

SYLLABUS DE COURS

Intitulé du cours	Witches and Witch Hunts: from Salem to Washington From Ancient to Contemporary Witchcraft		
Enseignant(e)	Dr. Cécile Malet-Dagreu		
Champ disciplinaire		Mots clés	
Langue d'enseignement	English – advanced level	Niveau	Master
Semestre	Semestre 2	Nombre d'ECTS	4 ECTS
Volume d'heures	18 heures	Modalités d'examens	Combination of assignments : presentations, research, essays
Descriptif	Witch hysteria really took hold in Europe during the mid-1400s, when many accused witches confessed, often under torture, to a variety of wicked behaviours, evil-doing, and crimes. Within a century, witch hunts were common and most of the accused were executed by burning at the stake or hanging. Single women, widows and other women on the margins of society were especially targeted. Witch-hunters would stop at nothing to drive out suspected witches and sorcerers. The exact number of executions during this witch-hunting craze is unknown and very difficult to assess, but estimates run to the tens of thousands (60,000 – 80,000). The most significant period is 1560-1630 and the last execution on European soil took place in 1782. Understanding why so many people were identified and persecuted, who was targeted and why, what was at stake then, who gained from such witch hunts, is essential to appreciate how “witch mania” also reached the New World. No event in the history of colonial America is more controversial and stupefying than the Salem Witchcraft Trials (1691-93), prompting historian Mary Beth Norton to refer to it as “the 800-pound gorilla” of colonial American history. However, the strangeness of the event does not come from our present-day assumption of early modern ignorance and Puritan superstitions, but rather from the fact that it was a strange event for the late seventeenth century itself—an anomaly, in fact. Indeed, the Salem witchcraft trials did not occur in a vacuum. Although extreme in their scope and intensity, they fit within the broader context in seventeenth century New England. Through the study of the trial transcripts and related documents of the investigation, as well as all kinds of resources on the events of 1691-93, students will learn about the Puritans’ worldview and the socio-political background that shaped their reactions to the events leading up to the trials, become familiar with the dynamics of this very unique succession of events from beginning to end, and assess the historiography of the Salem witch trials. By the end of term, students will demonstrate an understanding of the ways religious, diplomatic, political, cultural, social and economic factors combined in such a unique way to create the crisis precipitating the Salem witch trials. They offer a detailed survey of religion, spirituality, superstition, magic, the supernatural, public rituals, as understood by 17th century New Englanders and which explain this extraordinary “witchcraft craze” they indulged in. Once the context is laid out, we will move to a detailed examination of the witch trials at Salem themselves. The economic and demographic patterns apparent during 1692 and 1693 will be examined, as well as the relationships between witchcraft accusations,		



	gender, and inheritance practices. The relationship between these witchcraft trials and the traumas faced by New Englanders at the hands of the Natives during King Philip's and King William's wars will also be alluded to. Interpretations of the Salem Witch Trials are many and varied. The events of 1692 and 1693 are simultaneously some of the most popular and also misunderstood occurrences in early American history. Consequently, some of the myths surrounding the period will be dispelled, and the Salem Witch Trials will hopefully be understood from the perspectives of New England Puritans. In the process, the greater significance of the Witch Trials to early American history will become obvious as modern-day witch hunts and the resurgence of witchcraft will be considered, both in the United States and around the world.
Bibliographie	Cf. Chapters to read every single week