The Salem witch hunt of 1692–93, which claimed twenty lives directly and others indirectly, has been interpreted in markedly different ways. Even as they were taking place, ordinary and prominent citizens of Massachusetts disagreed on the types of evidence that should be admitted in court and on whether any of the accused were guilty. In recent decades, several interpretations that concentrate on the background to the charge of witchcraft have dominated public consciousness, university courses, and American historical treatments. These analyses differ considerably from each other.

Yet it is crucial to emphasize the political and judicial situation in Salem at the time of the trials, which occurred a relatively short time after the English Glorious Revolution of 1688, and to focus on standards of evidence accepted during the hunt. As we shall see, various social strains and fears undoubtedly contributed to the outbreak of the panic; nonetheless, the Salem trials represented a sharp break from earlier witchcraft cases tried in New England. The Salem events were never repeated; they were unique in the number accused, 185; tried, fifty-nine; and the twenty executed; they evoked major opposition from prominent Puritans as they unfolded; and leading figures involved in the trials, including a judge and the members of one jury, soon recanted and apologized for their actions. During the Salem outbreak, fifty-three residents of the neighboring town of Andover signed a petition in favor of five accused women, citing pressure from some in the community to confess to negligence of justice/miscarriage of the law. A witch hunt that might have become serious in Stamford, Connecticut Colony, in 1692 never developed momentum and ended with no executions.

The Salem witch persecution had its origins in the fall of 1691, as the minister of Salem Village, Samuel Parris, began to emphasize the presence of Satan in the world and as girls in his household began to have fits. The girls would lie rigid for hours or appear to be tormented by pain. A local doctor who examined the girls found them to be “under an evil hand.” Soon this diagnosis became entangled with stories that a slave in Parris’s household, Tituba, African by birth but brought to Massachusetts from the Caribbean, had told fortunes for several village girls. Then a helpful neighbor persuaded Tituba to bake a “witches’ cake” using some of the girls’ urine, which was then fed to a dog. That did not help matters. Soon other girls were also having...
fits, and several of the sufferers began to accuse adults in the village of causing their problems.

In late February, arrests began, at first, Tituba, and two white women. The accusations quickly led to the arrest of more adults and a 4-year-old girl, Dorcas Good, on March 23. On May 14, a new governor, William Phips, arrived in Boston from England. To try to resolve the witch problem, he appointed a special if relatively common court, of Oyer and Terminer. This phrase derived from the English affection for French legalese; the court was to hear and determine cases. Phips as well as the justices he appointed appeared to assume guilt in advance; in his directive to the new panel, he remarked that “there are many criminal offenders now in custody.”

The governor did not supervise the new court, as he had to leave almost immediately to lead the English fight against Indians in Maine.

The first guilty verdict and hanging came in June. The last execution occurred in September. It is not clear that anyone was tortured in Salem, although John Proctor, hanged as a witch in August 1692, wrote while in prison to members of the Boston clergy that several young men had been tied “neck and heels,” with their heads pulled tightly down to their feet, to get them to confess. Of course, being held in a foul prison was itself an ordeal. After Dorcas Good was released in early 1693, she remained mentally disturbed for the rest of her life.

Altogether nineteen people were executed as witches, while one, Giles Cory, was pressed to death under heavy stones. He had refused to enter a plea, probably because if convicted, his property would not pass to his heirs. Therefore, the court applied the principle of peine forte et dure, literally strong and hard pain, in a fruitless attempt to extract a plea. Of the twenty put to death, fifteen were women. The resulting 70 percent female proportion is close to the one usually cited for European witch hunts – 75–80 percent – although there are some instances of males predominating among the accused.

Opposition to the kinds of evidence admitted in the Oyer and Terminer Court arose almost with the first execution. A group of ministers, among them the prominent writer Cotton Mather, about whom more will be said, quickly questioned the court’s activities. Much had already been made of the testimony by the girls involved that the “spectre” of a defendant had attacked them. Several witnesses testified that it was the “shape” of Bridget Bishop, the first to be hanged, that pinched and tormented them, even though Bishop in the flesh was elsewhere at the time. In response to such “proof,” the ministers announced on June 15 that spectral evidence or “Alterations made in the Sufferers, by a Look or Touch of the Accused” could not be considered “infallible Evidence of Guilt.” Despite their dislike of such testimony, admitted in Salem and the decisive factor in a number of convictions, the ministers hedged by calling for the “speedy and vigorous prosecution of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious.”

