

BODIES THAT SPEAK: EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN GENDER DISTINCTIONS  
IN BLEEDING CORPSES AND DEMONIACS

by

MARGARET L. INGRAM

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of History  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

June 2017

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Margaret L. Ingram

Title: Bodies that Speak: Early Modern European Gender Distinctions in Bleeding Corpses and Demoniacs

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of History by:

David Luebke	Chairperson
George Sheridan	Member
Jamie Bufalino	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
----------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2017

© 2017 Margaret L. Ingram

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Margaret L. Ingram

Master of Arts

Department of History

June 2017

Title: Bodies that Speak: Early Modern European Gender Distinctions in Bleeding Corpses and Demoniacs

This thesis examines the concept of “speaking bodies” in the early modern European world, primarily in the seventeenth century. Demoniacs and corpses that bled due to cruentation are examined comparatively through the lens of gender. Utilizing sources that include pamphlets, broadsheets, witness testimonies, and legal records, this thesis performs a close textual analysis to reveal that the gender of the speaking bodies informed contemporaries’ beliefs in the validity of a body’s speech. This thesis also argues that one form of speaking bodies – bleeding corpses – survived over another form – demoniacs – because of gender differentials. In order for a body to speak and be heard, whether through literal demonic speech or metaphorical blood, this body either had to be male, or possessed by a male spirit such as a demon.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Margaret L. Ingram

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon  
University of California, Davis, California

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, History, 2017, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, History, 2014, University of California, Davis

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Early Modern Europe  
Religion, Magic, and Science  
Gender History

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, UO Department of History, 2015-2017  
Research Assistant to Dr. Kathy Stuart, UCD Department of History, 2012-2014  
Writing Tutor, UCD Student Academic Success Center, 2011-2014

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2015-2017  
Summa Cum Laude, University of California, Davis, 2014  
Highest Honors, UCD Department of History Honors Thesis Program, 2014  
Citation for Outstanding Performance, UCD Department of History, 2014  
Dean's List, UC Davis College of Letters and Science, 2012-2014

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis builds upon previous research I began as an undergraduate under the advisement of Dr. Kathy Stuart, someone who still remains a terrific role model to me. I attribute my initial interest in history and desire to attend graduate school to her unflagging support and enthusiasm over the years.

I want to thank Dr. Jamie Bufalino for stepping outside the boundaries of American history and delving into early modern Europe with me. I am grateful for her help in developing my background in gender theory, something which has proven to be an integral part of my analysis. If it weren't for her gender history seminar, I might not have thought to examine demoniacs and bleeding corpses comparatively with a particular focus on gender.

I also want to thank Dr. George Sheridan for his support of this project, and especially for teaching me the importance of voice, vision, and narrative writing. His seminar on writing history exposed me to a multitude of different stylistic approaches.

Thank you to my parents, Jack and Colleen, and my sister Noël, for their lifelong encouragement of my academic endeavors, and to Anthony Van Selow, whose love and support has never diminished by the miles that divide us. I appreciate my cohort for not only being my colleagues and helpful peer editors, but for being my family away from home: especially Haley Williamson, Miles Reding, and Jeffrey Whitaker, who have given me some semblance of a social life these past two years.

Last but not least, I wish to thank my adviser, Dr. David Luebke, for agreeing to take me on as his advisee, and for pushing me to better articulate my argument both during the initial stages of this project, as well as during the writing process. Our weekly meetings helped me clarify several issues I was having with my thesis. Thank you.

Dedicated to my cats, past and present: to Lola, my travel companion and furry research assistant. And to Mandy, who would have been sitting by my side during the writing process, if not for her untimely death at the beginning of my master's program.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. HISTORIOGRAPHY .....	15
Trial by Ordeal .....	15
Demonic Possession and Exorcism .....	28
III. WHAT IS THE BODY? .....	40
Religious Influences on Understanding of the Body .....	41
Biological Distinctions of the Body .....	52
Spirits and Souls .....	53
Discernment of Spirits in Bodies .....	56
IV. GENDERED BODIES AND GENDERED SPEECH .....	63
Demoniacs and Gendered Speech Through the Tongue .....	66
Speech Transformed from Feminine to Masculine in Loudun .....	67
Emasculation of Urbain Grandier .....	79
The Autobiography of Jeanne des Anges .....	84
V. CRUENTATION AND POSSESSION IN LEGAL CASES .....	88
The Lancashire Witches .....	88
A Female Corpse in Question .....	90
Master Murders Servant .....	96
A Bleeding Severed Head .....	98
Demoniacs in a Court Room Setting .....	102

Chapter	Page
VI. “IN EV’RY WOUND THERE IS A BLOODY TONGUE”: SPEAKING BODIES IN LITERARY AND VISUAL ARTS .....	103
Arden of Faversham.....	104
A Warning for Fair Women.....	107
Natural vs. Unnatural Behavior .....	110
Le Chevalier Au Lion .....	113
Possession and Exorcism in Visual Arts.....	116
Women’s Silence in Visual Arts.....	121
VII. CONTEMPORARY SPECULATION OF “SPEAKING BODIES”.....	128
VIII. RISE OF THE ANATOMICAL STUDY OF THE BODY AND DECLINE IN MAGIC .....	144
IX. CONCLUSION.....	154
APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF CRUENTATION.....	158
REFERENCES CITED.....	160

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Michael Wolgemut, <i>The Dance of Death</i> , 1493 .....	7
2. Title Page of Peter Müller's <i>Dissertatio</i> .....	24
3. John Siferwas, <i>Desecration of the Host</i> , 1400-1410 .....	46
4. <i>Christ in the Winepress</i> , 16th century .....	49
5. <i>Jeanne des Anges</i> .....	87
6. Francisco de Goya, <i>Saint Francis Borja at the Deathbed of an Impenitent</i> .....	118
7. <i>Jesus Performs an Exorcism</i> .....	119
8. Panel of the Small Mariazell Miracle Altar .....	120
9. Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld, <i>Bahrprobe</i> .....	123
10. Jenó Gyárfás, <i>Ordeal of the Bier</i> .....	125
11. <i>Urbain Grandier</i> .....	131
12. <i>Duke of Lauderdale</i> .....	142
13. <i>Richard Baxter</i> .....	143

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of June 23, 1634 in Loudun, France, a great crowd gathered outside the St. Croix parish, waiting to witness the exorcisms of seventeen Ursuline nuns.<sup>1</sup> Surrounded by curious spectators stood the supposed sorcerer himself, a priest named Urbain Grandier. The Ursulines called out to him, addressing him as “their master,” to which he responded that he never had communication with these devils. Coming from the mouths of the possessed nuns, voices multiplied and grew even louder, as the nuns persistently continued to accuse Grandier of “magic and evil that he worked on them.”<sup>2</sup> The nuns’ bodies had spoken, and Grandier was convicted of the crime of sorcery.

Well over one hundred years later in 1767, contemporaries did not seem to have a problem accepting the legitimacy of a victim “speaking out” against its murderer in the form of an emanation of blood from a corpse. In Bergen County, New Jersey, for instance, the coroner’s jury suspected that a man named Nicholas Tuers had been murdered. Despite coroner Johannes Demarest’s initial disbelief in the bier test, he could not ignore the fact that when Tuers’ slave Harry touched his dead master’s body, “about a

---

This thesis contains primary source material in English, French, and Latin. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> These Ursuline nuns were from the same convent in Loudun. The Ursuline Roman Catholic religious order was founded at Brescia, Italy, in 1535 by St. Angela Merici. The order based their teachings and practices off of the life of St. Ursula, a fourth-century martyr whose cult was popular in medieval Europe. By the time the Ursuline Order spread to France, beginning in Paris in 1612, the nuns were to live a strictly cloistered life. See Encyclopedia Britannica, “Ursuline.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ursulines>.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier... avec les confrontations des religieuses possédées contre ledit Grandier* (Paris: 1634).

tablespoonful of blood flowed from each nostril, and Harry confessed the murder.”<sup>3</sup>

Demons manipulated demoniacs into performing actions and speech. Bleeding corpses revealed their murderers. Bodies, whether dead or alive, communicated with the living, even without the volition of a human spirit within. Both of the examples above pertain to cruentation and exorcism, two practices that involved manipulation of the body in order to extract the truth. The ways in which these practices did so differed, as well as the reasoning behind the desire or need for these bodies to speak.

Together with bodies possessed by demons, also known as demoniacs, bleeding corpses are an example of what I like to describe as “speaking bodies.”<sup>4</sup> While these two types of bodies speak in different ways, one speaking metaphorically through an emanation of blood and another literally speaking by means of demonic forces possessing the host, they reveal that contemporaries treated evidence acquired from a female speaking body differently than they treated evidence acquired from a male body; thus, relevant gender theory, which addresses interpretations of gendered speech and bodily performance, allows us to see the body as a form of communication utilized by contemporaries. Early modern Europeans not only described female bodies’ speech differently, but they also considered female speech less credible than male speech.

