

DEC 02–
DEC 18



WITCH

play by **JEN SILVERMAN**
directed by **JAY BRIGGS**

warehousetheatre.com

Sponsored by
LINDA ARCHER
PEGGY & STEVE DAVIS
ELLEN & ALAN WEINBERG

Recommended Reading List

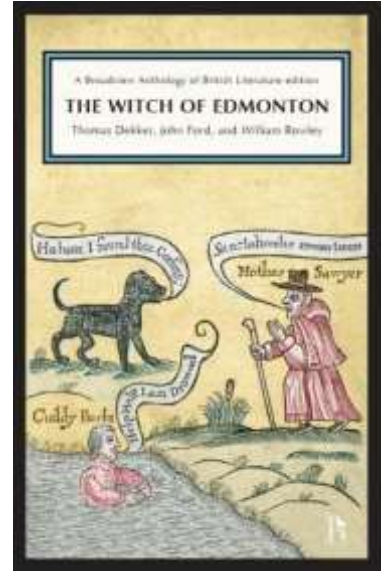
The Witch of Edmonton

Thomas Dekker, William Rowley, and John Ford

Genre: Drama

Book Jacket

At the center of this remarkable 1621 play is the story of Elizabeth Sawyer, the titular Witch of Edmonton, a woman who had in fact been executed for the crime of witchcraft mere months before the play's first performance. Described by the authors as a tragic-comedy and drawn in part from a pamphlet account of the trial then circulating, the play not only offers a riveting account of the contemporary superstitions embodied by the figure of the witch, but also delivers an implicit critique of the society that has created her.



Connection to Witch

Silverman's play *Witch* adapts the early modern domestic tragedy written by Dekker, Rowley, and Ford. The play was written and first performed in 1621 but was not published until 1658 and was inspired by the life of Elizabeth Sawyer, who was executed for witchcraft in connection to the death of a woman named Agnes Ratcliffe in England that same year. Her trial was widely publicized, particularly through Reverend Henry Goodcole's pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch*. The trial and rumors surrounding Sawyer served as the inspiration for Dekker, Rowley, and Ford and is why the title page of the play reads "a known true story." While the play certainly feeds off of the superstition and paranoia connected to witches, it does not rely on easy answers, turning a critical eye on the other townspeople within the play and their own susceptibility to suspicion and corruption.

Guiding Questions

- What strikes you about the adaptation choices Silverman made for *Witch*? Who is not included in the updated play? Have the themes shifted at all? How do the different ends for Elizabeth Sawyer affect the meaning of each work?
- How do you see power operating within the play? Who has it and what do they do with it?
- In many ways, the original play is an early form of true crime narratives. Why do you think audiences remain so interested in reading about real-life tragedies?

The Once and Future Witches

Alix E. Harrow

Genre: Historical Fiction

Book Jacket

In the late 1800s, three sisters use witchcraft to change the course of history in this powerful novel of magic, family, and the suffragette movement. In 1893, there's no such thing as witches. There used to be, in the wild, dark days before the burnings began, but now witching is nothing but tidy charms and nursery rhymes. If the modern woman wants any measure of power, she must find it at the ballot box. But when the Eastwood sisters—James Juniper, Agnes Amaranth, and Beatrice Belladonna—join the suffragists of New Salem, they begin to pursue the forgotten words and ways that might turn the women's movement into the witch's movement. Stalked by shadows and sickness, hunted by forces who will not suffer a witch to vote—and perhaps not even to live—the sisters will need to delve into the oldest magics, draw new alliances, and heal the bond between them if they want to survive.

There's no such thing as witches. But there will be.

An homage to the indomitable power and persistence of women, *The Once and Future Witches* reimagines stories of revolution, motherhood, and women's suffrage—the lost ways are calling.

Connection to Witch

Alix E. Harrow's *The Once and Future Witches* infuses the witch narrative with the struggle of the suffragette movement, drawing connections between two groups of people who suffered under patriarchal systems. Like Jen Silverman's *Witch*, the book imagines what might happen if one person or a group of people in the not-too-distant past decided to try and dream up a new world. Both illuminate the importance and pain that come with family and there is a focus in each work on other kinds of knowledge, occult or otherwise, and how storytelling impacts the real world.

Guiding Questions

- In both *Witch* and *The Once and Future Witches*, characters search for belonging, both familial and communal. What gives you a sense of belonging in your own life?
- Both of these works depict versions of the past where people are actively thinking about how to build kinder and more just communities. How might you imagine your own act of worldbuilding? How can you help make your communities more welcoming?
- *The Once and Future Witches* highlights the importance of oral histories and folktales. Which stories from your childhood have had a lasting impact on you?