Part of their reluctance to completely condemn the Oyer court’s activities stemmed from the fact that belief in witches – a huge topic that cannot be discussed here – was common among white residents of Massachusetts no matter what their level of education or social standing. Another difficulty in assessing the trials was that the damage supposedly inflicted by witches extended far beyond pinching or scratching. Here the fear of witches intersected with personal tragedies. In a particularly poignant example, Ann Putnam Sr., mother of the afflicted girl Ann Jr., had just lost a
six-week-old child. The mother now found an explanation for an event that had previously been unfathomable, even in seventeenth-century New England. Ann Sr. then also testified that specters of the accused were tormenting her. Livestock, apparently healthy one day and dead the next, could also be marked down as witches’ victims. Given the day’s knowledge of the physical world, witchcraft was a rational explanation for otherwise mysterious events. Even in societies today that embrace science in certain ways, witchcraft can be seen as quite real and dangerous.

In the Salem trials, the antics of the afflicted girls and the flimsiness of the evidence presented in court soon bothered another influential minister, Samuel Willard of Boston. He preached caution to his congregation. In late September, he defied the governor’s order not to write about the trials and published, under a pseudonym, a strong critique of the proceedings. Conviction by mere suspicion, he said, was “contrary to the mind of God . . . besides, reason tells us, that the more horrid the crime is, the more cautious we ought to be in making any guilty of it.” The judges did not have matters of fact “evidently done and clearly proved.”

In a letter to a member of the governor’s council dated August 17, Cotton Mather appeared to agree, though far from completely. Spectral evidence alone is not enough to convict, he declared, but it should be used as presumptive evidence which would lead the court to investigate further. Mather suggested that the devil might impersonate good persons, perhaps even himself. He hinted at the possibility that innocent people may have been convicted; if so, they should be reprieved. But he also endorsed the judges’ “great work” thus far. Two days later he appeared at the Salem gallows and urged the spectators to approve the hanging of George Burroughs. Standing with a noose around his neck, Burroughs had caused a sensation by reciting the Lord’s Prayer correctly, something a disciple of the devil was supposed to be unable to do. Mather nevertheless persuaded the crowd to let the execution proceed. By this time he was mired in profound contradictions about the evidence against the accused.

In October 1692, Mather published The Wonders of the Invisible World. Drawing on a book by the Englishman William Perkins, Mather listed a number of “presumptions” that should spark an investigation of witchcraft. These included notoriety as a witch and the death of someone following cursing by the suspect. Yet these were not “just and sufficient proofs.” A confession would be enough to convict, but it had to follow “due Examination.” Mather maintained that “sufficient” testimony for a guilty verdict would also be two witnesses who said they had seen a defendant make a pact with the devil; here he had arrived at the European continental standard for conviction. But he continued: proof could also be that the witch had a “familiar spirit,” usually a small animal that was in fact a demon assigned by the devil for the comfort and aid of the witch. Mather says nothing about how a court could be certain that an animal was more than it appeared to be. Finally, witnesses might state that a suspect carried out an act, a “wonder,” that could occur only with the help of witchcraft, for example raising a storm. “Wonder” in the lexicon of the day was opposed to miracles, which God arranged. Again, Mather does not make clear how the court was to determine that the witch had actually caused a disruption in the course of the universe. His book also ignores the question of spectral evidence.

Cotton Mather’s father, Increase, the most prominent minister in Massachusetts and president of Harvard College, had already begun to intervene in the whole affair,
in a different direction than his son took. Cotton Mather delivered a sermon on
witchcraft in early October to a group of ministers gathered in Boston especially to
hear him, then quickly published a book on the subject.\textsuperscript{10} The elder Mather followed
his son’s lead in one way, by asserting that the devil could appear in the shape of an
innocent and pious person as well as in the form of the wicked. However, Increase
pressed the point, which alone undermined much of the testimony accepted by the
Oyer and Terminer Court. After all, the devil might assume the guise of an honest
person and give testimony to destroy an upright resident. Noting that “the Devils
have of late accused some eminent Persons,” Increase Mather found that the testi-
mony of “possessed” people should not be taken as proof of witchcraft, for then
“no Person whatsoever can be in safety.” What the bewitched claim has happened to
other people “is not to be taken as evidence.” Scripture gives not the “least Intima-
tion” that it is proof of a diabolical connection when a possessed person falls into a
fit under the glance of another individual.\textsuperscript{11}

