Midway through his 1584 *Discoverie of Witchcraft* Reginald Scot offers an interpretation of the Biblical story of the Witch of Endor raising Samuel from the dead at the request of the disguised King Saul. “What *really* happened at Endor?” Scot asks. The witch couldn’t have resurrected the real Samuel, because then patriarchs could be raised by every passing witch. Nor could she have merely used the devil to impersonate Samuel, because then prophets would never know whether prophecies came from God or the devil. Scot concludes that Saul, guilty and hungry, must have hallucinated the experience, and the witch must have been an expert actor able to simulate hallucinations. In this surprisingly modern reading of a Biblical story, Scot calls into question the reality of witchcraft and sets the terms of witchcraft debate for the next hundred years.

How do Renaissance plays explicitly concerned with magic and witchcraft, register the aftershocks of this debate? How do such debates explicitly engage ideas about theater and the period’s conceptions of theatricality? In what ways do texts centrally concerned with the prosecution of witches “speak to” plays about other kinds of cultural “others” (Jews, Moors, women)?

Using debates about the power of witches as a lens to read Shakespeare’s plays we will study of two or three of Shakespeare’s plays as well as their “intertexts” (sources and adaptations) Reading for this Seminar will include two of Shakespeare’s major plays in dialogue with sources, excerpts from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, selections from Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, King James’ *Daemonologie* and the anonymous *Newes From Scotland*) as well as adaptations of Shakespeare in other mediums such as Christopher Wheeldon’s new ballet of *The Winter’s Tale* and (time permitting) illustrations of Shakespeare by Fuseli. Students will be asked to read *The Winter’s Tale* at least once before the course begins.