. Where possible, discuss the kinds of evidence the different authors consider and the ways they interpret it. As with other topics, concentrate on the main points and do not get lost in the detail.

1. CONFESSION IN NEW ENGLAND WITCH TRIALS. Contrast the positions of Boyer and Nissenbaum (pp.214-216); Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, pp.42-43,151-152, Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion*, pp.204-211, and Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women*, chap. 4.

2. GENDER IN WITCH TRIALS IN ENGLAND AND NEW ENGLAND. Contrast the positions of several (not all) of the following: Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*; John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, pp.60-70, 153-165, 197-206, Briggs (required reading), Willis (required reading), Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power*, and the articles in Levack, *New Perspectives*, v.4

3. WITCHES AND SEXUALITY. Contrast the positions of Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, pp.129-145, Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors* (see index), Levack (see index)

4. TITUBA, HER IDENTITY AND ROLE IN THE SALEM CRISIS: Maryse Conde, *Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, pp.10-31. Chadwick Hansen, 1974, "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro," *New England Quarterly* 47(1): 3-2. Elaine Breslaw, 1992, "The Salem Witch from Barbados: In Search of Tituba's Roots," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* v.128, pp.217-238.