

witches



NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2020

(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. How, then, do we make sense of 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 and short stories-in conversation with scholarship on religion and cultural studies to explore what the Witch can tell us about women and western religion(s).

READINGS

ed. Breslaw, *Witches of the Atlantic World* (req.)
Nye, *Religion: The Basics* (recommended)

All other readings available via Blackboard.

Readings & reading notes are due before class on the day they are listed on the syllabus.

EXPECTATIONS

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 western cultures.





Attendance and participation are mandatory (and necessary) if you want to pass the class. **Show up.**

But also: life happens.

You are permitted two absences, no questions asked. Beyond that (or a documented emergency), please come talk to me if you're having a hard time making it to class. I'm happy to work with you, but I can only do that if you communicate with me.

WE WILL WORK TO MAKE OUR CLASSROOM AND OUR CAMPUS A SAFER SPACE FOR PEOPLE OF ALL RACES, GENDERS, ETHNICITIES, ABILITIES, CLASSES, AGES, SEXUALITIES, AND STATUSES OF DOCUMENTATION.

Each class will center on discussion of the assigned texts. Some will include brief lectures, media analysis, or other elements.

None of these work unless you **attend class regularly and read the assignments carefully.**

Please come to class ready to analyze and respond to the readings, as well as to the contributions of your fellow students. **Always bring the readings to class with you.**

Remember: engagement includes active listening!





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 require accommodations for in-class discussions or activities, have emergency medical information, or need special arrangements during a building evacuation, please let me know as soon as possible.

I'm happy to work with you on making our discussions accessible to your learning needs, whether or not you have a registered or diagnosed learning disability.

However, if you need specific testing accommodations, you'll need to **register with the DRC** and inform me of your needs during the first week of classes.

technology



Unless you need them for learning accessibility, **only use your laptops and other devices in the classroom for specified class activities.** You'll also need to know how to use Twitter, to create a PDF document, and submit it via Blackboard in a timely manner. (We'll discuss these in class.)

Please note: I only accept electronic submissions in PDF format, and only via Blackboard. I will not accept assignments as *.doc or *.docx files or assignments sent to my email address.

know yr IX



Sex and gender-based violence and harassment are Civil Rights offenses. 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.

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, Northeastern wants to help.

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

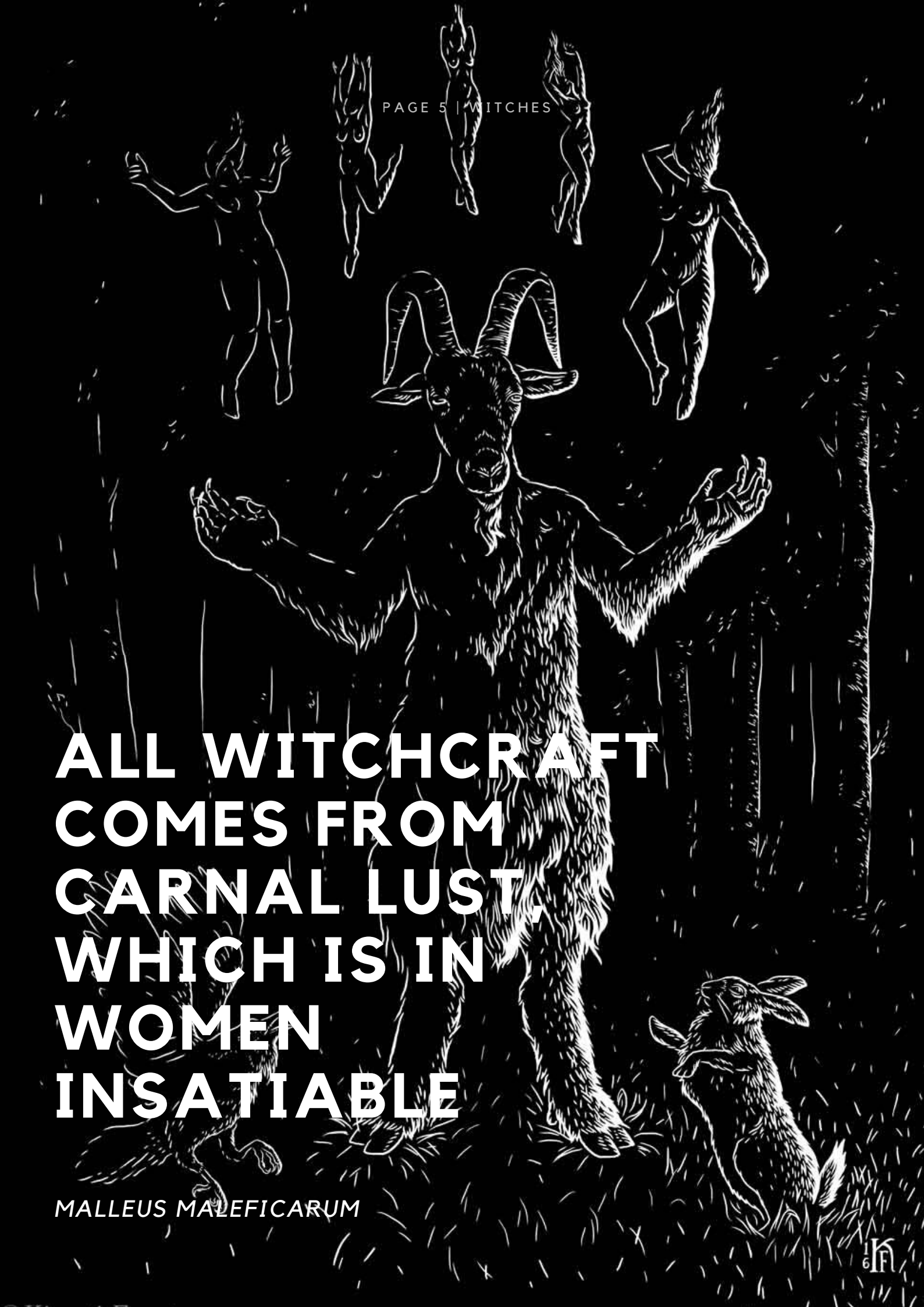
to their grisly deaths.



