Midterm Guidelines

Witchcraze & the End of the Middle Ages in Europe: Grimoires

After discussing your reading materials and the documentary (2017, BBC, *Harry Potter: A History of Magic ©*), consider the questions below and develop your answers carefully.

Tasks:

1. **Reading and discussion: Compare & Contrast**

   - **1300s:** Religious philosophers argued over the proper interpretation of the written text of the Bible. Those who found themselves on the wrong side of the debate were often burned for heresy. Heretic books and “magic” books (grimoires) were seen as threats to Christianity and the world order.

   - **1970s:** Philosophers of language argued that reality is created by text rather than the reverse. Jacques Derrida, the father of deconstruction, wrote that text is no more than the play of signifiers.

   - **Today:** Debate over the meaning (or lack of meaning) of language continues, although deconstruction has less influence in academic debates.

   - **1300s:** The Black Death raged across Europe, leading people to believe that it could be a punishment from God and a sign of the Apocalypse. Others viewed the chaos as a sign of the work of the “agents of the Devil”.

   - **1970s:** At the height of the cold war, the entire world feared nuclear holocaust and the post-Apocalyptic vision. Movies such as *Planet of the Apes* graphically provided images of such a future.

   - **Today:** While the ending of the cold war eases nuclear fears, the destruction of the World Trade Center Towers in 2001 raises renewed fears of destabilization and chaos at the hands of terrorists. Further, it raises fears of another worldwide plague precipitated by “terrorists”.

   - **1300s:** Scribes worked long hours copying manuscripts in the attempt to recover and preserve knowledge that was lost during the fall of the Roman Empire, but finally made its way back to Europe through the growing trade with the East.

   - **1970s:** Libraries and books existed worldwide and were easily accessible. Technology such as typewriters and copy machines, as well as radio and television, made information quickly and

---

1 Adapted from *Novels for Students: The Name of the Rose*. Cengage Learning, 2009.
readily available.

**Today:** The explosion of computer technology puts entire encyclopedias on one small USB. There is sometimes the experience of “information overload,” as well as the confidence that anything that needs to be known can be accessed on the Internet.

2. Review your reading materials and lectures’ notes about the significance of the written word, the “power” of books, belief in God and divine forces, the Devil, and magic, and the significance of grimoires. Considering these characteristics and elements of culture, make a list of examples you can identify in the BBC documentary *Harry Potter: A History of Magic*.

3. Think about **how those examples of lifestyle, faith, beliefs, and fears can be connected and compared to those in our present world**. Give clear examples and provide reasons for your answer. Use the comparative timeline examples provided above (1.) to develop your ideas.

4. Develop a conclusion expressing your views about the significance of **literacy** and the role of grimoires in the dissemination of the printed/written word during the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. How are these factors connected to the persecution of heretics and witches?

*This is your Midterm Assignment, so please be ready to discuss your views in class on January 12th, 2022. Make sure that you are citing your sources of information in the text and that you have a FULL list of resources ready to be submitted, in MLA or APA format.*

**Remember:** if you do not understand what you are explaining, other people will probably not understand it either, so please keep your answers simple and clear. Write your notes clearly, and provide good examples and justifications for your opinions and answers. Practice, practice, practice!