Why should gender matter and figure more prominently in studying these two phenomena comparatively, and why should these two types of speaking bodies be

---

<sup>3</sup> Henry Charles Lea, *Superstition and Force: Essays on The Wager of Law, the Wager of Battle, the Ordeal of Torture*, (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers and Co., 1892), 367.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I am chiefly concerned with possessions defined by an inherent knowledge of languages previously unknown to the demoniac (xenoglossia), as well as by physical changes in the demoniac’s bodily behaviors; I am interested in the contemporary accounts’ physical descriptions of the demoniacs’ actions, as well as records of their spoken words. Because xenoglossia contributed to giving these bodies the power to speak, equipping them with the supposedly paranormal ability to speak in foreign tongues, one could argue that the existence of xenoglossia was a sign of power for a “speaking body.”

considered together at all? For one reason, we should consider these two types of bodies together because some contemporaries did so. Despite the fact that Grandier was ultimately found guilty of causing the possessions and was burned at the stake, many contemporaries doubted the credibility of these nuns' speech, and did not believe in the legitimacy of their possessions. One eyewitness to the exorcisms of the Loudun nuns, a British man named Richard Baxter, sent a letter to John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale, describing what he saw. He wrote,

[When] I could hear nothing but wanton Wenches singing bawdy songs in *French*, I begun to suspect a Fourbe, and in great Gravity went to a Jesuite, and told him, I had come a great way in hope to see some strange thing, and was sorry to be disappointed.<sup>5</sup>

Even in the seventeenth century, contemporaries were already beginning to discredit female demoniacs' speech. Baxter had no doubts about cruentation's legitimacy, as we will see later on; but when it came to possession, he questioned demoniacs' validity on a case-by-case basis. Thus, not only did cruentation enjoy greater credibility than possession as a vestigial form of ordeal, but it also served as evidence longer than the evidence of possessed bodies speaking.

Cruentation and exorcism both involved bodies and communication with the spiritual realm, whether it was divine or diabolical, and they both could be used as evidence in the court room. Both bleeding corpses and demoniacs' bodies spoke in order to expose judicial truths. In addition to examining these "speaking bodies" comparatively, this thesis draws on Joan Scott's argument that gender serves as a useful

---

<sup>5</sup> Richard Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits and, consequently, of the immortality of souls of the malice and misery of the devils and the damned: and of the blessedness of the justified, fully evinced by the unquestionable histories of apparitions, operations, witchcrafts, voices &c. / written, as an addition to many other treatises for the conviction of Sadduces and infidels*, (London: 1691), 90.

category for historical analysis, because gender was a mechanism for establishing power in the early modern period. By paying particular attention to the gendered distinctions contemporaries made between the different kinds of “speaking bodies” in written description, we will see that the gender of the “speaking body” tended to inform contemporaries’ belief in the validity of a body’s speech. Furthermore, I use the term “gender” rather than “sex” to refer to these male and female bodies in order to reject biological determinism and emphasize the fact that bodies were shaped and described by their contemporaries in a very specific time and place within history. According to Scott, use of the term “gender” introduces a “relational notion,” meaning that the definition of what is considered feminine relies on the definition for what is masculine. Scott suggests that we cannot hope to understand one gender without also understanding the other, which is why it is crucial that we consider these “speaking bodies” as both feminine and masculine, not simply as bodies without gender.<sup>6</sup>

Dead bodies retained agency after death by speaking through an emanation of blood. These speaking bodies were recognized by the judicial courts, so long as these bodies were gendered male. Female bodies, on the other hand, were not granted the right to speak in the same way as male bodies. And while demonic possession is generally accepted as a female-gendered phenomenon, cruentation differs in the sense that both male and female corpses could bleed in the presence of their murderers.<sup>7</sup> Both phenomena were gender-related, but not gender-dependent. However, contemporaries’

---

<sup>6</sup> See Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”: *The American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986): 1054. “The term ‘gender’ introduce[s] a relational notion into our analytic vocabulary.”

<sup>7</sup> While the idea of demonic possession being gendered female is not new, the idea that cruentation also had gendered distinctions is new.

descriptions of these bleeding corpses and demoniacs in documents differed, based on whether the speaking bodies were male or female.

This thesis is organized in the following way. Historiographical information and background context about the two phenomena will first be presented in order to give the reader a firm grounding in pre-existing scholarship and ideas surrounding the two practices. Following a discussion of what pre-existing scholarship has to say about crucentation and possession is a chapter about early modern understanding of the body, and how this understanding affected contemporaries' treatment of the two practices. The fourth chapter delves deeper into the issue of gendered speech, and performs a close textual analysis of documents pertaining to bleeding corpses and demoniacs, arguing that women were unable to use the tongue as a "sword" unless their speech was transformed into masculine speech.

Next, the fifth chapter examines gender's role specifically in the context of court cases, and reveals that women did not have the ability to "speak out" in the same way that men did. The sixth chapter discusses "speaking bodies" featured in visual and literary arts, which serve as further examples of contemporaries' differing treatment of women and men. Similar to the previous chapter, chapter six shows that some crimes were more often gendered female than male, as we will see in their literary representation as well. The seventh chapter grapples with the issue of contemporary speculation of "speaking bodies," and argues that bleeding corpses persisted longer in courts than demoniacs did, because demoniacs were typically gendered female, and contemporaries often undermined the validity of their speech. Finally, before concluding this thesis, the eighth chapter discusses the decline of the "golden age" of the demoniac and the emergence of

anatomical study of the body. This chapter suggests that while contemporaries stopped practicing exorcism on demoniacs, cruentation survived by merging mystical practices with newer medical practices that recognized the legitimacy of the male body as a vessel for speech.

Scholars who discuss the allegorical art genre *Danse Macabre* (Figure 1), or “dance of death,” note its universality, and argue that death was the “great equalizer” in late medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>8</sup> Woodcuts featuring scenes of the dance of death imply that regardless of a person’s position in society or gender, all will meet the same end and die at one point or another. Paired with the idea that death brought about universality to all who died, most historians who are researching early modern judicial ordeal, and even those who specifically discuss cruentation, do not address gender in their analysis of the phenomenon. Scholarship on ordeal focuses on the ritual of the ordeal, and whether the practice was deemed legitimate or not. But when ordeal involves the dead, historians have tended to depict “the dead” without any particular gender.

While these dead bodies may be equal in the sense that they all succumbed to death and had the capability to bleed, they were certainly not deemed equal in their treatment in regards to the ordeal of the bier. In the cruentation cases examined for this thesis, a trend emerges: the bodies that bleed and “speak out” against their murderers are male bodies. The female bodies, on the other hand, either do not bleed, thus letting the accused person walk free, or do bleed, but are not described in a way that implies speech coming from the body, (such as the popular phrase “crying out to the heavens” that was

---

<sup>8</sup> Some scholars who describe death as the “great equalizer” include the following: Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57. Suzanne Walther, *Dance of Death: Kurt Jooss and the Weimar Years* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 58.

ascribed to male bleeding bodies). Perhaps this was an intentional choice authors made in terms of how they described the bier right. It seems as if early modern Europeans believed that God did not want to speak through female bodies, or that they thought female bodies were incapable of serving as vessels of divine providence. One can suggest that early modern Europeans believed that blood was a metaphorical mouthpiece reserved only for male bodies.

**Figure 1. *The Dance of Death* by Michael Wolgemut, 1493**



**Source:** Michael Wolgemut, *Danse Macabre*. 1493, the *Liber Chronicarum* (Book of Chronicles), Nuremberg. Available from: *Wikimedia Commons*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

One could argue that the reason why women's bodies could not speak in the same way as men's bodies was because contemporaries did not consider their bodies worthy vessels for speech. Gender distinctions were not created by God, but created by man on Earth. Women's bodies spoke, but because of gender's social construction, early modern European society refused to listen, deeming women's speech unintelligible. Laura Gowing and Michele Osherow both reveal that in early modern England, for instance, contemporaries attributed women's silence to feminine virtue, thus creating a stark dichotomy between gendered versions of speech and morality. In early modern England, contemporaries referred to a talkative woman by using sexually slanderous words, whereas there was no male equivalent.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the only way the possessed nuns in Loudun seem to have been heard and had their speech validated was when male-gendered demons used their bodies to speak.<sup>10</sup> In order for a body to speak and be heard, whether through literal demonic speech or metaphorical blood, this body either had to be male, or possessed by a male spirit such as a demon.<sup>11</sup>

Yet here is where the idea of speaking bodies becomes much more than just a matter of belief in the "magical." It is imperative that we examine these speaking bodies

---

<sup>9</sup> For a better understanding of early modern attitudes towards female speech, see Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009). According to Gowing, "radically different versions of sexual morality that applied to women and to men, among the most rigid of popular moral understandings, were rooted not in the church's teaching but in popular practice," 11. Both Gowing and Osherow reveal that contemporaries described similar behavior seen in both men and women by using gender-coded terminology.

<sup>10</sup> Documentation of exorcism and demonic possession refers to the diabolical spirits within a demoniac's body as both demons, devils, and the Devil. When referring to the sole entity of "the Devil," capitalization will be used. Like the primary source material I am using, I have adopted the interchangeability of the terms "demons" and "devils" when referring to possessed bodies.

<sup>11</sup> And because there were bleeding corpses that were described as genderless (or whose gender was unknown) but were also "speaking out," this suggests that not only was it disadvantageous to be a woman in early modern Europe, but that sexless bodies had greater agency than feminine bodies.

in a context of gender difference, because these different speaking bodies were both objects placed in a judicial setting, and both bodies' speech were used as evidence in court. However, while both types of speaking bodies revealed hidden knowledge of some sort, contemporaries chose to listen to bleeding corpses' speech far longer than they did to demoniacs' speech, thus supporting the popular tendency to discredit Max Weber's "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*) theory.<sup>12</sup> Discrediting Weber's theory is hardly a new idea; however, up until this point, historians have not considered the fact that gender played a role in the process of discrediting magical practices.<sup>13</sup> While historians such as Euan Cameron claim that belief in "superstitious" matters such as exorcism and possession fell out of disuse due to contemporaries' decline in their fear of magical practices, this theory does not support cruentation's persistence, nor does it consider how gender affected this decline, or lack thereof.<sup>14</sup> The fact that cruentation survived as a form of ordeal when so many other forms were falling out of practice

---

<sup>12</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (1920), trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 270. Weber argued that a paradigm shift occurred after the Protestant Reformation when magic, God, and supernaturalism slowly disappeared. He further stated that the Protestant Reformation rejected a magical understanding of the world, and instead promoted a more intellectualized understanding.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Hilaire Kallendorf also rejects the idea that the world was becoming disenchanting, stating that "some early modern authors could have lived in a world that was still very much enchanted," but her explanation for the persistence of "magical" beliefs is that it was a good way for contemporaries to rationalize tragedies in their lives. See Kallendorf, *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 199.