In stressing the position that no one could be safe from the accusation of witch-
craft, and by extension that it was impossible to identify anyone as a witch, Cotton
Mather had discovered the dilemma of witch finders everywhere. As H. C. Erik Midel-
fort wrote in his study of southwestern Germany, “witch hunters stopped because
they no longer knew how to find witches.”\textsuperscript{12} It would be even better to say that others,
or the community in question as a whole, stopped the witch finders; left to them-
selves, they seemed to have no notion of when to halt.

Increase Mather concluded that “the Evidence in this Crime ought to be as clear”
as for any other capital offense. “The Oath of a distracted . . . or of a possessed Per-
son” was not accepted in accusations of murder, theft, and so forth and therefore
could not be accepted regarding witchcraft. Finally, “it were better that ten suspected
witches should escape, than that one innocent Person should be Condemned.”\textsuperscript{13}
This was the strong voice of skepticism not regarding the existence of witches, but
about evidence that they had committed evil deeds. It was also a suggestion that
innocent people had suffered.

The elder Mather was trying to allay the sense of panic about witches that had
enveloped the court and much of the community. In a statement entitled “The
Christian Reader” that prefaced his book, fourteen ministers added their view that
“the more execrable the Crime is, the more critical care is to be used” in judging
it.\textsuperscript{14} Together, the men holding these views comprised a strong anti-persecution
party in Massachusetts, which had developed in reaction to the witch hunt. In
that same month of October 1692, they asked Governor Phips to halt the trials.
Although he allowed another special court to convene briefly in early 1693, no
more executions took place. In May, Phips pardoned and released the remaining
prisoners.

For the ministers who spoke out in the fall of 1692, who were the intellectual and
spiritual leaders of the Puritan community, the question of guilt or innocence turned
on the kinds of evidence brought to court. In Salem, the usual standards of evidence
in New England courts had been abandoned for a time, due to a strong sense that
a conspiracy by evil forces against the good people was at work. Yet that sense could
not have prevailed if the colony’s regular political and judicial system had been in
place. That feeling quickly passed, too late for the twenty dead and the dozens more
who suffered grievously.
The members of one Salem jury which had found people guilty of witchcraft in 1692 reconsidered their judgments less than a year later. Using a heavily loaded phrase to begin, “We confess,” the jurymen wrote,

“that we ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the powers of darkness, and prince of the air; but were, for want of knowledge in ourselves, and better information from others, prevailed with to take up with such evidence against the accused, as, on further consideration and better information, we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the lives of any.”

Samuel Parris met with Salem villagers in November 1694 and admitted that in 1692 he had “believed where he should have doubted.” The General Court of Massachusetts ordered a day of fasting in 1697 to acknowledge the tragedy that had occurred at Salem. One of the judges of the Oyer and Terminer Court, Samuel Sewall, then gave his minister, Samuel Willard, a confession of sin in 1692. Willard read the document to his congregation in Boston as Sewall stood silently weeping by a pew. Sewall wrote of himself that “he is, upon many accounts, more concerned than any that he knows of” [ . . . ] “Desires to take the Blame and Shame of it,” “Asking pardon of men.”

Cotton Mather never apologized or did much more than continue to waffle about evidence used to convict witches. But in regard to witchcraft, he stayed away from direct accusations and courts.

The misuse of evidence in Salem is thrown into further perspective by the outcome of another witch scare in the area in 1692. But this affair was a matter of “escaping Salem,” as Richard Godbeer put it. The trouble broke out in Stamford, Connecticut, and was obviously influenced by events in Salem. A 17-year-old servant, Katherine Branch, began to have fits in April 1692 that resembled the ones afflicting girls in Salem. Following Massachusetts’ practice, the Connecticut Colony’s representative assembly created an Oyer and Terminer Court in June. Included on this panel were the governor and deputy governor of the colony. In September, the court set three accused women free while continuing to detain two others. Seventy-six townspeople had signed a petition attesting to the good character of one of the freed women. The two still in jail had been tested by “swimming” in June, on the folk theory that pure water would reject a witch; she would float. These two suspects had stayed on the water’s surface, and so they remained in custody.

