

collection of exemplary essay questions to help the history teacher consider how these might be woven into the curriculum.

A Summary of the Series

The history teacher has long been drawn to consider the perils and prospects for using video footage in the classroom. While there are many books available that provide general insight into the use of these sources, the authors in this series make a valuable contribution to placing video in its proper context. In each volume of the series, history educators are equipped with a knowledge-base to consider the genre of film more specifically and its implications for inclusion in the classroom. The series is limited in its unavoidable emphasis of twentieth century subject matter in a discipline that extends centuries. And it is also challenging in that the “how this works” aspect of integration, while still respecting students’ cognitive load, is not fully articulated. These limitations aside, the series provides a unique and engaging collection that makes for a good addition to any history educator’s library.

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Erika Gasser. *Vexed with Devils: Manhood and Witchcraft in Old and New England*. New York: New York University Press, 2017. Pp. 272. \$35.00.

Erika Gasser’s *Vexed with Devils* is part of an abundantly rich scholarship on possession and witchcraft in Western Europe and the colonial U.S. during the early modern period. This field, which flourished in the 1980s and produced such classic studies as Brian Levack’s *The Witchhunt in Early Modern Europe* (1987) and Carol Karlsen’s *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987), has experienced a recent resurgence. Estimates of the numbers of victims in the period between 1450 and 1750 vary widely, from

fifty to one hundred thousand people and even into the millions, but specialists agree that eighty to ninety percent of those accused of practicing witchcraft were women. Although contemporaries were concerned that victims might be faking their symptoms or suffering from illness, they attributed true possessions to the power of the Devil, or to multiple demons, to take control of bodies and minds—a belief that was fully consonant with early modern Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant theologies. By contrast, modern scholarship examines these phenomena for insights into social relationships and religious and political conflict, arguing, for example, that the possessed were sincere performers in religious dramas and were following powerful “cultural scripts.” This is the approach that informs Gasser’s study which explores how “early modern peoples used gendered language in ways that tracked the vicissitudes of power” and concludes that cultural scripts that originated in England during the late 1500s were still being performed a century later in colonial New England (12).

The first half of the book analyzes English publications reporting on the symptoms, treatments, and accusations of female demoniacs: Margaret Cooper (1584, 1614, 1641), seventeen-year old Mary Glover (1603), and the very young Throckmorton daughters, whose accusations led to the execution of the Samuel family (wife, husband and daughter) in Warboys (1589-1593). Gasser then examines the “propaganda war” between the Anglican chaplain Samuel Harsnett and the Puritan minister John Darrell that took place between 1599 and 1603 over the dispossessions performed by Darrell. For colonial New England, Gasser selects two Salem/Essex County cases from 1692-1693, a year in which hundreds of people were accused of witchcraft and twenty were put to death. *Vexed with Devils* examines the trial against thirty-nine-year-old Reverend George Burroughs, which resulted in his execution in August 1692, and the possession of seventeen-year-old Margaret Rule, the subject of a years-long exchange (1693-

1700) between Cotton Mather and Robert Calef, recalling the propaganda wars between Harsnett and Darrell a century earlier.

This study relies on intricate textual analysis and a central theoretical claim: that while published accounts did not necessarily focus on the sex of the possessed per se, nonetheless the endeavor to determine whether a possession was real or fraudulent required the articulation of gendered understandings and thus reveal how religious and medical explanations enmeshed with political conflicts. As an example, Gasser mentions the instance of Edward Jordan's treatment of Mary Glover, explaining that his conclusion that her symptoms originated in hysteria, rather than the preternatural realm, "resonated for more than a century because of the way it factored in battles between Anglicans and Puritans" (27). And according to Gasser, Burroughs' accusers did not need to feminize him to get a conviction, only "unmake" him, which entailed representing his manhood as excessive rather than deficient (115), as "[Cotton] Mather and his peers also clearly realized that ...[the] survival [of the colony] depended upon the triumph of patriarchal hierarchy over upstarts who sought greater authority for themselves in turbulent times" (11).

Gasser's recounting of the cases, particularly the Throckmorton possessions, are beautifully rendered and compelling, but the book's methodology and analytical density are unlikely to appeal to general readers. There are many other, more accessible books that would be better suited to introducing students to this fascinating subject.

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