<sup>14</sup> In *Enchanted Europe*, Euan Cameron is similarly concerned with finding out what early modern Europeans considered to be the truth about why things happened, and how they discerned between good and bad spirits. However, while Cameron's focus is very similar to my own, his explanation for the end result is different. "How, and why, if ever, did European people cease to be 'superstitious' in the sense that this book describes them?" (10) According to Cameron, the reason "magical" and "superstitious" practices fell into disuse is because "the urgency felt by earlier pastoral theologians to moderate the beliefs of ordinary people had been replaced by other concerns. Therefore, it is not in the least surprising if evidence survives of popular 'superstitions' long after the supposed 'decline of magic.' What had declined was the *fear* of magic." (14)

reveals that Europe remained a very enchanted place, and that a decline in a “fear of magic” was not really the issue at hand.

It is not sufficient to simply state that the reason why bleeding corpses persisted longer as “speaking bodies” than demoniacs did was because they were supposedly getting their power to speak from divine providence, which was deemed more credible than speech brought about by diabolic means. One form of speaking bodies – bleeding corpses – survived over another form of speaking bodies – demoniacs – because contemporaries delegitimized women’s speech. Testimony (or speech) from demoniacs came more often than not from a female body, and contemporaries did not consider female speech to be nearly as trustworthy as male speech.<sup>15</sup> Blood emanating via cruentation, on the other hand, was almost always coming from a male body; or at the very least, description of a successful instance of cruentation, using description that indicated speech, involved male bodies. While the difference of gender identity is certainly not the only explanation for one form of speaking bodies’ persistence over the other, it is certainly a possible explanation that merits attention.

## SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS

As Laura Gowing says, bodies are “ideologically loaded narratives” which reveal the culture of the society they are socially constructed within.<sup>16</sup> The same can be said of

---

<sup>15</sup> See Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 51. According to Bardsley, women’s speech “was always open to doubt.” See also Kathleen Kalpin Smith, *Gender, Speech, and Audience Reception in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2017), NP. Google eBook. According to Smith, early modern Englishmen did not trust their wives’ speech because of their sex.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3.

these “speaking bodies,” if we deconstruct the textual documents contemporaries wrote. This thesis will examine primary source material such as pamphlets, broadsheets, witness reports, and documents detailing Grandier’s arrest and condemnation for causing the possession of the Ursuline nuns. Using these sources, this thesis will perform a close textual analysis to see how contemporaries chose to memorialize what they witnessed in cases involving either cruentation or possession, and make speculations based on chosen wording and speech. This thesis also analyzes how the justice system’s response to these speaking bodies affected the outcome of these cases.

From the mid-sixteenth century onward, ballads and pamphlets were the cheapest and most accessible printed texts, and they therefore make up a great portion of my source base. A large majority of ballads and pamphlets were news stories that were commonly referred to as a “discourse,’ ‘relation,’ ‘report,’ or ‘story,’” but were nonetheless written about actual events.<sup>17</sup> The specific subject matter of ballads and pamphlets was often of little importance; it was more important for the reader to learn from the morals and lessons presented in the text. Both followed a similar structure; they all had titles that summarized the featured story, and started out with a general statement about the condemned person’s wickedness. Phrases such as “innocent blood crying out,” for instance, were stock terms used to describe the injustices of murder.<sup>18</sup>

Often the sources do not state how the murderer carried out a particular murder; instead, the sources focus on who murdered whom, the relationship between the murderer

---

<sup>17</sup> Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> We see the “blood crying out” motif in many documents. See *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers* (London: 1591), Anonymous, *The Lamentable and True Tragedy of M. Arden of Faversham, 1592*. (Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1971), and Thomas Potts’ pamphlet *The Lancashire Witches* (London: 1612).

and the murdered person, and the end result of the crime (i.e. the corpse bleeding, and the murderer being found guilty). Can we make anything of this absence of information?

Perhaps the reason why documents tend to leave out the specific details of the murder is because it is the discovery of the truth of the murder, not the method of the murder, that early modern people thought was more important. Unlike today's forensic science, details of murder in the early modern period did not communicate the murderer's identity to observers. The corpse could, however, see to it that its death was avenged, by "speaking out" against its murderer. The motive for murder was of secondary importance to the discovery of murder via speaking bodies.

~

While documentation of speaking bodies in the form of bleeding corpses is scattered and sparse, the amount of documentation pertaining to demonic possession and exorcism is vast. In order to contain this thesis within a plausible scope and framework, its examination of possession and exorcism focuses primarily on primary source material pertaining to one case, the Loudun possessions. And while this thesis focuses primarily on one case, it does not attempt to argue that the Loudun possessions were representative of *all* possession cases; instead, the Loudun possessions are significant because they provide us with a well-documented example of how early modern treatment of gender affected "speaking bodies" such as the Ursuline nuns.

The possession of the Ursuline nuns in 1634 is one of the most well-documented cases of possession in history. It was a famous case during its time, attracting spectators from different countries, so there is a large quantity of primary documents pertaining to

the Loudun possessions: eyewitness accounts, pamphlet and news reports of the exorcisms, records of Grandier's arrest and condemnation, and more.<sup>19</sup> Because this case was so well-documented, it has been the subject of several historians' studies, which allows me to insert my historiographical contribution within what is missing.<sup>20</sup>

I wish to take documents pertaining to criminal trials beyond the domain of criminal history, and use these cases to shed light on more general truths about early modern society and its attitudes towards gender roles. Much as Natalie Zemon Davis did in *Fiction in the Archives*, I wish to show that despite the fact that court records may be somewhat unreliable, historians can still learn how early modern Europeans made sense of murder and possession, and how their understanding of gender influenced their portrayal of the discovery of knowledge through narrative.

The source material on cruentation is diffuse, ranging from medieval Europe to the nineteenth century. Part of the reason why I chose such a wide source base is because I wanted to compile as many existing sources about cruentation as possible, since there are no current publications in existence that bring numerous cruentation examples together in one study. This not only helps to show cruentation's persistence throughout time, compared to exorcism's decline, but it also shows that cruentation spanned a wide

---

<sup>19</sup> Urbain Grandier is one of three French priests who was burned at the stake for being a sorcerer. For more information about the execution of the other two priests – in Aix in 1611 and Louviers in 1647 – see D.P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 8. Also, even though eyewitness accounts written about the exorcism cases do not directly represent the viewpoints of the illiterate population, there is a general consensus among historians that belief in demonic possession and exorcism, much like belief in cruentation, “extended to all levels of society – commoners and noblemen, erudite and uneducated.” See Kallendorf, *Exorcism and its Texts*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> A methodological issue that is at stake here is the fact that the Loudun possessions are not representative of *all* early modern possession cases; therefore, conclusions I draw from my analysis acknowledge the fact that the Loudun possessions are not intended to speak of all possession cases.

chronological and geographical range, crossing the Atlantic and appearing in the American colonies as well. Also, by taking an interdisciplinary approach and examining both court records as well as pamphlets and plays, this helps to construct as complete of a picture of speaking bodies by means of cruentation and exorcism as possible.

Because my evidence is diffuse, this presents some methodological issues. Different kinds of evidence need to be read differently; for example, a fictional play should not be considered to shed light on cruentation or exorcism in the same way that court records or eyewitness accounts do, which record a contemporary person's actual thoughts about a trial or an exorcism. However, even my evidence which claims to be a "real" or "true account" must be viewed judiciously. While historians have often denied the fact that there could be such a thing as demoniacs, and instead have focused on providing explanations for "what really happened," this is an outdated question. Because we have no way of knowing for sure "what really happened" or whether the sources are accurate, I am less interested in discovering whether the trials and examples of bleeding corpses and demoniacs were accurately recorded. Instead, I am more concerned with trying to derive meaning from the way in which authors and court records chose to describe these events, and I can accomplish this by doing a close textual analysis of the way in which the instances of cruentation and possession are described, and the way the speech of these "speaking bodies" is recorded.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

The scholarship on the two phenomena is unbalanced. Possession has garnered a lot of attention from historians in the past century, whereas cruentation has not. And while gender seems to be a logical subsection for any study of demonic possession, especially considering possession's ties to witchcraft studies and the tendency for witches to be gendered female, discussion of gender in the context of cruentation does not currently exist. This chapter compares the historiographies of trial by ordeal and possession in order to show that not only did cruentation retain its power as a form of ordeal long after exorcism of possessed persons had fallen into disuse, but that cruentation persisted long after other forms of judicial ordeal had been discontinued as well.

