

# witches



NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2021

(PHIL1104) WOMEN IN WESTERN RELIGION



# COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion tells us what we should shun: the unfamiliar; the impermissible; the Other. We turn to religion to protect us from demons and monsters. Knowing what scares us tells us who we are, what we want, and what we cannot or will not tolerate. What, then, can we learn from the Witch?

**This course uses witches and the idea of the monstrous feminine to introduce foundational concepts in the academic study of religion and gender.** Students analyze popular culture sources (including films, poems, and short stories) in conversation with scholarship on religion and cultural studies to explore what the Witch can tell us about gender and religion(s) in what is now the United States.

# READINGS

It's a damn pandemic, y'all. I'm not making you buy books. All your readings are available on Canvas.

**Readings are due before class on the day they are listed on the syllabus. Reading notes are due before the next scheduled class meeting.**

# EXPECTATIONS

*Second full semester of the pandemic = we still really don't know what to expect, if we're being honest. Let's try to be patient with ourselves and each other.*

This is an introductory course. I don't expect you'll know anything about the traditions we're discussing or about religious studies as a discipline. I do assume a basic familiarity with humanities scholarship. If you're unfamiliar with reading and analyzing scholarly articles or writing scholarly essays using standard humanities styles, you might find some course assignments challenging. Please be sure to read directions closely and seek additional assistance as needed well in advance of deadlines.

Regardless of your academic background, **treat every student and every concept you encounter with scholarly respect.** Challenge your assumptions and your position(s) of privilege. Speak from your own best understandings of the issues. As scholars of religion, it is not our job to evaluate the truth or validity of any tradition. We use the evidence we have to position that tradition's beliefs, practices, teachings, and products in the broader context of religions, genders, and American cultures.



## CLASS FORMAT

COVID19 + immunocompromised professor = we're doing this thing remotely and asynchronously.

### **NO ZOOM EVER.**

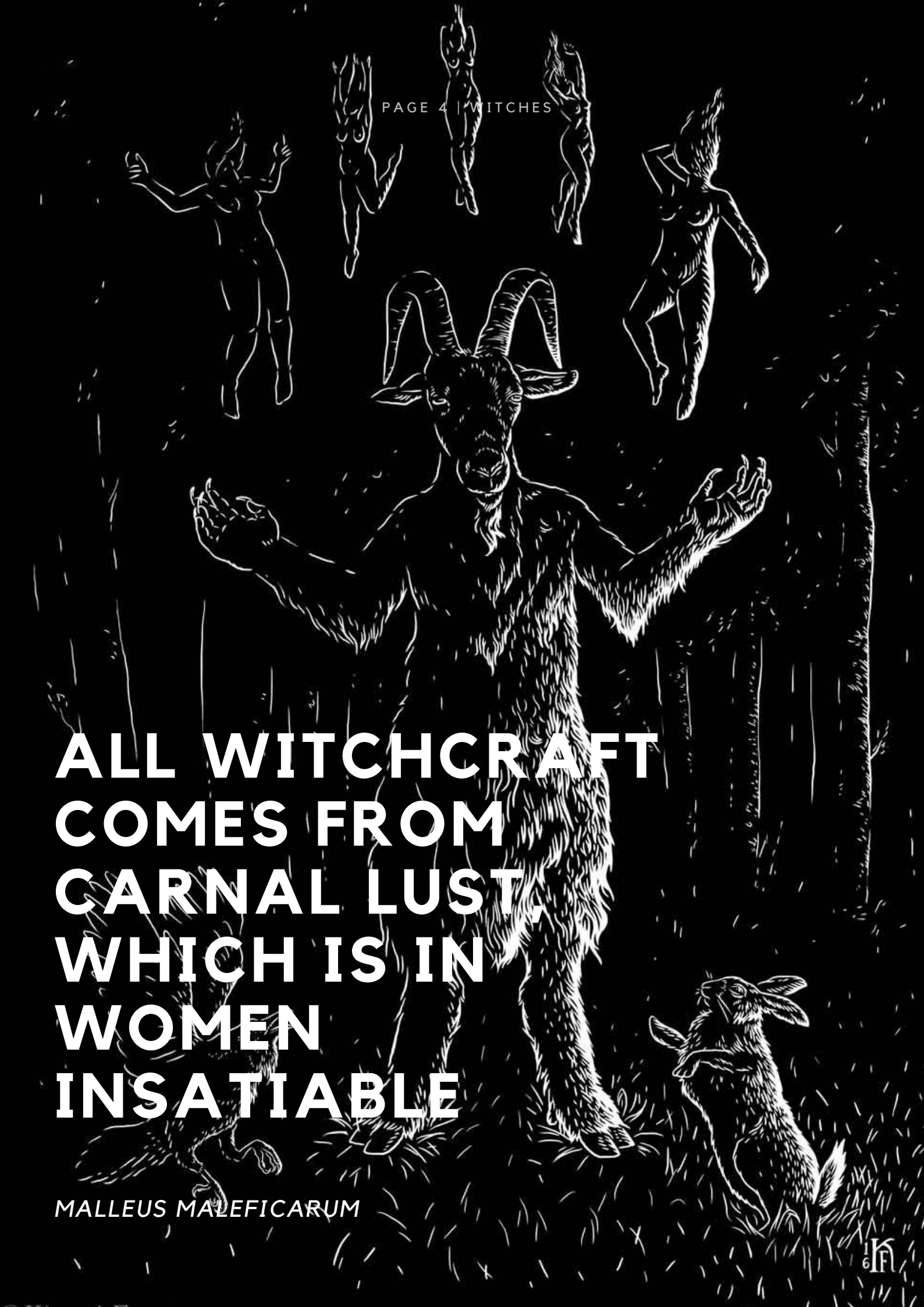
If you're having trouble accessing course materials for any reason, please contact me ASAP so we can work something out.