The Witches: Suspicion, Betrayal, and Hysteria in 1692 Salem

Stacy Schiff

Genre: Non-Fiction

Book Jacket _____

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Cleopatra*, the #1 national bestseller, unpacks the mystery of the Salem Witch Trials.

It began in 1692, over an exceptionally raw Massachusetts winter, when a minister's daughter began to scream and convulse. It ended less than a year later, but not before 19 men and women had been hanged and an elderly man crushed to death.

The panic spread quickly, involving the most educated men and prominent politicians in the colony. Neighbors accused neighbors, parents and children each other. Aside from suffrage, the Salem Witch Trials represent the only moment when women played the central role in American history. In curious ways, the trials would shape the future republic.

As psychologically thrilling as it is historically seminal, *The Witches* is Stacy Schiff's account of this fantastical story -- the first great American mystery unveiled fully for the first time by one of our most acclaimed historians.

Connection to Witch _____

While Jen Silverman's play is based off of *The Witch of Edmonton*, a play based on a real woman executed for witchcraft in England, the United States has its own history with witch trials. Stacy Schiff elegantly charts the history of Salem and the witch trials, contextualizing 17th century New England, the circumstances that led to the trials, and how the aftermath of the panic has shaped American culture. Schiff's book offers a historical and chilling look at how power struggles and suspicion can lead to the kind of paranoia that is directed at Elizabeth Sawyer in the play and that has been directed at real people in Salem and elsewhere.

Guiding Questions _____

- What did you know about Salem and the witch trials prior to reading this book?
- Can you see something like the Salem trials happening today? What modern circumstances might mitigate or accelerate that kind of paranoia?
- The Salem trials have inspired a number of adaptations and retellings over the past few centuries. Which adaptations are you drawn to? Has your view of them changed having read the historical account of the trials?



“The Many Faces of Women Who Identify as Witches”

Naomi Fry, The New Yorker

Genre: Magazine Article

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-many-faces-of-women-who-identify-as-witches>

Description

This article explores photographer Frances F. Denny’s series, “Major Arcana: Witches in America,” which illuminates portraits of dozens of people in the United States who identify as witches. The series, named after the Major Arcana of the Tarot, opened at ClampArt in New York in October 2018. You can view the entire collection and can purchase Denny’s book (complete with essays by well-known modern witch, writer, and podcast host Pam Grossman) on her website, <https://www.francesfdenny.com/>.

Connection to Witch

Silverman’s adaptation of *The Witch of Edmonton* presents a nuanced look at womanhood, power, community, and shame. Denny’s series offers a look at aspects of contemporary witchcraft and those who practice, expanding conceptions about who witches are and the interiority of their lives. Both works ask audiences to reassess their own preconceived notions of magic, witches, and the relationship between good and evil.

Guiding Questions

- Is there anything that surprises you about these portraits? Is there anything in the depictions that you expected?
- What connections did you see across the portraits and narratives in the series? What differences stood out to you? Are there any you’re particularly drawn to?
- Do you have any conceptions of modern witchcraft? Has your view of witchcraft or the history of witches shifted as you’ve grown up?

List Curated and Study Guides Crafted by:
Emily Lathrop, PhD

Emily R. Lathrop is a writer, arts administrator, teacher, and theatre practitioner. She holds a PhD from the Department of English at The George Washington University, a Master's degree in early modern literature from King's College London, and a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Iowa. She has participated in seminars at The Folger Institute, has received an honorary mention for the J. Leeds Barroll Dissertation Award from the Shakespeare Association of America, and holds a certificate in the Engaged and Public Humanities from Georgetown University. Her current work explores intersections of audience engagement, Shakespeare performance, arts administration, and the myth of universality. You can find her work in *The Rambling*, the Renaissance volume of Bloomsbury's *A Cultural History of Disability* series, Routledge's *Shakespeare's Audiences* collection, as well as performance reviews in *Cahiers Élisabéthains* and *Shakespeare Bulletin*.



Emily is currently the Connectivity Manager at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington D.C., where she primarily works on audience and community engagement initiatives and where she manages the Miranda Family Fellowship program.

Emily is a former stage manager, teaching artist, and dramaturg at Warehouse Theatre. Notable productions include *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Boeing, Boeing*, *Richard III*, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.