#### TRIAL BY ORDEAL

Cruentation can be placed under the more broadly defined umbrella term “trial by ordeal.” According to Robert Bartlett, trial by ordeal was “intended to reveal a specific fact; it was designed to deal with specific allegations when other evidence or proof was lacking.”<sup>21</sup> In a similar description, Scottish antiquary Robert Pitcairn (1793-1855) claims that Scotland and other western European countries used the Law of the Bier only in “extreme cases” when there was no legal proof to connect the murder to the suspect.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Water and Fire: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 79.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials in Scotland, from A.D. M.CCCC.LXXXVIII to A.D. M.DC.XXIV, Embracing the Entire Reigns of James IV. and V., Mary Queen of Scots and James VI. Compiled from the Original Records and Mss. with Historical Notes and Illustrations* (Edinburgh: William Tait, Prince's Street, 1733), 185.

Sometimes the trial proved to be more effective than torture, since judges, clergymen, and the accusers often intimidated suspects. Oftentimes the fact that the body bled was not the sole reason why the court condemned the suspect, but because the suspect would confess after seeing the body bleed. Therefore, the Law of the Bier was not only a visual test, but also a psychological test for the suspect.

While trial by ordeal was a topic of interest among historians in the 1990s and early 2000s, few have made scholarly contributions to the literature on trial by ordeal since the publication of Bartlett's well-known *Trial by Fire and Water* in 1986. And even though cruentation has a clear connection to trial by ordeal as a broader judicial category, it remains largely absent from the scholarship on trial by ordeal.

The origin of the practice itself is difficult to pinpoint, and scholars throughout the centuries have attributed its origin to different places and cultures. Henry Charles Lea, for instance, suggested that cruentation could have arisen out of an old Jewish custom,

under which pardon was asked of a corpse for any offenses committed against the living man, the offender laying hold of the great toe of the body as prepared for sepulture, and it is said to be not uncommon, where the injury has been grievous, for the latter to respond to the touch by a copious nasal hemorrhage.<sup>23</sup>

One of the first-known documented instances of cruentation occurred in 1170, when a Cistercian monk named Simon assassinated fellow monk Gérard at the Trois-Fontaines Abbey in France. Here we see a brother, in spiritual kinship, kill a fellow brother. The abbot, Pierre le Borgne, recorded the whole event in a letter.<sup>24</sup> He wrote that he was suspicious when “the blood flowed constantly from the body each time that he

---

<sup>23</sup> Lea, *Superstition and Force*, 360.

<sup>24</sup> For information about the abbots of the Trois-Fontaines Abbey, see *Traité des droits, fonctions, franchises, exemptions, prérogatives et privilèges annexes en France à chaque dignité: à chaque office & à chaque état, soit civil, soit militaire, soit ecclésiastique, Volume 4* (Paris: Visse, 1788).

[Simon, the murderer] approached it.”<sup>25</sup> Because the blood flowed from the dead monk’s body, the church interrogated Simon, who eventually confessed.

Others cite King Henry II (1133-1189) of England’s death in 1189 as the earliest mention of cruentation. As the story goes, when King Henry’s son Richard the Lionheart (1157-1199) heard of his father’s death, he went to the church where he saw his father lying in a coffin.<sup>26</sup> According to nineteenth-century French Professor R. D’Amador,

The contemporaries ensure us that, since the instant when Richard entered the church, and until the moment he went away, the blood did not stop flowing in abundance from the two nostrils of the dead body.

While D’Amador and some other modern historians cite this story as the first mention of cruentation, there is no record that this actually happened; it is impossible to determine its legitimacy. Nevertheless, the fact that this story about cruentation exists reveals that people living in twelfth-century England were, at the very least, familiar with the concept of cruentation.

By the twelfth century, trial by ordeal was increasingly considered a form of blasphemy, since it was assumed that humans could provoke divine judgment through a ritual of this kind.<sup>27</sup> Between the years 1194 and 1219, the English plea rolls contained several cases of trial by ordeal, but none afterwards.<sup>28</sup> We attribute this disappearance of trial by ordeal from ecclesiastical courts to Pope Innocent III (1161-1216), who called

---

<sup>25</sup> “The contemporaries assure us that since the moment Richard entered the church, and until the moment he went away, the blood did not cease to flow in abundance from the two nostrils of the dead body.” “Les contemporains assurent que, depuis l’instant où Richard entra dans l’église, jusqu’à celui où il s’éloigna, le sang ne cessa de couler en abondance des deux narines du mort.” R. D’Amador, *De la Vie du Sang au point de vue des Croyances populaires* (1844), 20.

<sup>26</sup> “Il trouve le roi dans un cercueil.” D’Amador, *De la Vie du Sang*, 20. See also Lea, *Superstition and Force*, 360.

<sup>27</sup> Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 128.

forth the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.<sup>29</sup> Canon 18 from the Fourth Lateran Council discussed trial by ordeal, and the Council ultimately ruled that clerics were not allowed to pronounce or carry out death sentences. Instead, they reserved this duty for laymen.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the church's decision to abolish participation in trial by ordeal explains its disappearance from ecclesiastical courts.

Ever since the Middle Ages, textual evidence shows that people practiced cruentation all over Europe, and from the sixteenth century onward in the North American colonies as well. Derived from the Latin *cruentatio*, which means "staining with blood," cruentation was the belief that a victim's corpse bled in the presence of its murderer.<sup>31</sup> Early modern sources typically use expressions like "bleeding corpse," "Law of the Bier," and "the Bier test" to describe the phenomenon. Although the word *cruentatio* dates back to the third century, "cruentation" does not appear in English texts until 1893 when it appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which defined it as "the supposed 'bleeding from the wounds of a dead person in the presence of a murderer.'" The word's meaning has changed over time, and the OED currently defines it as "a term applied to the oozing of blood which occurs sometimes when an incision is made into the dead body."<sup>32</sup> The OED's two different definitions of cruentation demonstrate the shift in the meaning of cruentation from being a discovery

---

<sup>29</sup> David Ditchburn and Angus Mackay, ed., *Atlas of Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge Publishing, 2002), 119.

<sup>30</sup> Guiseppe Alberigo, ed. Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990). "Neither shall anyone in judicial tests or ordeals by hot or cold water or hot iron bestow any blessing." In order to discuss church reform, Pope Innocent III created the Council, which was composed of around 1,200 clergymen.

<sup>31</sup> Latin Dictionary, "Latin Definition," <http://www.latin-dictionary.net/definition/14913/cruentatio-cruentationis>.

<sup>32</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, "Cruentation," <https://www.oed.com/45172?redirectedFrom=cruentation&>.

tool for murder to a medical term applied to the effusion of blood from any dead body, murdered or not.

Depending on the origin of the word, cruentation was also called *jus feretri*, which translates as “the right of the coffin”; *jus cruentationis cadaveri* translates as “the right of the bleeding of the cadaver”; *Bahrrecht* in German translates as “right of the bier”; and lastly, the “Bier test” and “Law of the Bier” were used as synonyms for cruentation.<sup>33</sup>

French historian and Catholic clergyman Henri Platelle dramatically describes cruentation as being “in the most physical sense the term for ‘the voice of the blood.’”<sup>34</sup> Regardless of the term used to refer to cruentation, the phenomenon, when discussed in the early modern context, always involves murder. These terms will be used synonymously to refer to cruentation throughout this thesis.

Interestingly enough, Bartlett makes no mention of cruentation in *Trial by Fire and Water*, despite its known relation to the process of ordeal. Usually when historians mention cruentation, they provide the well-known definition of a body “bleeding in the presence of its murderer” and explain that it was a popular belief in medieval and early modern Europe. However, most modern-day scholarly references to cruentation do not move beyond this point.

Other forms of trial by ordeal, unlike cruentation, did not involve interaction of a living body with a dead body; instead, the accused person interacted with inanimate objects. In addition to cruentation, other forms of trial by ordeal practiced by Christians included trial by fire, where the suspect held a red-hot iron. If the wound from the iron

---

<sup>33</sup> Henri Platelle, *Présence de l’au-delà : une vision médiévale du monde* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004), 13.

<sup>34</sup> “C’était au sens le plus matériel du terme ‘la voix du sang.’” Platelle, *Présence de l’au-dela*, 13.

healed, then the suspect was deemed innocent. Sir William Blackstone describes this process in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, writing:

Fire ordeal was performed either by taking up in the hand unhurt a piece of red-hot iron of one, two, or three pounds weight; or else by walking barefoot and blindfold over nine red-hot ploughshares, laid lengthwise at unequal distances;’ - now, with every sort of deference for the learning and abilities of this illustrious writer, I trust it may be permitted me to remark, that these accounts appear to be not only very imperfect, but very incorrect. For as to the first, the trial did not consist in the culprit’s *taking up* the iron in his hand; he was to receive it in his hand, and *to carry it to the distance of three full paces, or nine feet...*<sup>35</sup>

Another ordeal was trial by water, and the most popular one used in witch trials was referred to as “witch ducking.”<sup>36</sup> A suspected witch would be placed in a body of water with her hands and feet tied; if she sank, she was considered innocent, and if she floated, she was guilty. It is interesting to note how a suspension of the laws of nature in this ordeal indicated innocence; human bodies are relatively buoyant, since human body fat is slightly denser than water. Assuming divine providence is what allowed a body to sink, why does this type of ordeal reveal innocence through suspension of the laws of nature, whereas when the laws of nature were suspended in the ordeal of the bier, resulting in cruentation, this was a sign of guilt?

Unlike other ordeals, cruentation differed because it involved physical contact between the living and the dead. In his essay (1824) on the various degrees of strength of different forms of judicial evidence, M. Gabriel, the Dean and former Barrister of the order of lawyers from the Parliament of Metz, explains the commonly held belief that

---

<sup>35</sup>Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England. Volume 2.* (London: A. Strahan, 1765), 342.