But

a girl needs goals.

asofterworld.com



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

MALLEUS MALEFICARUM



GRADING

You will be graded on HOW you think—not WHAT you think—in this class. In other words, **you will not be graded on your beliefs, opinions, or the positions you advance.** I evaluate how clearly and precisely you articulate your thoughts and positions, how closely you read the assigned texts, and how much your ability to think critically and synthetically about course themes develops throughout the semester.



RUBRIC

Reading Notes	30%
Media Analyses (2)	30%
Witch Trials 2.0 (small groups)	15%
Harkness Discussion (class grade)	15%
Participation	10%

A = 94-100 | A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89 | B = 83-86 | B- = 80-82
C+ = 79-77 | C = 73-76 | C- = 70-72
D+ = 67-69 | D = 63-66 | D- = 60-62
F = 59 and below

PARTICIPATION

There is no attendance grade for this class – you must participate in the conversation to receive credit for attending. To succeed in this class, you have to fully engage in activities and discussions. **In short: speak up!** Here are the criteria that determine your participation grade:



minimal

You usually make a single comment during discussions in response to another student's observations or insights. ("I agree with them.")



adequate

You're present and prepared, but limit your contributions to several surface-level observations or clarifying questions about lectures or readings.



good

You're present, prepared, and offer thoughtful questions & comments that show your preparation for discussion and attention to readings and lectures.



excellent

You consistently reference readings, lectures, & class discussions. You encourage other students' comments & questions in a productive and respectful manner.



Cheating = failing. Please don't. Complete this [plagiarism tutorial](#) by **15 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

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 these texts. **Submit reading notes for each text in bold on the class schedule.** Reading notes are due by **midnight** before the class meets. Please review the assignment sheet and rubric for further instructions.

MEDIA ANALYSES

Twice this semester, we'll watch films as part of our class discussions. Livetweet our viewings ([#NUwitches](#)) and submit 750-1000 word analyses of the films in conversation with the readings assigned for that 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? Refer to course readings to support your argument. Review the assignment sheet for more info.





ASSIGNMENTS

SALEM WITCH TRIALS 2.0

At the end of our colonial witchcraft unit, students will work in small groups to consider the ways cultural understandings of gender and religion shaped the Salem witch trials. Groups will engage primary sources, scholarly analyses, and pop culture depictions of the trials as part of an in-class midterm exercise. Review the assignment sheet for more info.

