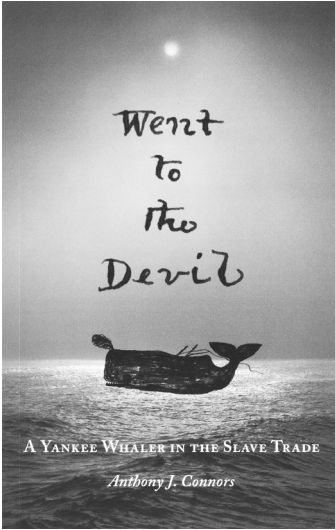


BOOK REVIEWS

***Went to the Devil: A Yankee Whaler in the Slave Trade.* By Anthony J. Connors. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019. 204 pages. \$22.95 (paperback).**



The phrase “Went to the Devil” appears in the log of the schooner *Palmyra*. Captain Edward Davoll and the men had harpooned a large whale, but they lost it. Davoll subsequently added the caption in the log next to a whale stamp. The phrase might also apply to Davoll himself, a New Bedford whaling captain who became entangled in the slave trade. Davoll, Anthony J. Connors explains, played a crucial role in “fitting out the *Brutus* to look like a legitimate whaler to deceive the port authorities and the federal revenue cutter patrolling” (1). *Went to the Devil: A Yankee Whaler in the Slave Trade* explores how Davoll, “a devoted family man, just thirty-eight years old, with nine whaling

voyages to his credit, would risk his career and his freedom to engage in the loathsome and illegal slave trade” (2). The volume is thus simultaneously a story about one individual and about the slave trade during the late 1850s and early 1860s.

Edward Davoll was born on September 21, 1822, in Westport, Massachusetts. Little information exists about Davoll’s schooling or what he did between the time he finished school and began his maritime career. Davoll gravitated toward the whaling industry, “the third-largest industry in Massachusetts at the time, behind only cotton textiles and shoes” (7) and went to sea for the first time in 1840, at seventeen, on the brig *Elizabeth*, the first of his nine voyages. The captain, Pardon Cook, was one of the few Black whaling captains. “Given Davoll’s later activities,” Connors observes, “it is tempting to speculate on the effects of this first voyage under a black captain and officers, but there is simply no evidence to go on” (9). After his second voyage, Davoll moved to New Bedford, a logical choice because New Bedford was a larger town with more opportunities than Westport. Davoll’s career appeared to be on an upward trend and he “had set himself on a course to be a career whaleman and, as quickly as possible, to assume command as a master mariner” (20).

Davoll married Elizabeth Brownell in 1850, but the marriage appears to have been difficult. Unsurprisingly, given his profession, Davoll was away for long period of time and his letters suggest that he “behaved like an eighteenth-century whaleman, directing the ‘domestic sphere’ from aboard ship” (55). Unusually, Davoll spent a full year at home between voyages (August 1853–August 1854) and was home for the birth of his daughter Carrie. Shortly thereafter, he went back to sea, this time on a disastrous voyage that saw the wreck of the *Iris* in Port Gregory (Western Australia). Davoll did not cause the wreck, but the episode did some damage to his career. He continued to sail, but his desperation to make enough money to retire and live on shore with his family eventually lured him into the slave trade.

As noted above, *Went to the Devil* is the story of Davoll as well as of the resurgent slave trade. Cuba, scholars have demonstrated, produced a considerable percentage of the world’s sugar. Slavery made the Cuban sugar industry possible and the demand for slaves in Cuba was high. New York was a major center of the slave trade, as well as other Atlantic World port cities. In whaling towns like New Bedford a “relationship between whaling and the slave trade, made possible by the dimming prospects for whaling and the crafty New York slaving agents and their worldwide network of financiers who were able to exploit whalers’ economic uncertainty and moral indifference” (3) developed. Davoll certainly experienced economic uncertainty and shared many of the prejudices of his contemporaries against people of color. In 1859–1860, Connors argues, Davoll made the fateful choice to enter the slave trade. He took charge of the *Atlantic*, which had been fitted out for a slaving voyage and then became involved in fitting out the *Brutus*. Money likely explains Davoll’s involvement: “regardless of the risks, the trade was too appealing for many Americans to pass up” (85).