<sup>36</sup> Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 146. According to Bartlett, “swimming witches” continued, despite official disapproval, into the seventeenth century, and still occurred in Virginia, for instance, until 1706.

when one could not discover the author of a murder, all those who were suspected of having participated, would come [forward] to touch the body of the murdered person, exposed on a coffin. Woe to the accused if, of these inanimate and insensitive remains, escaped the slightest drop of blood when he touched them.<sup>37</sup>

The way in which Gabriel describes “this cruentation” is unusual, because he places the “body of the murdered person” in the position of agency. Based on Gabriel’s explanation of cruentation, the body is the one who performs the action of touching “all those who were suspected” of murder, as opposed to the living suspects touching the dead body. While this description of cruentation does not involve the body “speaking,” it is important to note the corpse’s agency. Gabriel might have chosen to give agency to the corpse in his description of cruentation rather than give agency to the suspects, because their fate was figuratively in the corpse’s hands. By having the corpse “touch” the suspects, this figurative control of their fate becomes literal, since flesh-to-flesh contact that resulted in the “escape of the slightest drop of blood” was grounds for condemnation to death.

In his essay on judicial proof, Gabriel chooses to categorize the exemplary bleeding corpse as male, and does not provide an explanation for differences between the bleeding of a male corpse versus a female corpse. While there may be nothing more to this use of male-gendered pronouns than the explanation that male pronouns were more commonly used in texts to refer to humans in general, this may also indicate an absence of descriptions of female corpses bleeding.

---

<sup>37</sup> M. Gabriel, *Essai sur la nature, les différentes espèces, et les divers degrés de force des Preuves* (Toulouse: Rue des Tourneurs, No. 45, 1824), NP. A similar description of the “test of the coffin” can be found in Bonnier, Edouard. *Traité théorique et pratique des preuves en droit civil et criminel*. 1843. Accessed via Bibliothèque nationale de France. “Lorsqu'on n'avait pu découvrir l'auteur d'un assassinat, on obligeait tous ceux qui étaient soupçonnés d'y avoir participé à venir toucher le corps de la victime, exposé sur un cercueil. Malheur à l'accusé si, de ces restes inanimés et insensibles, s'échappait la moindre goutte de sang quand il les touchait,” 627.

Contemporaries' descriptions of the actual process of the ordeal of the bier differ slightly. Therefore, we do not know if there was a specific process that needed to be followed exactly, if contemporaries using the ordeal of the bier were altering a supposed specific process, or if specific processes were determined based on local authorities. However, one thing is certain: all recorded instances involved an interaction with the living suspect and the murdered person's corpse; and in order for the results of the ordeal of the bier to be considered a positive sign of guilt, the corpse needed to bleed.

The exact bodily location where the corpse needed to bleed, however, is a detail that various contemporary and secondary accounts of cruentation describe differently. Also, whether the suspect needed to physically touch the dead body or simply be in the same room with it is also a detail that differs from one case to the next, although it is unclear why some ordeal proceedings required physical contact between the living and the dead, and others did not.<sup>38</sup> In some cases, if the corpse bled from its fatal wounds when the suspected murderer stroked it, this was considered confirmation of the suspect's guilt.<sup>39</sup>

While the corpse sometimes bled from mortal wounds, other times it bled from natural orifices. According to French historian Edmond Locard, even if the murderer strangled, drowned, or poisoned the victim, the blood would still flow when the murderer stood in front of the body; it would bleed from natural orifices like nostrils, the mouth,

---

<sup>38</sup> Both cruentation and exorcism ritual involved variety; See Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, 6. "There was at this time a great variety of published exorcisms from which a priest could choose - there was no attempt to standardize the procedure or the formulae until Paul V's *Rituale Romanum* of 1614."

<sup>39</sup> Robert P. Brittain, "Cruentation in Legal Medicine and in Literature," *Medical History* 9, no. 1 (1965): 82.

and ears, rather than from fatal wounds.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, despite these slight variations, a successful ordeal of the bier resulted in the dead body bleeding in the presence of its murderer in all cases.<sup>41</sup>

In his *Dissertatio de Jure Feretri sive Cruentationis vom Baar Rechte* (1680) (Figure 2), the Saxon jurist Peter Müller gave an example of the step-by-step process of the ordeal of the bier. It explains that the ordeal had to be administered in a specific way: the dead body needed to be exposed to air for a few hours, and it needed to have its chest and torso exposed to ensure the blood could thoroughly coagulate. The suspect had to approach the dead body and was required to read certain oaths to it. The suspect also had to touch various parts of the dead body: the mouth, the navel, and the fatal wound(s). If any substance came out of the dead body's mouth, or if the wounds or natural orifices began to bleed, then that was considered evidence to confirm the suspect's guilt.<sup>42</sup> The bier rite was not just a popularly-held belief in the early modern period; it was an actual judicial process that magistrates ordered to be performed when there was no other way of discovering the truth.

---

<sup>40</sup> Edmond Locard, *Les crimes de sang et les crimes d'amour au XVIIe siècle* (Lyon: A. Storck & Cie, 1903), 5.

<sup>41</sup> See also Brittain, "Cruentation in Legal Medicine and in Literature": 82. Brittain says that if the corpse bled from its fatal wounds when the murderer stroked it, this confirmed the suspect's guilt.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Müller, *Dissertatio de Jure Feretri sive Cruentationis vom Baar Rechte* ed. Christianus Conr. Oelsner (literis Müllerianis, 1680), 8. "Forma consistebat in eo, nimirum suspecti ducebantur ad sandapilam, in qua jacebat occisus & singuli cogeantur certa verba, qua ipsis prae legebantur, repetere, digitis, vulneribus, ori & umbilico applicatis. Finis fuit, ut si vulnera Cadaveris ederent non nulla signa cruentationis, titillationis vel spumationis, nocens sit reus, sin minus, innocens. Quamvis D. Wilh. Romanus in *diff. De corpore delicti in criminibus facti permanentis potioribus, ad effectum condemnationis considerate* c. 2.2 cum Paul, Zach, *Medicolegal* 8. *Lib.5 tit 2.n.8* neget talia signa a mortuis suis petia, eum in finem, ut ex cadaveris cruentatione, fatalis contingat, suspecti culpa, si secus, e jus veritas tanto plenius probari possit."

Figure 2. Title page of Peter Müller's *Dissertatio*



Source: Oelsner, Christianus Conr., ed. *Dissertatio de Jure Feretri sive Cruentationis vom Baar Rechte*. Litteris Müllenaris, 1680. Available from: Google eBook.

In *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt*, James Whitman argues more generally that pre-modern Europeans used trial by ordeal (all forms, not just the bier right) to not only determine a suspect's guilt or innocence, but also because they did not want the judge to commit a mortal sin by accidentally condemning an innocent man. Believing that the revelation of innocence or guilt came from God, rather than from the decision of the court, removed moral implications for humans. As Whitman discusses, pre-modern jurists were concerned about condemning an innocent person to death, because by doing so, they damned themselves in the process. All throughout the Middle Ages, theologians would warn: "Beware the act of judging... you risk making yourself into a murderer."<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly enough, Whitman's discussion of blood in *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt* does not refer to blood emanating from a murdered corpse; instead, he refers to blood pollution where a person who was responsible for committing an innocent man to death "had blood on his hands" because he caused an unjust death. Therefore, Whitman is not interested in speaking bodies, especially not dead speaking bodies. Rather, he is concerned with the living and their interactions with each other. The relationship between judge and suspect is more important to him than the relationship between murderer and murder victim, which he does not discuss at all. The only time he mentions cruentation is when he writes that "the test of the bier... required a proband accused of murder to tread on the hand of the victim's corpse, in the expectation that the corpse would bleed if the proband was guilty."<sup>44</sup> This is not the only way in which a suspected murderer could interact with the corpse, yet it is the only definition for the bier

---

<sup>43</sup> James Q. Whitman, *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt: Theological Roots of the Criminal Trial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>44</sup> Whitman, *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt*, 59.

test that Whitman provides. Like the other historians who have merely defined what cruentation is, Whitman does not delve deeper into this historical issue of why the body bled, why contemporaries believed the body bleeding was caused by interaction with the murderer, or how contemporaries believed God gave this bleeding corpse the capability to “speak.” Whitman’s focus is largely centered around the judge and jury, not the suspect and bleeding corpse.

The most recent contribution to the scholarship on cruentation is Winston Black’s essay, “Animated Corpses and Bodies in the Scholastic Age” in *Death in Medieval Europe* (2017). While Black’s work is certainly relevant to my own because he focuses on animation of dead bodies, the corpses he focuses on are zombies (also known as revenants), which are stuck somewhere in between the living and the dead. They are not the same as murder victims’ corpses who “speak” in order to reveal injustices; zombies, according to Black, “are indicative of anxieties held by scholastic authors about bodies.”<sup>45</sup> Black discusses the physical movement of the undead zombies, and how zombies represented a merging of new science with theology. Also, Black’s methodology differs from my own. His focus on corpses does not include a close textual analysis of primary documents describing the deaths of these people, nor are his corpses those of murder victims placed in a judicial setting such as the speaking bodies I am studying.

