

reached England. In fact, one portrait in the series, that of Peter Martyr Vermigli, hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

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Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany. By **Jonathan B. Durrant.** Brill Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Traditions: History, Culture, Religion, Ideas. Leiden: Brill, 2007. xxx + 289 pp. \$129.00 cloth.

One picks up a book on early modern witchcraft ready to hear the screams and groans of the accused, to envision the hypocritical hand-wringing of the perfidious churchmen, to feel the revulsion of demonic orgies, to smell the smoke from the pyres. With Durrant's monograph, one gets instead numbers and mundane statistics. This is good.

For in his introduction Durrant makes the point (embarrassingly obvious, but too often ignored) that most studies of witch trials focus on a single, well-documented case or a handful of cases and then allow or encourage generalizations about witch crazes, while the actual overall picture goes unexplored.

Previous studies of witchcraft in early modern Europe have drawn the following, by now familiar, picture: accused witches are older women, marginalized from the centers of social and political power, dangerous because of their mature knowledge (perhaps of medicines or "good magic," perhaps of life in general), vulnerable because they have offended somebody in power and lack protectors. Witch trials happen in a frenzy of accusations, they provide an outlet for a community under social, cultural, or economic stress (social dislocation, religious reforms and pressures of Protestantism, famines and economic dislocation). They flare up and then just as suddenly die down; at their inflamed peak they preoccupy the church and bring to bear the concentrated weight of its juridical powers. Landmark books in constructing this picture include Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971), Brian Levack's *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe* (2nd ed., London: Longman, 1995), and Robin Briggs's *Witches and Neighbours* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), all of which are still worth reading. However, Durrant's evidence discounts all of these assumed truths.

As Durrant also plainly points out, smaller witch trials that produced coherent and detailed narratives lead to a "fairly straightforward exercise to

locate the conflicts which produced the accusations and identify the agenda of the local hostile authority ... [after which] the panic tended to dissipate providing a very clear end to the story" (xvi). In other words, we historians as readers have fallen for the easy and sensational story at the expense of the accurate one.

To right the record, then: Durrant draws on trial documents of approximately 250 accused witches over four decades (1590–1631). Witchcraft investigations occurred primarily in four of the nineteen districts of Eichstätt (but not in the other fifteen). The witch trials are a small percentage of trials conducted by the Church during this same time and region; far more Church trials targeted recusants or heretics; far more civil trials of marginal groups targeted gypsies or vagrants. The great majority of witches interrogated in his study were not arrested or accused by their neighbors, nor convicted by testimony of others (their supposed victims). They were denounced by other accused witches under torture and convicted based on their own confessions under torture. "The local inhabitants of Eichstätt rarely brought accusations of witchcraft [and] they also refused the role of witnesses against their suspected neighbours. Very few witnesses were brought before the witch commissioners ... and those who did appear before them invariably failed to corroborate the suspects' narratives" (xviii). The local population did not feed the panic but rather sought to support their friends and neighbors with frequent messages and gifts to the accused in jail, reinforcing and demonstrating that the accused were well integrated into kin and community networks.

On the question of gender, Durrant's evidence is in line with previous studies, showing that 88 percent of the people arrested for witchcraft were female. But 70 percent of the accomplices named by the witches were male, raising a different question: why did the investigators diligently record the accusations against men but arrest primarily women?

So what made the witch trials run (and keep running for decades)? One impetus was the desire of the Church to bring people back within the fold of orthodox Catholicism. Authorities may also have wanted simply to police common behavior that did not comply with the desired norms, and much of this behavior centered on gender and sexual relations—the services of older women in bringing together unwed lovers, for example, or in hiding a resulting unexpected pregnancy.

Finally, Durrant reveals to us some of what happened to the accused witches during their time, as it were, "off stage," when they were not being interrogated and on the record, but simply sitting in jail. Seeking to get to the bottom of an alleged pregnancy, the court officials uncomfortably uncovered corruption among the petty officials of the town jail and collusion with the accused allies outside the jail. The line between the righteous arm of the law and the guilty women of the town was besmirched.

As can be seen from this review, most of Durrant's argument is summarized in his well-written introduction. The body of the book, close to the sources, gives the voluminous details to back him up and, admittedly, it is not quite the page-turner that, say, Aldous Huxley's classic thriller *The Devils of Loudun* (1969) is. But he has taught us an important lesson: "In presenting witchcraft episodes . . . historians have merely read the court records in the way that accusers, judges, theologians and pamphleteers wanted them to be read. Accusers wanted justice, judges wanted clear convictions, theologians wanted to eradicate a heretical sect, and pamphleteers wanted to sell stories which resonated in the marketplace" (xxiii).

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Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture.

Edited by **David Loewenstein** and **John Marshall**. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2007. x + 322 pp. \$96.00 cloth.

Reading the essays in this rich collection leads one to conclude that the idea of heresy may well be the single most useful point of entry into the two tumultuous centuries of religious change addressed in this volume. The editors do not offer quite so sweeping a claim in their introduction, and yet the cumulative weight of one meticulously documented essay after another shows how fruitful a close examination of heresy can be. The creation of heresy, inasmuch as it involves defining what is permissible and what is not, obviously invites consideration of the establishment and maintenance of political authority. However, the dozen authors represented here, a mixture of historians and literary scholars, move beyond the political mechanisms of heresy to investigate hermeneutical strategies, theological controversies, gender concerns, theories of belief, modes of literary representation, theories of the state, and more. In sum, the editors have assembled a collection that provides a useful entrée into the study of religion in early modern England.

As is the case with most essay collections, there is no single argument that unites these methodologically and chronologically diverse pieces, though Loewenstein and Marshall offer that they "are interconnected by their concern with the complex and often unstable understanding of 'heresy' during the periods of religious change and upheaval in early modern England" (3). This instability is much on display as Peter Lake revisits some