WE WILL WORK TO MAKE OUR CAMPUS AND (ONLINE) CLASSROOM A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR PEOPLE OF ALL RACES, GENDERS, ETHNICITIES, ABILITIES, CLASSES, AGES, SEXUALITIES, AND STATUSES OF DOCUMENTATION.

Each unit requires you to review the assigned materials in advance of our discussions, so you should complete the readings, podcasts, etc. *by* the date on the syllabus. Every lesson includes a discussion on our course [Medium](#) page; this is where you'll participate in class discussions if you choose to do so.

Each unit also includes a feature film, which we'll live-tweet during our scheduled meeting time. If you have a conflict (scheduling issue, can't do horror films, etc.), please let me know ASAP. Review the **opt-in grading** instructions and the **assignment sheet** for more information.





**ALL WITCHCRAFT  
COMES FROM  
CARNAL LUST,  
WHICH IS IN  
WOMEN  
INSATIABLE**

*MALLEUS MALEFICARUM*



# OPT-IN GRADING

There's a lot of evidence to suggest that grading isn't (and maybe can't be) 100% objective, and that often grades reflect unconscious instructor biases. This class hopes to challenge and disrupt white supremacy, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and other injustices. So let's try something different, shall we?

**Opt-in grading = you decide how much and what kind of energy you can devote to this course.**

**Option F:** failure is not an option.

**Option D:** turn in literally any of the work assigned for this course. Congrats, you've got yourself a D. It's not fancy, but you pass the class.

**Option C:** turn in at least 75% of your reading notes (16/21). Bam! That's a C.

**Option B:** turn in at least 85% of your reading notes (18/21) + at least two film analyses + participate in most class discussions (minimum 18/22) on Medium. Mazel tov on your B.

**Option A:** turn in 95% (20/21) of your reading notes + three film analyses + final un/essay + participate in 90% of class discussions (20/22). You earn an A, also several naps. Just kidding, everybody deserves naps.

**Please note:** you must follow directions to earn credit for turning in assignments. Opting in for an A requires completion of all assignments required at the C and B levels. (Don't sleep on the reading notes or discussions.)



i like my witches

like i like my books

e horne and j comeau



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properly respected for their cultural importance

asofterworld.com

## accessibility



If you're having trouble keeping up, please let me know as soon as you can. **You do not have to have a registered disability to request accommodations**, but I won't know you need help or more time unless you tell me so. You don't have to tell me why you're having a hard time, but getting in touch means I can come up with a plan to get you what you need.

It is 100% okay to be struggling to retain new information or keep up with schoolwork right now.

Crises affect our moods, our energy, and our cognition. **I will never judge you for needing more time or an alternate assignment, but I can't help you if you don't tell me you need help.**

## technology



Distance learning is tech-intensive, which makes keeping up hard if you don't have the resources you need. And the internet can be an unsafe place for already vulnerable folks.

**If you can't stream video or download podcasts, or can't/would prefer not to use Twitter or Medium for privacy or safety reasons, please let me know ASAP so we can plan alternative assignments.**

If you're new to Twitter or Medium, don't worry! They're pretty straightforward to use. There are intros to both platforms on Canvas, and I'm happy to answer questions via email or Canvas chat.