Black uses cruentation as one of his examples of physical changes in the body after death in the context of medieval anxieties directed towards the body. However, Black’s subsection on cruentation is incomplete and inaccurate. He correctly provides his

---

<sup>45</sup> Winston Black, “Animated Corpses and Bodies with Power in the Scholastic Age,” in *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster (London: Routledge, 2017), 73.

readers with the typical definition of cruentation as a phenomenon where the body bleeds in the presence of its murderer, and he cites the well-known literature that references cruentation such as Henri Platelle's *Presence de l'au-delà* and Alain Boureau's "La preuve par le cadavre qui saigne au XIIIe siècle."<sup>46</sup> Yet Black leads his readers astray and inaccurately states that cruentation was "found only in northern Europe," completely ignoring the fact that there is evidence of and references to cruentation occurring in other regions of the world, such as colonial Maryland and even Hungary.<sup>47</sup> Black's analysis does not move past the introduction of cruentation's initial emergence. Tracking cruentation's persistence throughout time is necessary in order to understand the changes in early modern belief in the magical as well as the medical treatment of the body, as well as gender distinctions.

Finally, Black argues that because elite belief in animated corpses was being "both limited and expanded," the dead became "less mobile, less independent... [and] more passive."<sup>48</sup> Since Black does not discuss gendered distinctions between the revenants and other animated bodies he studies, we do not know if Black means to say that *all* corpses were becoming "more passive," or if he even considered the possibility that gender distinctions did exist.

---

<sup>46</sup> Alain Boureau's "La preuve par le cadavre qui saigne au XIIIe siècle" (1999) was published after Platelle's *Presence de l'au-delà* and contains a similar definition for cruentation as the "voice of the blood." Boureau's study differs from Platelle's in the sense that it expands upon the discussion of cruentation by looking at literary works as well as legal documents.

<sup>47</sup> Black, "Animated Corpses," 82-85. Black's discussion of contemporary belief in cruentation is also top-down; he does not mention that people of humble origins also believed in the phenomenon. Instead, he states that cruentation was a belief "among the learned elite."

<sup>48</sup> Black, "Animated Corpses," 82.

## DEMONIC POSSESSION AND EXORCISM

With cruentation, the crime of murder was apparent, but the identity of the murderer was difficult to uncover. Thus, there was one way of revealing the truth and allowing the body to speak out against its murderer: an effusion of blood. With possession, however, the criminal (i.e. the person who supposedly caused the possession) was clearly identified, but it was difficult for contemporaries to determine whether possession had actually occurred or not. In Loudun, for instance, the Ursulines' accusation of Grandier is explicit; what is not clear, however, is whether the Ursulines were truly the victims of possession or not.

Determining the truth via possession was problematic because there was no standard expression of demonic possession in early modern Europe, which meant that it was difficult to distinguish between a real possession and a fake one. Possession could be characterized by the following: convulsions, physical pain, rigidity of limbs, contortions, levitation, vomiting, fasting, knowledge of foreign languages, changes in tone of voice, blasphemy, and more.<sup>49</sup> Multiple signs of demonic influence therefore make it difficult to come up with a precise definition of demonic possession. Once it had been established that a person was possessed, however, exorcism needed to be performed.

---

<sup>49</sup> Brian Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 6. See also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 569. "A person into whom an evil spirit had entered... would suffer from hysterical fits, wild convulsions and contortions, analgesia, strange vomitings, even total paralysis."

~

The Word Exorcism... is so call'd, from an Ancient Ceremony, which the Church has always practised, since the beginning of Christianity, & still daily uses by the Ministry of her Priests, empower'd & commission'd expressly by Jesus Christ Himself; to Eject, or Cast forth devils, out of the Bodies, which they Possess, or which they Obsess: or out of any other Creatures whatsoever, animate or Inanimate.<sup>50</sup>

In the definition for exorcism above, eighteenth-century English monk Gregory Greenwood reveals that like cruentation, exorcism as a practice had ancient origins. However, unlike cruentation, which fell under a broader category of trial by ordeal and could involve either good or bad spirits, contemporaries such as Greenwood believed that exorcism worked to “eject, or cast forth devils,” meaning that possession almost always involved diabolical spirits.

As mentioned previously, this thesis primarily focuses on one case of demonic possession, the case of the Loudun nuns, in order to remain within a plausible scope. However, in order to better understand the trends in scholarship on possession, it is important to introduce historians' works that deal with possession in a broader category of “magical” beliefs and connections to witchcraft, just as it is important to understand cruentation as one practice belonging to a broader category of trial by ordeal in general.

Keith Thomas' well-known *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) illustrates sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English beliefs about magical practices, and how these practices converged with religious and scientific beliefs at the time. While modern-day people may consider “magical” practices such as exorcism to be unusual, Thomas

---

<sup>50</sup> Gregory Greenwood, “A Short Account of the Blessings of the Catholick Church, Particularly of Holy Water” (c. 1723-1730), Downside Abbey MS 675 fol. 1 in Francis Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553-1829* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 191.

reveals that exorcism was just one of many practices that was intrinsic to everyday life in early modern England.<sup>51</sup>

From the 1970s to 1990s, possession and exorcism tended to feature within broader historical works about “magical” practices and witchcraft trials, since many people accused of being witches were also accused of using their diabolical powers to cause possession, much like Grandier was. According to Thomas, “it was frequently believed that an evil spirit had entered into a victim because a witch had sent him there,” so the notions of possession and witchcraft were “intertwined.”<sup>52</sup> However, around the beginning of the twenty-first century, possession and exorcism garnered more attention from historians as topics deserving of studies within their own right.

For example, Brian Levack has published several different works on witchcraft which mention possession, but his most recent publication, *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (2013), focuses solely on possession and exorcism, independently of witchcraft trials. Most scholarly works that discuss demonic possession provide either one of two explanations for the phenomenon – that it was either fraud or illness – but Levack claims that these two explanations are not sufficient answers for the phenomenon of demonic possession. Instead, Levack argues that we must consider both demoniacs and exorcists as actors, performing roles in “religious dramas.” Whether they were aware of it or not, Levack says, “they were playing roles and following scripts that were encoded in their respective religious cultures.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 569-588.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 570.

<sup>53</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*, 29.

Jonathan L. Pearl shares Levack's interpretation of the theatricality of possession, and claims that the theatricality of possession cases was used to reaffirm the power of the Catholic Church, supposedly the only church capable of expelling demons. According to Pearl, "Exorcisms were theatrically staged and highly publicized in order to gain the widest possible audience for the claims of the exorcists that Protestantism (and toleration of Protestantism) was evil, fomented by the Devil."<sup>54</sup>

Levack and Pearl assert that not only did demoniacs play roles, but everyone involved in an exorcism – the neighbors, exorcists, and family members – had roles to play. This supports the idea that possession cases were quite public. As we will see, demoniacs' exorcisms were spectacles that were carried out in public, and the attention drawn to this phenomenon firmly placed these speaking bodies in the public sphere, a male-gendered space, which affected the way the demoniacs spoke, and the way these other actors interpreted the demoniacs' speech.

Not only should we recognize the performativity of a person playing the role of a demoniac, but we should also recognize the performativity of gender, and how contemporaries interpreted these performances of gender. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a specific link between gender performance and demonic possession. According to Butler, "gender is always a doing," and by performing the role of the demoniac, the Ursuline nuns effectively performed a role ascribed to females.<sup>55</sup> Because of gender's performativity, this identity was not fixed, and the nuns' performance can be seen as upholding societal norms expected of women at the time.

---

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan L. Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes: Demonology and Politics in France, 1560-1620* (1998), 42.

<sup>55</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge University Press, 1990), 25.

However, this is not to say that the Ursulines had control over their performance. In fact, Butler would argue quite the opposite; because gender performativity is a “process, a becoming,” the nuns’ performance as demoniacs was out of their control.<sup>56</sup>

Ever since the seventeenth century, Urbain Grandier’s trial and the possession of the Loudun nuns has produced a number of historical monographs. However, prior to Robert Rapley’s *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (1998), it had not been a topic of focus for Anglophone historians, with almost all scholarship being written in French. Anglophone historians of witchcraft, politics, and possession in early modern France have often made generalized references to it in broader historical works, but no one had published a thorough study in English. Prior to Rapley’s study, the only exposure English speakers had to this case was Aldous Huxley’s *The Devils of Loudun* (1952), written for a popular audience, and Ken Russell’s highly sexualized X-rated film, *The Devils* (1971). While Rapley may not provide a new argument or approach to Grandier’s trial and the public exorcisms of the Ursuline nuns, he does provide a well-researched narrative for those who are not literate in French.

In the beginning of *A Case of Witchcraft*, Rapley presents several examples to support his claim that Grandier’s political and ecclesiastical enemies in Loudun contributed to his downfall and subsequent execution, further demonstrating how historians often incorporate possession and exorcism cases into studies with a broader purpose than simply exploring early modern belief in the practice itself. For example, Grandier fell out of favor with the prominent Louis Trincant due to his supposed impregnation and abandonment of Trincant’s daughter, Phillippe. Rapley cites other

---

<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

enemies such as Cardinal Richelieu, who Grandier supposedly humiliated in regards to a church procession hierarchy.<sup>57</sup> Richelieu eventually became the king's first minister, and thus gained a position of power higher than Grandier's.

Rapley characterizes the Loudun possessions as a witchcraft trial; however, the relationship between witchcraft and possession in early modern France has been contested by historians. Some historians consider possession a separate category from witchcraft, whereas others believe the two are interrelated. According to D.P. Walker, the reason why so many possession cases are intertwined with witchcraft cases is because witchcraft cases left traces in legal documents; cases of possession without witchcraft accusation, however, frequently went undocumented and are therefore largely absent from legal documents.<sup>58</sup> Whether one considers possession and witchcraft to be intertwined or separate categories, one cannot deny that the two practices informed one another.