The problems for Davoll began when two sailors—Milo Roberts and Jerome Colburn—told the authorities about the activities of the *Brutus*. Roberts and Colburn signed on to what they thought was a whaling voyage. When they discovered it was actually a slaving voyage, they faced the unpalatable choice of participating or being cast off the ship and stranded in Africa. They reluctantly participated and, when they returned to port, told their story. By this point Davoll had taken command of the *Palmyra*, where he recorded that the harpooned whale “Went to the Devil.” Davoll had a confrontation with a crew member and whipped him, a brutal punishment that had been prohibited in the U.S. Navy and commercial vessels since 1850. Some of the crew members later deserted the ship largely, although probably not exclusively, because of Davoll’s behavior. Davoll lingered in Bermuda

because the people involved with fitting out the *Brutus* as a slave vessel were being brought to trial in the U.S. and he feared he would be as well. The Lincoln administration determined to stop illegal slave traders, unlike many previous administrations, and, consequently, prosecutions became much more aggressive. Davoll eventually returned home and was arrested, but he died of typhoid fever, in April 1863, while under indictment.

Davoll's life, Connors concludes, "as he slid from respectable whaler to accomplice in slave-trading voyages, provides a glimpse into social and economic issues that allowed a surprising number of people—captains, ordinary sailors, agents, outfitters, and government officials—to conspire in this appalling business" (3). Connors is correct. In Davoll one can see how whaling initially allowed a captain to make a good living, but, by the end of Davoll's life, the industry had begun to stagnate. Like many other people, Davoll's desire for money and his racial prejudices pushed him into a devil's bargain with slave traders and, at the end of his life, landed him under indictment. This well-written book will appeal to anyone interested in the history of slavery and race, whaling, and class and gender in the nineteenth century U.S.

Evan C. Rothera is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith.

***The Ruin of All Witches: Life and Death in the New World.* By Malcolm Gaskill. London: Penguin Books, Limited, 2021. 336 pages. \$13.11 (paperback).**

In this new volume from British historian Malcolm Gaskill we have a welcome contribution to historical studies in western Massachusetts. *The Ruin of All Witches: Life and Death in the New World* traces the story of the first two people accused of witchcraft in Springfield. The author relies on a careful reading of the voluminous notes taken by William Pynchon, the founder of Springfield, during a spate of depositions before him from late February through mid-March, 1651. Gaskill has carefully unraveled the skein of materials available from that time, and he presents the story and its context with clarity and fluency.

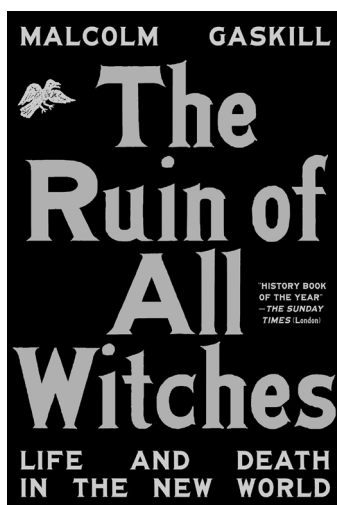
The book lays out the witchcraft case and its hodgepodge of wholly circumstantial evidence, as Gaskill skillfully presents the incident with its sobering twists and turns. The story involves Mary Lewis, whose husband abandoned her before she immigrated from Wales, and Hugh Parsons, a

brickmaker, probably from the West Country. They formed what Pynchon called “a league of amity” between them. Permitted to marry, the two began a troubled and ultimately tragic relationship. Two of their children died very young. Mary heard tales of witches from a neighbor who had come from Windsor, Connecticut, the first site of witchcraft accusations in New England. She eventually charged the neighbor with that very crime. Found guilty of slander, Mary was herself accused by neighbors as charges escalated. More than twenty Springfield residents had their say. Mary’s taciturn husband was implicated as well. Because the testimony potentially involved a capital crime, Pynchon sent the case to Boston. At the couple’s trial there, the fragile Mary confessed to killing one child – but Hugh was released for lack of evidence. Mary probably died soon after in prison, while Hugh, understandably, left Massachusetts.

Gaskill brings a British approach to the subject, which is a real asset when it comes to this topic. He has previously written *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (2005) on the witchcraft phenomena in East Anglia, and he brings insights from that study to enrich this analysis of a contemporaneous case in New England. The British perspective, however, also leads to unwarranted assumptions and anachronisms. Clergy were never members of the government, for example, that was in keeping with the Puritan concept of separation of church and state. The Massachusetts legislature sitting all together in judgment as the “General Court” did not wear wigs, at least not until the eighteenth century. And magistrates, not clergy, conducted weddings.

Gaskill employs “informed imagination,” a phrase used by the late historical novelist Hilary Mantel for a method of enhancing historical accounts with memorable supplemental material. The result is vividness—but that can be achieved at the cost of accuracy. Enthusiastically connecting the dots can lead to improbable and unsubstantiated deductions. That has been the results for some historians seeking—and manufacturing—heroes from the past, including William Pynchon. It has also been the case with some of Gaskill’s secondary sources.