## know yr IX



Despite recent efforts to the contrary, gender- and sex-based harassment is still a Civil Rights offense. Offenders are subject to the same kinds of penalties applied to offenses against other protected categories (such race, national origin, etc.).

**Survivors are entitled to confidential support, no matter who the president is.**

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you're not alone. I believe you.

**You can find the university's resources here.** I am also happy to provide further resources in class or during office hours.



Not all witches

live out in the wilds

e horne and j comeau



luring little children

to their grisly deaths.



But

a girl needs goals.

asofterworld.com

# PARTICIPATION

I'm including my standard "how to earn participation credit" chart, but this semester?

**Let's all just do the best we can.** Any engagement beyond what is explicitly required is awesome. I hope you'll want to talk about the material we'll be covering beyond what's explicitly required, but I won't penalize you for being short on the ability to even right now. **There is no penalty for late work during a pandemic.** Just get everything in before **27 April**.



## *minimal*

## *adequate*

## *good*

## *excellent*

Making a single comment based on a surface-level reading of the lecture or offering a basic response to another student's comments ("I agree with them")

Offering a thoughtful reflection that demonstrates you've reviewed the assigned sources but omitting specific source references

Supporting your analysis of the assigned sources with specific references to the material and thoughtfully engaging other students' responses and insights.

Consistently and specifically referencing course material and discussions; engaging other students' comments or questions in a productive and respectful manner



**Cheating = failing.** Please don't. Complete this [plagiarism tutorial](#) by **26 January**.

Check out the "What is Plagiarism?" handout on Blackboard or Northeastern's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) for more info. "I didn't know" is not an excuse. Go know.



# ASSIGNMENTS

## READING NOTES

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Learning to read, understand, and think critically about challenging material is a key skill for liberal arts scholarship. This assignment will help you become a more careful reader of the assigned sources (and hopefully a more careful reader in general!).

**Submit reading notes for each text in bold on the class schedule.** Reading notes for each topic are due before the next scheduled meeting time. Please review the assignment sheet and rubric for further instructions.

## MEDIA ANALYSES

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Thrice this semester, we'll watch films as part of our class discussions. Livetweet our initial viewings ([#NUwitches](#)), putting the film in conversation with the readings for the day.

**How might the authors of these essays respond to the films in question? Do the film's depictions of witches correspond with our class readings & discussions? About broader concerns in the study of religion and gender? Why/not? Why do these correspondences matter?** Submit your analysis as a twitter thread. Refer to course readings to support your argument. Review the assignment sheet for more info.