Some early modern demonological texts state that a demon could either enter a person's body directly, or under the command of a witch.<sup>59</sup> Contemporaries believed that God gave the devil (and by extension, witches) this permission because He was punishing the sinner, and testing and refining the "elect."<sup>60</sup> However, according to Brian Levack, because early modern Europeans believed that demons most often directly entered the

---

<sup>57</sup> Robert Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 16.

<sup>58</sup> Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Brian Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 231.

<sup>60</sup> Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, 6. See also Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1487). According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, devils can enter human bodies with God's permission.

body, witches were less likely to be suspected for the crime of possession.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the Ursuline nuns' claims that Grandier was responsible for their possessions are somewhat unusual. Why would Grandier need to act as an intermediary between the demons and the nuns, if demons could enter bodies without an intermediary? Because of this, some historians believe that due to early modern demonological texts' descriptions of possession, possession was not entirely dependent on a witch and thus could be considered a separate matter from witchcraft.

Sarah Ferber opposes the separation of witchcraft and possession. In *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (2004), Ferber argues that demonic possession must be placed in the context of witchcraft beliefs and cases, or else one cannot fully understand contemporaries' use of possession or the role it played in reaffirming the power of the Catholic Church. Rapley may identify Grandier's case as witchcraft, but *A Case of Witchcraft* does not focus on contemporary witchcraft beliefs, nor does it provide an analysis of witch-hunting practices in early modern France. Rapley's study tells us more about the political climate of early modern France than it does about witchcraft trials and beliefs in seventeenth-century France.

Most historians who have written about the Loudun possessions and other possession cases in general have emphasized the importance of politics. Similar to Rapley's study, Huxley's monograph provides examples of religious and political tension in seventeenth-century Loudun, and implies that these tensions directly affected the outcome of Grandier's trial. For example, Huxley describes how one of the demons possessing the Ursuline Prioress Jeanne des Anges blasphemed God, Jesus, and the

---

<sup>61</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*.

Virgin Mary, “but never Louis XIII, and never, above all, [Richelieu] his eminence.”<sup>62</sup>

Huxley suggests that Grandier was condemned and tried not because the ecclesiastical authorities were concerned about witchcraft per se, but because Grandier had offended and humiliated some of the most powerful men in Loudun. Trying Grandier for witchcraft was a way for the authorities to achieve a means to an end.

Several contemporaries questioned the validity of possession and possession’s relationship with witchcraft. Typically contemporaries believed that a possession case could have one of three outcomes: either the supposed demoniac was indeed possessed by a demon, was ill, or was committing fraud.<sup>63</sup> Johann Weyer (1515-1588), a Rhenish Protestant demonologist, believed in the Devil and his ability to possess people, but he did not believe in the possibility of witches causing possessions, since witchcraft did not appear in the Bible.<sup>64</sup>

Robert Mandrou’s case studies in *Possession et Sorcellerie au XVIIe Siècle* (1979) all feature female demoniacs, but the condemned people accused of causing the possessions are both male and female. Mandrou was interested in understanding the mindset of early modern Europeans in regards to possession, and how their understanding affected their approach to exorcisms. Grandier’s trial is one of Mandrou’s case studies. However, unlike the other historians who emphasize early modern French political and religious tensions in regards to Grandier’s trial, Mandrou uses Grandier’s case as one of many examples of the theatrics of power, organized chronologically to reflect the gradual

---

<sup>62</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun* (New York: Book of the Month Club, 1952), 156.

<sup>63</sup> Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Levack, *Sourcebook*, 235.

decline of possession cases. According to Mandrou, possession cases gradually declined because public exorcisms could possibly cause scandals. If the demoniac did not act in the way the crowd expected her to act, or if public witnesses to the exorcism were not convinced of its legitimacy, this worked to undermine the authority of the Catholic Church, which could only become worse if the number of skeptics increased.

While these historians touch upon the importance of power dynamics in relation to social standing, they do not focus on gendered power dynamics in their works. While Mandrou rightfully identifies Grandier's case as an example of the theatrics of power, he does not focus on the intersection of gender with power, despite the fact that his explanation for possession cases' gradual decline could benefit from an analysis including gender.

As we will see in the following chapter, contemporaries believed women were more likely to be possessed since their bodies were weaker than men's, and more susceptible to outside forces such as demonic entities. And if an exorcist was able to successfully expel a demon from inside a female body, this worked to demonstrate the Catholic Church's masculine dominance over the demon, considered inferior to the Church's power since it was housed inside a female body. Therefore, because the Church's ability to demonstrate its power related to its ability to dominate a female body, the public spectacle of exorcism depended on a female body to perform in an appropriate manner. If a female body's performance seemed uncontrollable, even when this body was possessed by a male demon, this compromised the power of the Church in a very public setting by not only showing that the exorcist could not expel the demon, but by showing the Church's inability to control a female body.

Nicky Hallett's *Witchcraft, Exorcism, and the Politics of Possession in a Seventeenth-Century Convent* (2007) is one of the most recent publications pertaining to possession, and unlike Levack, Carmona, Mandrou, Ferber, and Walker, she specifically considers the role of gender in the context of possession. Hallett's study explores the bewitchment, possession, and exorcism of two nuns living in an English convent in the Spanish Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Because women's voices are often absent from primary documents, Hallett aims to make the voices of early modern women heard. Her source base is a set of the two nuns' diaries, which they wrote before, during, and after their exorcisms. This source base is particularly unique because accounts of exorcisms are typically written by observers and exorcists, not the demoniacs themselves. Hallett's case studies have similarities to the Loudun possessions in the sense that the demoniacs are also nuns, but Hallett focuses much more on these women's agency through their writing – and not so much through their actions while possessed – as opposed to the Loudun primary sources, which place the Ursuline nuns in a passive role.

All of these historians studying the Loudun possessions come to a general consensus that the reason why Grandier was executed for witchcraft was due to political motivations and actions his enemies took against him. Furthermore, the sources adhere to the belief that the possessed nuns' role in the case was political, and that they were simply following orders from religious authorities on how to act and what to say. Many historians, both French and American, also agree that demonic exorcism in general served as a tool in church reform. After the Protestant Reformation, France was religiously divided, and the Catholic Church sought to stop the spread of Protestantism, and convince Huguenots to return to the Catholic Church. Successful cases of demonic

exorcism served as visual displays intended to assist church reform.

The Loudun possessions are typically pulled into a larger network of witchcraft studies. These sources provide a broad synthesis about witchcraft beliefs, trials, and persecution in general, and use the Loudun possessions as one example of supposed witchcraft beliefs that contemporaries held. However, even in historical studies that have focused specifically on demonic possession in early modern France and not on witchcraft in general, such as Ferber's *Demonic Possession and Exorcism* (2004), Loudun is only briefly mentioned.

The concept of possession was gendered, and possession displays the power and control male authorities held over female demoniacs. While the nuns' testimonies against Grandier were ultimately deemed legitimate, one must note that the nuns' voices themselves were not heard. The only way these "speaking bodies" were heard was when the nuns were used as masculine mouthpieces which brought forth information to convict Grandier. And because Grandier had mistresses, his execution can be seen as the church's way of emasculating and eliminating someone who threatened seventeenth-century priestly gender norms. In the context of this case, gender can be seen as a symbol of power, which was used to exert control over Grandier as well as the nuns, who were used as objects to aid in bringing Grandier's execution to fruition. The Loudun possessions exemplify an attempt on the nuns' part to defy early modern French gender norms; the nuns held a position of authority only during their publicly displayed exorcisms, which allowed them to speak out against Grandier in a way that would otherwise be impossible for seventeenth-century French women.

~

One would expect that due to the vast array of primary source documentation that exists on possession and exorcism, that there would be more historical monographs published that focus solely on possession. Strangely enough, however, this abundance of sources does not equate to an abundance of purely possession-based studies. Although studies about possession certainly exist, such as Levack's *The Devil Within*, possession is still typically incorporated into studies about other "magical" practices such as witchcraft.

What about cruentation? As the historiographical information surveyed for this thesis reveals, a study that focuses solely on cruentation does not currently exist. Therefore, despite the differences in quantity of source material between possession and cruentation, their historiographies are similar in the sense that the two practices, when featured in historical scholarship, are drawn into broader discussions of both magical beliefs and trial by ordeal, respectively.

With cruentation, bleeding corpses were dependent on outside living sources in the sense that they needed a living person to be present to witness their emanation of blood, thus revealing the truth and unmasking their murderers. Possessed bodies undergoing exorcism, on the other hand, were subject to both inside and outside sources in the form of the demons possessing their bodies, potential witches who caused the possessions in the first place, exorcists expelling the demons, witnesses to the possessions, and so forth. Therefore, cruentation as a judicial truth-finding method remained more independent than possession, which relied on various different factors to confirm its legitimacy.

## CHAPTER III

### WHAT IS THE BODY?

Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine “mystery.”<sup>65</sup>

While there were many questions left unanswered in early modern Europe about the human body, no type of body was more mysterious to contemporaries than the feminine body. In the quote from *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) above, Simone de Beauvoir discusses the “mystery” that is women’s oppression by men in a patriarchal society where women are categorized as other, and inferior to the “first sex,” the male sex. Much like how de Beauvoir discussed the feminine body as a “mystery” to man in the twentieth century, we must decode the mystery that is the early modern understanding of the body. In order to understand how anyone could believe that bodies had the capability to speak through supernatural means to reveal some unknown truth, we must first be familiar with early modern understanding of the body itself, both as a physical and spiritual entity.

