



Demonic Possession On Trial: Case Studies in Early Modern England and Colonial America, 1593-1692

William Coventry

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Demonic Possession on Trial demonstrates that the phenomenon of demonic possession reflects a society's cultural characteristics, intellectual perceptions, religious concerns, and popular beliefs. In this work, William Coventry analyzes seven legal cases of alleged demonic possession from England and colonial America during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These examples reveal the political and religious rivalries, medical controversies, and inter-communal conflicts that influenced the development and prosecution of the cases. The book also sheds light on the Salem proceedings, which many times have been viewed only in their distinctive and radical sense. The Massachusetts colonists brought their opinions, memories, traditions, and laws over from England, so these earlier cases almost certainly affected the mindset at Salem. After describing and comparing these case studies, the author draws some interesting conclusions. Though possession cases all shared certain commonalities, the fascinating interplay of diverse influences and issues created vastly different outcomes, culminating with the executions during the Salem witchcraft trials.

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