At this point, Connecticut’s deputy governor, William Jones, examined the available literature on witchcraft cases and especially on tests of guilt. He found warnings that there must be “good and sufficient proofs” in any witchcraft trial. Meanwhile, Connecticut ministers announced their opinion that swimming a witch was illegal and sinful. A jury deliberating in late October found one woman guilty; her conviction was then overturned by a panel of three magistrates. No one was executed.

Thus, whatever broad patterns or attitudes troubled Puritans in the late seventeenth century, it was the particular set of circumstances in 1692 that facilitated the successful explosion of folk belief in Satan and witchcraft in one court of law. Prior to that year, witchcraft cases in New England usually involved only one or two defendants. Most accusations did not lead to a trial; those that did typically ended in acquittal, just as the Connecticut cases of 1692 did. Juries were usually reluctant to convict
for witchcraft in the first place. If the initial panels returned a guilty verdict, magistrates who reviewed witch convictions on appeal often exercised their right to overturn the decision. Prior to the Salem outbreak, there were ninety-three defendants altogether in witch cases in New England; only sixteen of those were executed. Even a woman who admitted to practicing witchcraft in Boston in 1652 was acquitted of the charge, only to be found guilty of infanticide and hanged. No death sentences for witchcraft had been handed down in the region since 1663 except for a case in Boston in 1688, personally managed by Cotton Mather.

In short, the higher a case went in the New England judiciary before 1692, the less likely it was to result in a conviction. This pattern reflects developments regarding witchcraft cases in Western Europe; after roughly 1630, and earlier in England, the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy, among other regions, the elite ceased to accept the charge of witchcraft as a triable offense. In England, for example, after King James I personally intervened to bring a witch panic to a halt in 1616, executions for witchcraft became rare in his realm. It was only during the height of the English Civil War, 1645–46, that the breakdown of the regular courts and chaos in the political system allowed a witch panic to develop in a part of Essex. Probably more than 100 people were executed, on the basis of particularly specious “evidence” collected by gentlemen with no official status. The leader of the hunt was Matthew Hopkins, who declared himself “Witchfinder General.” Suspects were tried in local courts, but the assize (circuit) courts did not operate in the early stages of the pursuit.

Hopkins and his associates used methods of interrogation already in disfavor in English courts, among them sleep deprivation, starving his prisoners, and probing their bodies with needles to find a “witches’ mark,” a place where the devil had supposedly touched a new recruit and where the person would not feel pain. That is, Hopkins tortured his victims. When the assize justices in Norfolk heard objections to such methods, they sent a sharp inquiry to Hopkins. Apparently he never replied; in any event, the magistrates forbade most of his practices. During 1646, the hunt came to an end, and Hopkins soon died of tuberculosis.

In key respects, the events in Salem of 1692–93 mimicked the story of Essex almost five decades earlier. And while Cotton Mather was no torturer, he followed Matthew Hopkins’ lead in maintaining that Satan was hard at work in Massachusetts and that his minions, people who had pledged their lives and souls to him, were causing deaths as well as discernible harm to the living.

Mather was one of those European and American figures of the seventeenth century who simultaneously believed in something called science, which entailed conducting experiments and achieving verifiable results, and in the power of darkness, which could not be seen or tested but whose effects appeared to some to be quite real. In this dualism he was hardly alone, at the time or even to the present day. Mather carried out scientific experiments and collected the latest equipment for research at the same time that he argued Satan had supernatural abilities. In considering witches, Swedish cases, not the problems and the end of the Essex hunt, influenced Mather. His father, Increase, spent the years 1689–92 in London. He returned to Massachusetts as the talk of witchcraft was gaining strength. Increase and Cotton both knew of a large hunt around Mora, Sweden, in 1668–76. Cotton discussed the Swedish events with approval in his Wonders of the Invisible World, the book he published in Boston in October 1692. He was certain that at Mora “the Devils, by the
help of Witches,” had drawn “hundreds” of children into an evil plot to harm their neighbors. Convictions in the hunt were based largely on testimony by children, who claimed that they had been transported to witches’ Sabbaths by women. Both Mathers must have known that the Swedish trials ended with the freeing of many prisoners, after royal commissioners dispatched from Stockholm expressed skepticism about the evidence used to obtain convictions and officials in the capital finally had a chance to examine both the “proof” used at Mora and long-standing criticisms of it. Children now began to confess that they had made up their stories, and a 13-year-old boy regarded as a ringleader for others who had testified was executed. But Cotton Mather did not mention that outcome to his readers.