# ASSIGNMENTS

## *MEDIUM "LECTURES"*

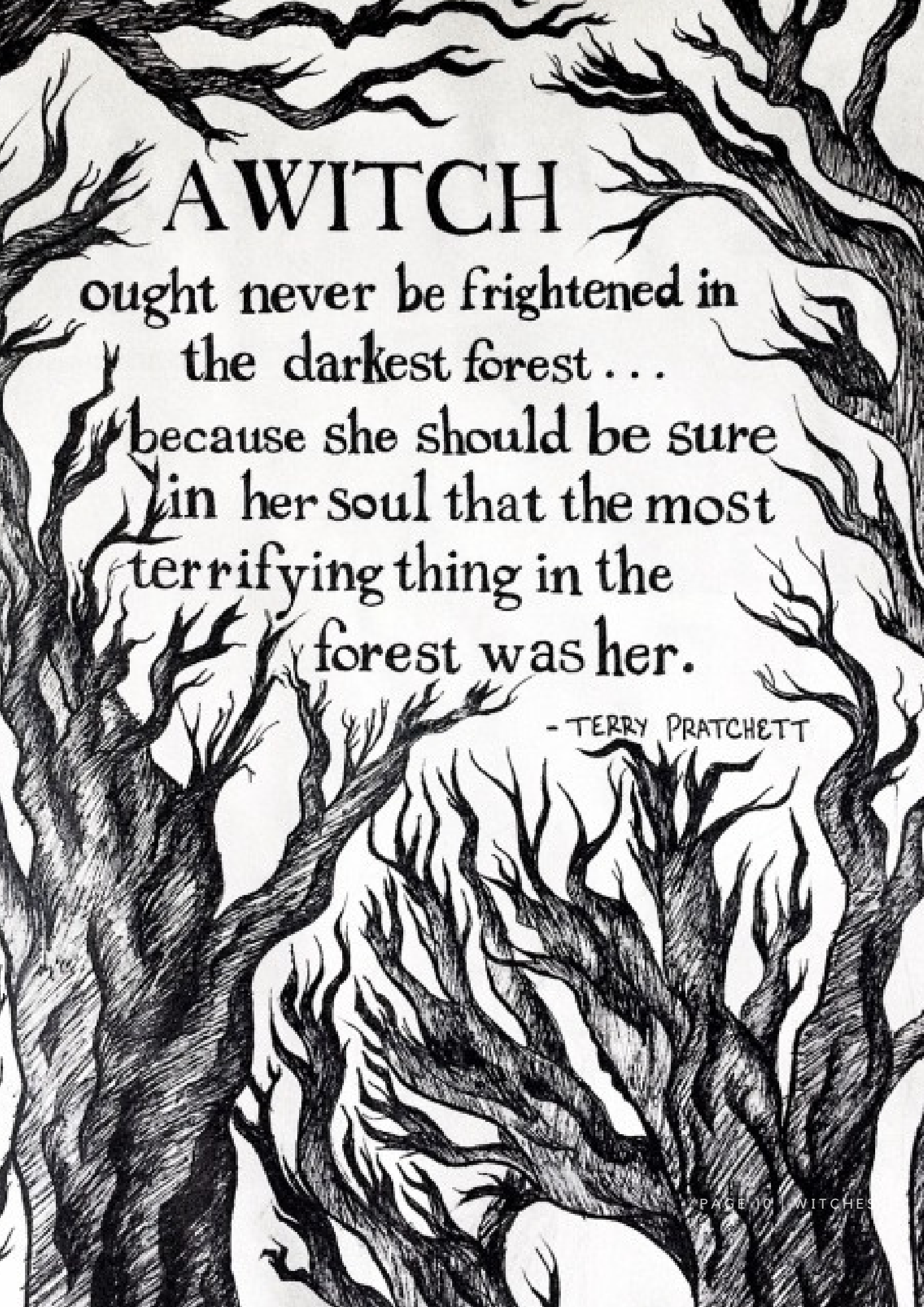
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While I will sometimes provide slideshows to clarify challenging concepts, my "lectures" this semester will be on our course [Medium](#) page. (Any copyrighted material I reference will be on Canvas.) **I'll post breakdowns of the materials, related links & resources, and ask you to reflect on what you read/ listened to/watched.** You can respond publicly or privately on the page. Review the directions on Medium for more information about participating in class discussions.

## *WHICH WITCH(ES) AND WHY? FINAL UN/ESSAY*

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By the end of the semester, you should have a more expansive, more nuanced understanding of who witches are, what they do, and what they can tell us about religion and gender. **If you're opting in for an A in this class, submit something that tells me how your thinking about gender and religion has shifted and why witches are a useful way to understand both.** Your project can be a playlist, a collage, a twitter thread, a video, or just a plain old bog-standard essay -- use whatever format you want to answer the question. (Un-essays will require short framing statements to clarify your vision for the project. Review the assignment sheet for further instructions.



# A WITCH

ought never be frightened in  
the darkest forest . . .

because she should be sure  
in her soul that the most  
terrifying thing in the  
forest was her.

- TERRY PRATCHETT

# CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
T 19 January	What is religion?	<i>Keeping It 101</i> , “Who Gets Left out of Religion?” Gooden, “What It Means to Be a Real-Life Witch” Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” Bosker, “Why Witchcraft Is on the Rise”
F 22 January	What is gender?	<b>Butler, from <i>Bodies That Matter</i></b> “Sex, Gender, and Gender Identity” handout Doyle, “The Woman at the Edge of the Woods” Donovan, “Witchcraft is Empowering Queer & Trans People”
T 26 January	Which witch is which?	<b>Eller, “Relativizing the Patriarchy”</b> Grossman, “The Witching Hour” (video + essay) Grossman, “Who Is a Witch?,” and “Afterwyrd” <i>New Yorker</i> , “Many Faces of Witches”
F 29 January	The monstrous feminine	<b>Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine”</b> Doyle, “Domestic Terror” <i>Alphabet of Ben Sira</i> , Lilith
T 2 February	Reading against the text	Plaskow, “Coming of Lilith” <b>Plaskow, “Lilith Revisited”</b> Theriault, “Baba Yaga’s Guide to Feminism” Vera, “The Seam of Skin and Scales” Glück, “Gretel in Darkness”
F 5 February	Witch watching	Yale Film Analysis Guide: basic terms & cinematography Clover, “Carrie and the Boys” <b>Williams, “When the Woman Looks”</b> Clips: <i>Carrie</i> (1979, 2013); <i>The Witches</i> (1990, 2020); <i>The Craft</i>
<i>witches in the colonies</i>		
T 9 February	Screening: <i>The Witches</i>	<b>Zwissler, “I Am That Very Witch”</b> “5 Things to Keep in Mind before Seeing the Witch” Murphy, “That (Very Very) Old Black Magic”
F 12 February	Salem’s witches (1)	Godbeer, “How Could They Believe That?” <b>Karlsen, “The Economic Basis of Witchcraft”</b> Willard, “Two Sermons on Women and the Devil”
T 16 February	Salem’s witches (2)	<b>Reis, “The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul”</b> Reis, “Discourse of Depravity” Mather, “The Character of a Virtuous Woman”
F 19 February	Salem’s witches (3)	“Examination of Tituba” <b>Breslaw, “Tituba’s Confession”</b> Roach, “Tituba” Bishop, “Tituba Speaks”
T 23 February	Rescreening: <i>The Witches</i>	Film analysis thread due (Analyze three shots & relate to assigned sources)
F 26 February	Catch up day	

# CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
<i>witches v. colonialism</i>		
T 2 March	Screening: <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>	<b>Weisenfeld, "My Story Begins Before I Was Born"</b> Martin, "For Us, By Us"
F 5 March	African Diasporic Religions	Guillory, "African Diaspora Conjuring Practices" (podcast) Washington, "Introduction" <b>Clark, "19<sup>th</sup> Century New Orleans Voodoo"</b>
T 9 March	Conjure, Hoodoo, and Rootwork (1)	<b>Chireau, "Our Religion &amp; Superstition"</b> Chireau, "Introduction" Chireau, "Conclusion"
F 12 March	Conjure, Hoodoo, and Rootwork (2)	Hurston, from <i>Mules and Men</i> <b>Manigault-Bryants, "Conjuring Pasts and Ethnographic Presents"</b> Bess, "Black Magic: Hoodoo Witches Speak Out" Newsome Bass, <i>Wake</i> (short film)
T 16 March	Post(?)colonial witchcraft	Rodriguez, thread on Santeria and Espiritismo <b>Romberg, "Ritual Alchemy"</b> Brown, "Afro-Caribbean Spirituality"
F 19 March	Appropriation & commodification	<b>Romberg, "The Halloween Extravaganza"</b> Keene, "Spiritual Theft" Joho and Sung, "How to Be a Witch without Stealing"
T 23 March	Rescreening: <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>	Film analysis thread due (Analyze three shots & relate to assigned sources)
F 26 March	Catch up day	
<i>nouveau witch</i>		
T 30 March	Screening: <i>Rosemary's Baby</i>	<b>Frankfurter, "Awakening to Satanic Conspiracy"</b> Skal, "It's Alive, I'm Afraid"
F 2 April	Witchcraft, sexual violence, and reproductive justice	<b>Cusack, from <i>Invented Religions</i></b> David, "Hexing Brett Kavanaugh" Balcazar, "Sympathy for the Devil" Satanic Temple, "Religious Reproductive Rights" Clip from "Lovecraft Country"
T 6 April	Witchcraft, white feminism, and intersectionality	Budapest, "How this Book Was Born" Daly, from <i>Gyn/Ecology</i> <b>Lorde, "Open Letter to Mary Daly"</b>
F 9 April	#BlackGirlMagic (1)	<b>Martin, "Good Wickedry"</b> Crumpton, "Glory B" White, "Black American Gothic" Clips from "Lemonade" and "Black Is King"
T 13 April	#BlackGirlMagic (2)	Bell, "How Hollywood Has Failed Black Witches" Samuel, "Witches of Baltimore" <b>Thomas, "Hermione Is Black"</b> Bennet, "A 'Racebent' Hermione Granger"

# CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
		<i>nouveau witch</i>
F 16 April	Brujeria 2.0	Galer, "The Instagram Witches of Brooklyn" (video) <b>Romberg, "Brujos, Saints, or Brokers?"</b> Herstick, "Hoodwitch" Cross, "Understanding American Brujeria"
T 20 April	Rescreening: <i>Rosemary's Baby</i>	Analysis thread due (Analyze three shots & relate to assigned sources)
T 27 April	<b>ALL COURSEWORK DUE</b>	



*"show me your witches and I'll show you  
your feelings about women."*



PAM GROSSMAN  
WAKING THE WITCH

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# witches

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## **Dr. Megan Goodwin**

*is not on campus this semester,  
but you can reach her at*

me.goodwin@northeastern.edu  
or on twitter @mpgphd

**There are no in-person meetings  
for this course.**

You can **book me** for individual  
Canvas Chat or video conference  
sessions during our scheduled  
meeting time, **TF 9:50-11:30am.**