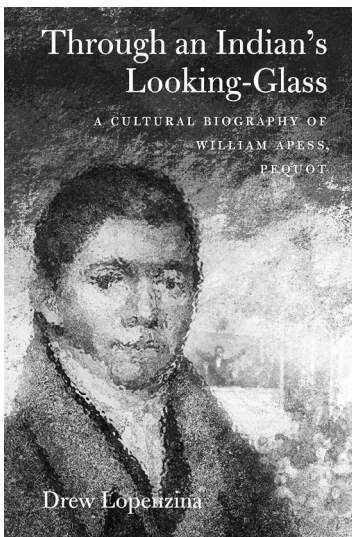
Still, *The Ruin of All Witches* lets us appreciate the dynamics of a problematic chapter in Springfield’s history. Fortunately, spectral evidence



(the belief that a person's being could be present while his or her body was somewhere else) did not play the disastrous role there in 1651 that it did at Salem in 1692. But the well-documented tale of Hugh and Mary Parsons, artfully told by Malcolm Gaskill, portrays the community's involvement in a dark time which shook its very foundations.

David M. Powers is author of Damnable Heresy: William Pynchon, the Indians, and the First Book Banned (and Burned) in Boston (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

***Through an Indian's Looking-Glass: A Cultural Biography of William Apess, A Pequot.* By Drew Lopezina. Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017. 293 pages. \$29.95.**



Drew Lopezina's *Through an Indian's Looking-Glass: A Cultural Biography of William Apess, A Pequot* is at once an historical odyssey across space and time, a meditation on American identities and literatures of the early republic, and a finely researched and richly textured account of an extraordinary figure of early nineteenth century New England. Drawing on a diverse array of sources including archival documents, literature of the period, contemporary Native scholarship and his own site-based historical investigation, Lopezina has penned a fascinating and intimate biography of the great Pequot orator, author, Methodist preacher, and

central figure of the Mashpee Revolt of 1833. The author is right when he claims in the conclusion that the book, as a cultural biography, makes it possible to examine Apess' literary accomplishment in the light of his personal activities and whereabouts, to trace his path over a large geographical, and even spiritual expanse (252).

In his essay "Cradling Lives in Our Hands: Towards a Theory of Culture Biography," Harold K. Bush Jr. defined cultural biography as seeking "to match the subject's life story with the ideologies, issues, concerns, values, and beliefs of an age" and is "steeped in the broader history of ideas and the social

and cultural trends . . . by which a person is influenced.” Lopenzina follows this template beginning in the first three chapters with analysis of Apess’ early life. He was born in 1798 to a Pequot man and an apparently mixed Black and Pequot woman in the tiny village of Colrain, near the border with Vermont and the Deerfield River, in the “back settlements” of Massachusetts. Shortly after birth, Apess was left in the care of his maternal grandparents in Colchester, Connecticut, where he and his siblings suffered terribly in a childhood of extreme hardship, marginalization, poverty, and racism. This was tragically common for so many Native children who endured hunger, indenture, beatings, escape and recapture, and cultural scorn. As Lopenzina summarizes, “Binding out entire generations of Native children proved a violent destabilizing agent for an indigenous community, breaking familial chords, and forcing children into often-traumatic situations of violence, sexual exploitation and servitude, as well as divorcing them from their cultural moorings (170).

Lopenzina contextualizes this inter-generational trauma, using a nuanced reading of Apess’ writings and bringing them into conversation with other key writings of the period and the subaltern histories of Pequots and other Native Peoples. In a chapter entitled “The Baskets Copy Our Stories” attention is focused on Apess’ grandmother and the lives of Native women under colonialism. The genocide of the Pequot war is explored, in which so many of the tribe were killed, sold into slavery in the Caribbean, or forced into servitude in colonial settlements. The sexual violence and systemic oppression visited upon Native women in the centuries that followed is illustrated by the story of Katherine Garret, whom the author identifies as the “first Native in all of New England to have her writing disseminated in print form” (39). It was her written confession to the crime of infanticide, for which she was executed. The (likely) forced confession and the range of plausible explanations for her circumstances serve to illustrate the extent to which Indian women were at the mercy of the colonial system.

Such was the subject position Apess’ grandmother inherited a century later. Destitute and alcoholic, she neglected the children and brutally beat the young Apess when he was four years old, experiences he carried with him the rest of his life, and wrote about in his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest* (1831). She was a basket-maker who struggled to make her way on the margins of white society. Apess later wrote about the plight of a similar Pequot woman, Ann Wampy, in his *Experiences of Five Christian Women of the Pequot Tribe* (1833). Wampy, carried her baskets to cities and towns in southern New England, drinking her proceeds before arriving home. Lopenzina writes that Wampy’s story is Apess’ grandmother’s story. Both

women labored for their “white oppressors, both of them carrying the legacy of a century and a half of violence against their people, their children, their traditions, their livelihoods, their bodies, upon their backs” (44).