The kinds of evidence admitted in the Salem cases, especially on specters, were disallowed in other New England cases. Nor were young girls, some not yet even teenagers, typically accepted as credible witnesses during the seventeenth century in courts based on English law. In Salem, a panic seized people and officials alike, leading them to suspend — for a fairly short time — the legal and evidentiary standards to which they had previously held. In this regard, the Salem events resemble other mass persecutions, for instance the Soviet “Great Terror” of 1936–37.

One prominent interpretation of the Salem hunt argues that the Puritans of the area found it convenient to remove social deviants by labeling them “witches” and prosecuting them. A second view is that the patriarchal, God- and devil-fearing Puritan society held largely negative views of women and was inclined to charge them with witchcraft when people were afflicted in mysterious ways. Females whose legal situation as widows or daughters blocked men from receiving an inheritance, or who had demonstrated their contentiousness in quarrels or court cases, were especially likely to be identified in Salem as the devil’s helpers, this second argument continues. A third study maintains that the major source of witchcraft charges was a long-simmering dispute between people in Salem Town, which was fast becoming a commercial port, and Salem Village, a farming community nearby. The hostility between these two different economic communities worsened as people from both were divided over a recently arrived minister, Samuel Parris, who began to preach in Salem Village in late 1689. A fourth, relatively new interpretation emphasizes the emotional state of girls in Salem who had recently arrived as refugees from Maine, where particularly bloody attacks by Indians had just occurred. The Indians, “wicked cannibals” to white settlers, were linked in the Puritans’ minds to the devil. Without the Indian war in Maine, this view continues, there would have been no witch crisis in Salem.

In considering these analyses, it should be noted first that no direct evidence for any of them exists. No record is available, nor is there any suggestion in the surviving documents from Salem, that prominent males used the charge of witchcraft to persecute women they detested for other reasons. Indeed, nowhere in the substantial body of materials from European witch hunts has any such clear indication of a false pretext for persecution emerged. The idea that killing suspected witches had to do with state building seems equally unfounded, while in various hunts it was the central authorities who brought them to an end, as happened in Sweden.

Much published work on the Salem trials has, or should have, ended in a blind alley, unable to say why there were not many more convictions for witchcraft in colonial New England. After all, Puritan attitudes toward women did not change for decades before and after 1692. Indian attacks had been much worse in the 1670s, and they continued...
to be a problem for whites along the frontier. Why fear of Indians would have been translated by young girls into accusations against whites in Salem must remain a puzzle. Commercial capitalism arrived slowly, and available land for inheritance continued to decrease. Nor, by the way, can the end of the hunts be attributed to the arrival of the “Scientific Revolution,” itself a slow process that was well under way before 1692.

Mass persecutions discussed as events in which officials say they are pursuing one kind of enemy, but in fact have another goal in mind, rely on functional theory, whether the authors refer to it or not. The concept of “functions” is multilayered. In theory, they may be “manifest,” goals readily evident in words or deeds, or they may be “latent.” In the latter case, even those carrying out persecution may supposedly be unaware of the deeper or true purpose of their actions. But that idea, based originally on Freud’s notion of the unconscious, opens the door to pure speculation.

The theory of functionality has in any event encountered strong criticism in its home field. While introductory sociology texts still advance ideas of the 1940s and ’50s on manifest and latent functions, rarely are the “concepts themselves employed in the research context.” Vague and unprovable, they have not “found a home in [recent] sociological theory.” For some time now, sociologists have tied “function” to consequences, intended or otherwise, or to both intentions and results. Studying an event’s consequences is merely another way of saying the event requires analysis. Yet another problem plagues functional theory; it is unable “to cope with change,” wrote the noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Indeed, this is one of the key difficulties in trying to ascribe the Salem hunts to any strain of thought or activity not directly mentioned in the accusations: they rose and fell quickly, from the autumn of 1691 to early 1693. We are led once more to look closely at the events and immediate context of that period.

