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*Vexed with Devils: Manhood and Witchcraft in Old and New England* by Erika Gasser (review)

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outside church approval and often risk legal and extra-legal church action. These and other topics might also serve to humanize Scientology and Scientologists beyond the usual discussions about celebrity and ecclesiastical stakeholders.

As this new religion continues to evolve in the twenty-first century, researchers and students would do well to consult Kent and Raine's anthology and other recent scholarship to piece together the diversity and complexity of Scientology.

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*Vexed with Devils: Manhood and Witchcraft in Old and New England.* By Erika Gasser. New York University Press, 2017. 272 pages. \$35.00 cloth; ebook available.

Most people accused of witchcraft in the transatlantic Anglophone world of the seventeenth century were women, but as Erika Gasser argues in *Vexed with Devils*, "to restrict witchcraft-possession analytically to 'something female' obscures some of the ways these cases functioned" (174). Her book therefore examines the role played by men and notions of masculinity in seventeenth-century culture.

Witchcraft accusers were powerful men from the ranks of the educated elite: ministers, magistrates, and businessmen. They reflected deeply-rooted notions about masculinity both in England and New England. Ideally, men had credit, meaning they were reliable and trustworthy. Without good credit, a man was vulnerable to many charges, including witchcraft. Manliness also conveyed a sense of strength, both physical and intellectual. A strong man was capable of supporting his family economically. More importantly for witchcraft accusations, a strong man was rational, in contrast to women, understood to be hysterical by nature, and thus mentally weak and more susceptible to the temptations of Satan than men. As many studies have shown, women accused of witchcraft were often on the margins of social acceptability: widows, teenage girls, and others with little economic power or agency. When accused, these females temporarily enjoyed power to influence men in their communities. In particular, they could persuade their accusers that certain men in their midst were consorting with the Devil. But eventually patriarchy won: powerful men made witchcraft charges stick, and many accused women, and some men, were executed.

To uncover these pervasive gender dynamics, Gasser analyzes key documents from witchcraft cases on both sides of the Atlantic. They include published sermons, court testimony, pamphlets, and books. Some were written by well-known figures of this time period, like

Cotton Mather, or involved witchcraft episodes that today's reading public would recognize, such as those in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. But most deal with individuals largely unknown to the casual student of witchcraft possession. Gasser's reading of these texts is close, careful, and extensive. In fact, her book needs a companion volume, containing lengthy excerpts from these documents.

I would not recommend this book for an undergraduate course, but it is ideally suited for graduate students interested in delineating the contours of witchcraft studies. Gasser's contribution to this scholarship is noteworthy. She provides a corrective to the direction that many previous studies took—investigating mostly women, perhaps even women only—and failing to appreciate the attitudes about manhood that affected the outcomes of so many witchcraft cases. Gasser isn't the first to point out that by 1700, the older theological paradigms about witchcraft were challenged by a budding scientific worldview regarding supernatural phenomena. Men like Thomas Brattle, though devout, published skeptical assessments of witchcraft. Gasser argues that these male writers—whether a skeptic or a committed champion of supernaturalism, like Mather—relied upon masculine conventions to score points against their opponents in these debates.

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*Legalizing Plural Marriage: The Next Frontier in Family Law.* By Mark Goldfeder. Brandeis University Press, 2017. xiv + 257 pages. \$40.00 paper; ebook available.

The United States is “in the midst of a family law revolution” (1). Mark Goldfeder's book claims that, in its wake, Americans must consider legalizing plural marriage alongside other forms of polyamorous family structure. This book will interest readers interested in the politics of marriage in the United States. Goldfeder's argument is sophisticated but accessible, if also a bit dry. It begins by articulating what makes marriage special. While marriage gives participants access to a number of practical personal and legal benefits, it also entails less tangible elements at the core of its meaning: it is the means by which individuals define themselves by their commitments to other people as part of a shared entity that is socially recognizable to just about everyone they encounter. Goldfeder claims that legalizing plural marriage extends these marital benefits, making them “more fair, equitable, and available for all” (17).

Many Americans already participate in what Goldfeder calls “de facto polygamy” through divorce and remarriage, infidelity, serial monogamy, non-marital sex with multiple partners, extra-legal committed plural