Apess was drawn to the somewhat universalist interpretation of the Bible offered by Methodism, which he was exposed to after escaping from indenture and making his way towards the Northeast borderlands at the age of fifteen. Lopenzina develops the context for Apess’ travels across the various indigenous and newly colonized spaces of the northeast, as a runaway and ultimately as a soldier during the war of 1812. He surveys Washington’s policies towards Native peoples in the early republic, the geopolitical significance of the Ohio River Valley and the struggles of Indigenous communities fighting for the remnants of their historical territories, both within and outside the pale of white settlement. He places Apess’ journeys alongside these developments, building a case for the growth of Apess’ consciousness as a Native person traversing the borderlands of northern New York/Canada, first as a soldier, then staying in the region after the war.

In chapter four, Lopenzina engages with the complexities of the borderlands for Native peoples focusing on the Haudenosaunee, with whom Apess almost certainly interacted with, observing some of their ceremonies and surviving cultural practices, and becoming a “witness to the possibility of indigenous lifeways and beliefs sustaining themselves in a hostile environment” (115). It was a time when he would “begin to pull together the materials of a new narrative framework that would prove crucial to his own healing and form the philosophical core of his literary accomplishment” (123). These experiences made the ground fertile for his apprenticeship with the Pequot healer and spiritual leader, Sally George, and the integration of Native spiritual themes with Methodism.

The narrative structure of *Through an Indian’s Looking Glass* follows Apess through the remainder of his life and some of the better-known events, including his career as a preacher, orator, author of the first book length autobiography by a Native American *A Son of the Forest* (1831), and as a powerful force behind the Mashpee Revolt of 1833. The “Revolt,” actually a series of civil disobedience actions designed by Apess, successfully drew attention to the mistreatment and encroachment suffered by the Mashpees. Apess served time in the Barnstable jail for his efforts, and Lopenzina credits Apess with understanding what Thoreau would write of a decade later, as the necessity for struggle at the margins to “be conducted through the acquired moral authority of directed non-violent action and civil disobedience” (198).

If Apess’ rather extraordinary accomplishment at Mashpee is the apogee of his career as a Native rights advocate and activist, his 1836 sermon *Eulogy*

on King Phillip is something of a capstone to his intellectual achievement. For Lopenzina, Eulogy is where Apess accomplishes “the sweeping repurposing of dominant historical narrative hegemony that Apess had been working towards his entire career” by taking up the story of the most revered and symbolic of New England Natives, challenging white Americans to consider the injustices of conquest, colonialism and racism (222). Apess’ ability to understand dominant narratives and to challenge them rhetorically is a central theme of *Through an Indian’s Looking Glass*. Lopenzina provides much in the way of original historiography in the book, adding importantly to the work of Barry O’Connell and his seminal introduction to Apess’ collected works in *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writing of William Apess a Pequot* (1992) and Philip Gura’s *The Life of William Apess, Pequot* (2015). The never-before-published “Memorial of the Marshpee Indian, January 1934,” attributed to the Mashpee as a group but almost certainly drafted by Apess, is included as an appendix, strengthening the book’s overall contribution to scholarship on Apess.

Lopenzina’s exploration of Apess’ narrative and rhetorical strategies, and their evolution in the context of the period, is arguably the most powerful dimension of the book. He locates Apess’ achievement alongside the literature of the time, the dominant tropes of which “performed the task of sharpening and refining into an extraordinarily sharp edge a deterministic vision of Native peoples as vaporizing from the continent . . . rousing sympathetic feelings for Native people while simultaneously disposing of them in the dustbin of history” (171). Apess produced a countervailing body of work, performing the “negative work” of contradicting these narratives by his very existence, survival and penetrating critique, holding a looking-glass up to the settler colonialism that conditioned his existence and continues to shape our history.

Some readers may find Lopenzina’s speculation to be off-putting at times. For example, he takes some creative license in arguing for the influence of Haudenosaunee philosophy, spirituality, and metaphor on Apess. However, trying to account for some of the silences on Native American life of the period is clearly one of Lopenzina’s goals, and he balances thoughtful reflection with detailed archival research, and dialogue with the work of contemporary Native Scholars. The final product is an exceptional portrait of a towering figure of Native New England and a rare glimpse at life for Native New Englanders in the early nineteenth century.

Brian W. Conz is a Professor in the Department of Geography, Planning, and Sustainability at Westfield State University.