Panic about enemies within the good society, fed by ministers like Parris and Cotton Mather, erupted for a time in Salem in 1692. Disruption in the political and legal system, especially the absence of a governor as the fear spread, the lack of a charter for Massachusetts Colony in the early stages of the hunt, the attitudes and preoccupations of the new governor upon his arrival, and the lack of a steadier hand in the form of a functioning superior court, allowed the panic to result in the conviction of nineteen people, and the death of Giles Cory, for crimes they could not possibly have committed. The community recovered and, we might say, regained its bearings and its usual attitudes toward what constituted good evidence, during the fall of 1692. The whole episode lasted less than a year. Upon reflection, several leading figures in the persecutions recanted, rejected their earlier pro-persecution stances, and apologized with shame.

Considering these points, it was above all the problem of evidence during a panic, not any broader streams of thought or economic development that produced the Salem hunts. To be sure, Indian attacks in Maine, negative attitudes toward women, and other problems endemic to Massachusetts sharpened suspicion that Satan was on the scene. Yet in a more stable context, these themes would not have led to a large witch hunt, just as they had not in the past and would not in the future. Finally, the Salem events of 1692 should be seen in a European context, or more precisely as an extension of many of the worst practices of witch hunting on the European continent. Salem was an outpost of Europe, albeit one faced with particular dangers. It would be appropriate to shift the focus of thinking about the Salem hunts to questions of evidence and to regarding the persecution as an extension of witch fear across the Atlantic.
Notes

3 Quoted in John Demos, The Enemy Within: 2,000 Years of Witch hunting in the Western World (New York: Viking, 2008), 159.
5 Chadwick Hansen, Witchcraft at Salem (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 133. And see Reis, Damned Women, 158–160.
6 “The Return of several Ministers consulted by his Excellency [Governor Phips], and the Honourable Council, upon the present Witchcrafts in Salem Village,” Boston, June 15, 1692. Published as a postscript to Increase Mather, Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men; Witchcrafts, Infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as Are Accused With that Crime (London: John Dunton, 1693). Originally Boston, 1693.
8 Hansen, Witchcraft at Salem, 141–143.
10 This was his Cases of Conscience.
11 Mather, Cases of Conscience, 283.
13 Mather, Cases of Conscience, 283.
16 Hoffer, The Salem Witchcraft Trials, 141, 144.
17 Godbeer, Escaping Salem. The following section on Connecticut is based on this book.
22 Mather, Wonders of the Invisible World. Bold type was used in the book where Mather wished to emphasize similarities between the Swedish and Salem cases.
24 I have addressed this issue in my Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia, 1934–1941 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).


30 See Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, revised and enlarged ed. (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957). Merton, a sociologist, began to develop functional theory in the late 1940s. He adapted the term function from biology, where it refers to "vital or organic processes" that "contribute to the maintenance of the organism." The words "vital" and "organic" suggest that a living creature, or a society, cannot live without certain processes. Immediately a problem arises in applying these ideas to witch hunts: life in Massachusetts and Western Europe proceeded without much persecution of suspected witches, or without any at all, in many places. This was so even in the periods of most intense hunting in certain areas, during the years 1580–90 and 1620–30. The waters are muddied further by attaching the adjectives "manifest" and "latent" to function, which Merton did in 1949. He adapted those modifiers "from their use in another context by Freud," although earlier thinkers had also found "latent" helpful to discuss processes "below the threshold of superficial observation." Merton declared that *manifest* functions are "consequences . . . which are intended and recognized by participants in the system." Naturally, *latent* functions are "neither intended nor recognized." That is, anyone involved somehow in enacting latent social functions does not see or think about them. So how do people trying much later to unravel the past know that function was involved in an act? Freud used "latent" when he felt he had some direct evidence of hidden intent or motivation, obtained especially through patients' dreams. Merton relied instead on what could be called commonsense observation.


32 Merton himself had several warnings for anyone drawing on his work. He thought that writers who endorse functionality might use his theories too quickly and fail to see more applicable “alternative modes of action.” There was no need to argue that “all culture items fulfill vital functions.” In other words, a social practice might not be functional at all, and it certainly might not bear latent functions within it. He added that “functional social scientists run the risk of erring in the other extreme, first, by being quick to find functional or adaptive value in societies that are not their own — which he called ‘strange’ or ‘primitive,’” *Social Theory*, 21, 51, 61, and 73.


**Bibliography (selection)**


