



Instructor: Holger Schott Syme

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Course Number: ENG461H5F

Course Title: Renaissance Strangers:
Witchcraft, Women, the Exotic

Course description: In this seminar, we will study three key thematic obsessions of early modern drama: witchcraft and magic, in their classical, mythological form as well as their contemporary, English manifestation; unruly and criminal women; and historical or imaginary figures of exotic otherness. Our discussions will be grounded in an intensive study of the cultural debates surrounding these texts, with readings including trial narratives and “scholarly” treatments of witchcraft, polemical misogynist tracts and proto-feminist responses, and travel accounts. Although we will pay some attention to the theatrical origin of our texts, asking, for instance, how the commercial environment of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London theatre scene reinforced particular generic and thematic preoccupations, our main focus will be on the cultural history inscribed in the plays – how they record and participate in the construction of particular cultural concepts and images. A selection of critical readings will complement our primary texts and aid our exploration of these questions.

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Plays will include: Marston, *Sophonisba*; Middleton, *The Witch*; Shakespeare, *Macbeth*; Dekker, Ford, and Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*; Anon., *Arden of Faversham*; Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*; Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*; Anon., *Swetnam the Woman-hater Arraigned by Women*; Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* Parts 1 and 2; Anon., *Selimus*; Jonson, *Masque of Blackness*; Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

Required texts: Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, eds., *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays* (Manchester, 1986); Kathleen E. McLuskie and David Bevington, eds., *Plays on Women* (Manchester, 1999); Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York, 2000); individual editions of plays by Marlowe and Shakespeare; coursepack.

Assignments: Three 1-2 page response papers; one final research paper (12-15 pages) with annotated bibliography; one in-class presentation.

Method of Instruction: Class discussion, student presentations, occasional lectures.

Prerequisites: Some background in early modern literature is strongly recommended for this class. It would be extremely useful if you had taken ENG220 (Shakespeare) and/or a course on poetry or drama before 1660. None of these are formal requirements but you will have a much easier time coming to terms with the concepts and texts we will be studying if you're already familiar to some extent with the idiom of the period.