HARKNESS DISCUSSION

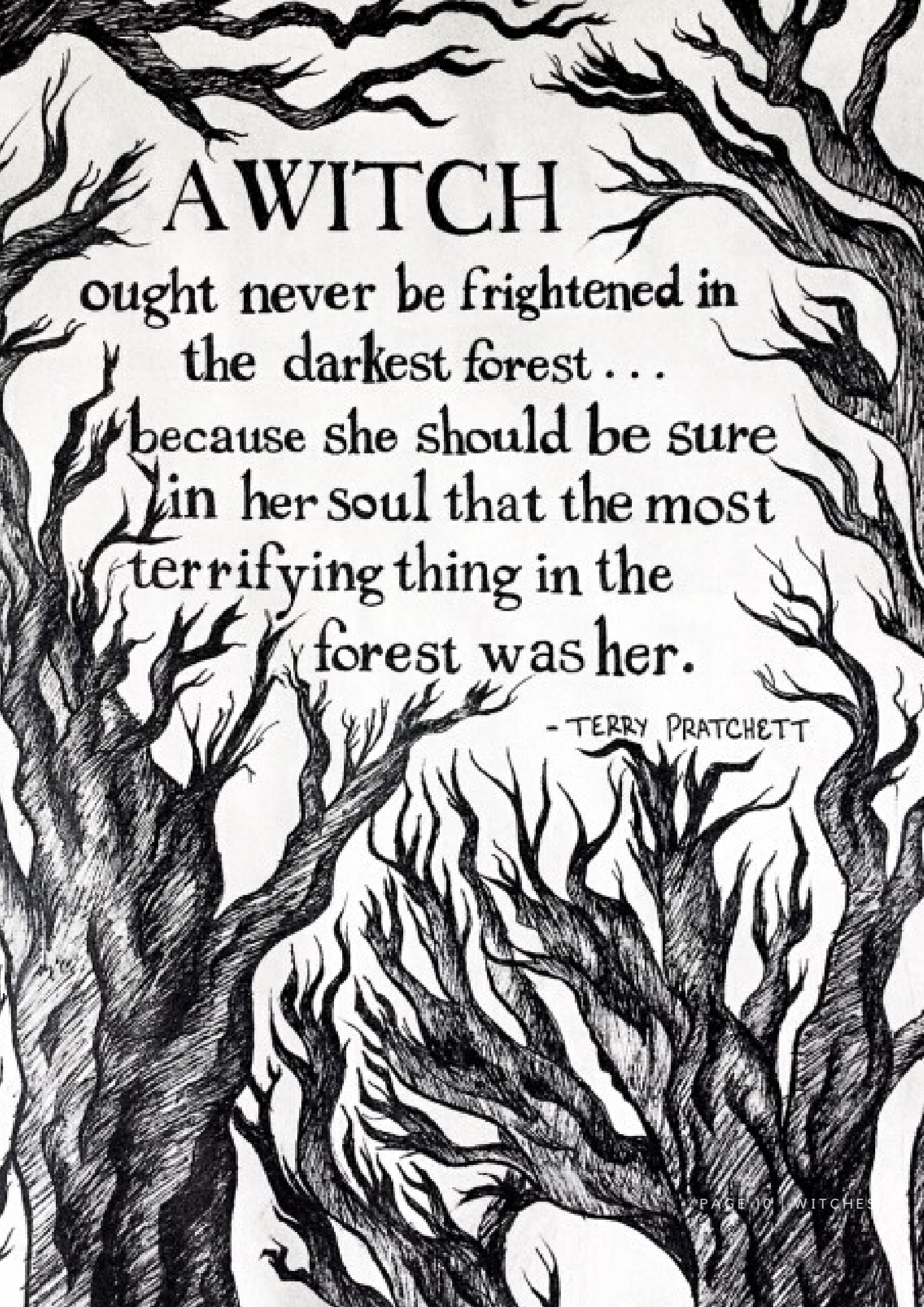
These are rigorous, student-led classroom discussions. For your final exam, students will spend the class period responding to a prompt provided in advance. Students will also receive further research questions and a list of required readings selected from sources assigned this semester. I will record the conversation but participate only to pause for check-ins. All participants earn a single grade for this discussion. You must attend to receive credit for this assignment. Review the rubric, assignment sheet, and sample feedback sheet for more info.

CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
W 8 January	Introductions	
F 10 January	What is religion?	Albanese, "An Elephant in the Dark" Pike, "The Circle Is Open but Never Broken" Gooden, "What It Means to Be a Real-Life Witch" Grossman, "The Good, the Bad, and the Wicked"
W 15 January	What is gender?	Butler, from <i>Bodies That Matter</i> "Sex, Gender, and Gender Identity" handout Doyle, "The Woman at the Edge of the Woods" Donovan, "Witchcraft is Empowering Queer & Trans People"
F 17 January	Which witch is which?	Breslaw, introduction Grossman, "Who Is a Witch?," and "Afterwyrd" <i>New Yorker</i> , "Many Faces of Witches"
W 22 January	The monstrous feminine	Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine" Doyle, "Domestic Terror" <i>Alphabet of Ben Sira</i> , Lilith
F 24 January	Reading against the text	Williams, "When the Woman Looks" Plaskow, "Coming of Lilith" Theriault, "Baba Yaga's Guide to Feminism" Vera, "The Seam of Skin and Scales" <i>optional</i> : KYD Podcast, Kosman & McGregor interview
<i>witches in the colonies</i>		
W 29 January	Screening: <i>The Witch</i>	Zwissler, "I Am That Very Witch" "5 Things to Keep in Mind before Seeing the Witch" Murphy, "That (Very Very) Old Black Magic"
F 31 January	Salem's witches (1)	Godbeer, "How Could They Believe That?" Karlsen, "The Economic Basis of Witchcraft" Willard, "Two Sermons on Women and the Devil"
W 5 February	Salem's witches (2)	Reis, "The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul" Reis, "Discourse of Depravity" Mather, "The Character of a Virtuous Woman"
F 7 February	Salem's witches (3)	Kamensky, "Words, Witches, and Woman Trouble" Kramer & Sprenger, "Why Women Are Chiefly Addicted"
W 12 February	midterm: Salem Witch Trials 2.0	
<i>witches v. colonialism</i>		
F 14 February	Indigenous Americans and witchcraft	Cervantes, "The Indian Response" Cave, "Indian Shamans and English Witches" American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978)
W 19 February	Native rights & rites v. free exercise	U.S. Constitution, First Amendment <i>Employment v. Smith</i> (1990) – Oyez & skim full case Keene, "Spiritual Theft" Sullivan, "The World that Smith Made"

CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
<i>witches v. colonialism</i>		
F 21 February	Screening: <i>Possibility of Spirits</i>	Washington, Introduction Lukumi Babalu Aye v. Hialeah – Oyez & skim full case
W 26 February	Post(?)colonial witchcraft	Romberg, “Ritual Alchemy” Brown, “Afro-Caribbean Spirituality”
F 28 February	Conjure, Hoodoo, & Rootwork	Chireau, “Our Religion & Superstition” Chireau, “Conclusion” Hurston, from <i>Mules and Men</i> <i>optional</i> : Bess, “Black Magic: Hoodoo Witches Speak Out”
W 4 March	SPRING BREAK: NO CLASSES	
F 6 March		
W 11 March	Commodifying witchcraft	Romberg, “The Halloween Extravaganza” Herstick, “Hoodwitch” Burton, “Witches and Consumer Culture” Khan, “Tumblr Witchcraft?”
<i>political witchcraft</i>		
F 13 March	Screening: <i>Rosemary’s Baby</i>	Frankfurter, “Awakening to Satanic Conspiracy” Skal, “It’s Alive, I’m Afraid”
W 18 March	Satanic ritual abuse	Goodwin, “The Satan Sellers” Goodwin, “Believe the Children?”
F 20 March	Radical religious innovation	Pike, “Serious Playing with the Self” Hutton, “Witchcraft and Modernity” Starhawk, “Witchcraft as Goddess Religion”
W 25 March	Witchcraft, sexual violence, and reproductive justice	Cusack, from <i>Invented Religions</i> David, “Hexing Brett Kavanaugh” Balcazar, “Sympathy for the Devil” Satanic Temple, “Religious Reproductive Rights”
F 27 March	Witchcraft, white feminism, and intersectionality	Budapest, “How this Book Was Born” Daly, from <i>Gyn/Ecology</i> Daly, “Witches Return” Lorde, “Open Letter to Mary Daly”
W 1 April	#BlackGirlMagic	Thomas, “Hermione Is Black” Bennet, “A ‘Racebent’ Hermione Granger” Samuel, “The Witches of Baltimore” White, “Black American Gothic”
F 3 April	Political witchcraft	West, “Yes, This Is a Witch Hunt” Haute Macabre, “W.I.T.C.H. PDX” Baloch, “Why W.I.T.C.H. Needs to Make a Comeback” Schiff, “Witchcraft on the Campaign Trail” Serhan, “Actual ‘Single Greatest Witch Hunt of a Politician”
W 8 April	Prepare for final Harkness discussion	
F 10 April	Harkness discussion	



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

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



PAM GROSSMAN
WAKING THE WITCH

witches



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twitter: @mpgphd

Office hours: Wed 1:30-2:30pm
or by appointment

Please note: I am only on campus
Wednesdays and Fridays this
semester. If you cannot meet in
person on those days, we can
arrange video conferencing.