Prior to the medical revolution of the seventeenth century, all bodies were seen as mysterious, as Laura Gowing points out; female bodies, however, were more mysterious than male bodies.<sup>66</sup> Were male bodies and male speech more readily accepted because in a masculine patriarchal society, men could not make sense of female bodies due to their mystery? Was it easier to accept a male bleeding corpse than a female one because men understood other male bodies better than they understood female bodies? In early modern Europe, the distinction between religion, science, and beliefs that we might label today as

---

<sup>65</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 256.

<sup>66</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 40.

“magical” overlapped with one another, and this intertwining can be seen in early modern understanding of the human body as well.

In 1832, *The Scots Weekly Magazine* called the Law of the Bier a “superstition of our forefathers,” but said that out of all superstitions, contemporaries took this one in particular the most seriously, and openly practiced it in public for all to see. According to the magazine, early modern people believed that blood was more than just a red fluid in bodies: it was life, and the very soul of the deceased.<sup>67</sup> This animation of a biological substance as the life of a dead person explains why early modern Europeans and colonial Americans believed that bleeding was the deceased’s way of “speaking out” against its murderer. Since the dead could no longer speak with their mouths, it was necessary for them to resort to some other form of communication in order to have agency, such as an emanation of blood.

Why did these “speaking bodies” merit attention from their contemporaries? When there was no other means of discovering the truth, especially when it came to matters of crimes involving murder and diabolism, early modern people relied on these forms of bodily manipulation to “test the spirits” and extract the truth.<sup>68</sup>

## RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON UNDERSTANDING OF THE BODY

Most early modern Christians understood crucifixion to be an example of God’s divine providence and ability to bring justice to those who were wrongfully murdered.

---

<sup>67</sup> “Law of the Bier,” *The Scots Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3; (Edinburgh: 1833): 33.

<sup>68</sup> Nancy Caciola and Moshe Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies: The Discernment of Spirits in Medieval and Early Modern Europe” (*Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 1:1, 2012): 1.

Because of this religious understanding, we can view the bleeding corpse motif as a parallel image of Christ bleeding on the crucifix, because both Christ and the murder victims discussed in this thesis experienced some form of betrayal. From a religious viewpoint, God eventually avenged each of the victims' deaths by revealing their murderers. While people considered Christ's blood holy, they viewed the corpses' flowing blood as a sign of God's divine power. The fact that all of the religious motifs presented in this chapter are comparing bleeding corpses to Christ's body could suggest that contemporaries believed God granted power to male bodies such as Christ's, the ability to speak out in the form of an effusion of blood.

Christianity played an important role in nearly all aspects of early modern life, and contemporaries' understanding of the human body was greatly influenced by the Church. Aside from the obvious fact that contemporaries believed that God had created men and women and placed them on Earth, the idea of "the body" was used to refer to the Church collectively. In sixteenth-century Lyon, for instance, French ecclesiastics used a corporeal metaphor to refer to the Church. They considered Jesus Christ the "head" of the church, and God the "animator" of the body.<sup>69</sup>

We see this bodily understanding in the early modern conception of cruentation, since God was believed to have given these bleeding bodies the agency they needed to speak out. And because exorcists acted as an extension of God on Earth, helping to bring about the animation and hopefully expulsion of the demon from the demoniac's body, again we see this religious connection to the early modern understanding of the body in

---

<sup>69</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," *Past & Present*, no. 90 (1981): 65.

exorcism. Both God, and God's earthly extension in the form of exorcists, acted as animators of these speaking bodies.<sup>70</sup>

This metaphor of the church as a human body can be applied to both the Protestant and Catholic Church in early modern Europe.<sup>71</sup> For instance, "the Protestant service, *La forme des prieres ecclesiastiques*, was a communication in which the pastor was described variously as the 'mouth' of the Lord talking to the attentive ear of the faithful, and as the 'mouth' of the congregation talking to the Lord."<sup>72</sup> The "mouth" of the body of the church was a two-way street; the pastor could use this mouth to communicate directly with God, but he could also use it to communicate with the rest of the body: the congregation. As we can see, early modern bodily metaphors are ubiquitous, and the resilience of these ideas transcended confessional differences.

---

<sup>70</sup> According to Kallendorf, exorcists could have been "male or female, clerics or laymen, although a male priest or minister is the most typical exorcist figure during this time period." *Exorcism and its Texts*, xviii. In the case of Urbain Grandier and the Loudun nuns, the only exorcists involved were male priests.

<sup>71</sup> We can deduce the religious denomination of the murder cases examined for this thesis by looking at the geographical location where these murders occurred. For example, in sixteenth-century France, Bertrand d'Argentré, head of the présidial court in Rennes, allowed magistrates to use cruentation as legal evidence in the courts of Bourdeaux and Chassanee. In Spain, another Catholic country, courts also placed their trust in the practice. In 1644 Aragon, for instance, a suspect stood in front of the victim's corpse in the town square for all to see. The body reportedly did not bleed, but it "raised up its right arm, pointed with its fingers to the several wounds and then to the accused." After the magistrates witnessed this miraculous display, they executed the suspect. (See Lea, *Superstition and Force*, 366.) In addition to European confessional differences, a biographical dictionary from colonial Maryland alphabetically documents the colonists who resided there from 1635-1789, and lists their religious affiliations. The majority of the Maryland colonists documented were Protestants, Anglicans, or Quakers. Catholics were a very small minority in colonial Maryland during the time the murders examined in this thesis took place. (See Edward C. Pafenfuse et. al, "A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature 1635-1789," Archives of Maryland Online). Various forms of Protestantism dominated other American territories during the early colonial period, and remained far more popular than Catholicism well into the nineteenth century. The Virginia Historical Census of 1870, for example, reveals that nineteenth-century Virginians were predominantly Methodist. Out of all religious organizations in the state, 1,011 Methodist organizations existed at the time of the murder case examined in this thesis. (See University of Virginia Library. "Virginia 1870," Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/state.php>).

<sup>72</sup> Davis, "The Sacred and the Body": 65.

Just as the corporeal metaphor could be applied to both Protestant and Catholic churches, the two denominations both believed in and practiced cruentation, despite their differing viewpoints on Christ's physical versus metaphorical body. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546) and his followers criticized Catholics, thinking they were more susceptible to belief in "magical" occurrences, especially because of the Catholic belief in transubstantiation (miraculous transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ during the sacrament of the mass). According to Luther, transubstantiation was a "figment of human opinion."<sup>73</sup>

Like Luther's treatise *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Protestant Henry Pendlebury's religious tract *A Plain Representation of Transubstantiation* argued against transubstantiation, calling it a "gross absurdity" that rejected sense, faith, reason, and scripture.<sup>74</sup> According to Pendlebury, the Catholic belief that the bread turned into God's body went against reason, since a corporeal body could not be in more than one place at a time. Furthermore, he argued that it was impossible for Jesus to eat with his disciples at the Last Supper while simultaneously serving his body to them.<sup>75</sup> Because of this Protestant perception that Catholics believed in "miracles" that went against reason, some may find it surprising that the two denominations both utilized a "magical" practice like cruentation. However, the interesting point to notice here is not that Protestants

---

<sup>73</sup> See Martin Luther, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). In this treatise, Luther rejects the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, but nevertheless agrees that Jesus Christ's presence is contained within the Eucharist. He writes, "Since then it is not necessary to lay it down that a transubstantiation is effected by the operation of divine power, it must be held as a figment of human opinion; for it rests on no support of Scripture or of reason. It is forcing on us a novel and absurd usage of words, to take bread as meaning the form or accidents of bread, and wine as the form or accidents of wine."

<sup>74</sup> Henry Pendlebury, *A Plain Representation of Transubstantiation, as it is Received in the Church of Rome: With the Sandy Foundations it is Built Upon, and the Arguments that Do Clearly Evert and Overturn it* (London: J. Johnson, 1687), 4.

<sup>75</sup> Pendlebury, *A Plain Representation of Transubstantiation*, 6.

shared belief in a “magical” bodily phenomenon with Catholics, but that they shared the same type of understanding when it came to differences between the male and female body. Both Catholics and Protestants believed that female bodies were weaker than men’s bodies, both physically and mentally, and this belief influenced their treatment of female bodies in regards to cruentation and possession. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, cruentation’s persistence compared to exorcism’s demise had less to do with religious and “magical” beliefs, and more to do with gender perceptions.

In addition to the corporeal metaphor for the Church, other Christian metaphors and beliefs connected the human body to the body of Jesus Christ. “*Hoc est corpus meum*” referred to the Eucharist (also known as the host), which contemporaries believed became Christ’s body during transubstantiation.<sup>76</sup> Early modern Europeans believed that the host was capable of performing miracles. According to a Carmelite friar named Tomasz Rerus, in 1399 a Christian woman stole three hosts from mass and delivered them to some Jews, who wanted to test the hosts to see if they were truly the body of “our Lord the Savior.” The Jews desecrated the three hosts (Figure 3), stabbing them with knives, which caused blood to burst out of the hosts and stain the Jews' faces. They could not wipe the blood off from their faces. In an attempt to cover up their crime, the Jews buried the hosts. However, the hosts rose up from the ground, and a shepherd discovered them.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> The Latin phrase “*Hoc est corpus meum*” translates to “this is my body” in English.

<sup>77</sup> Magda Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege After the Reformation*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 97.

Blood emanating from the desecrated hosts parallels the bleeding corpse, specifically the bleeding corpse of Jesus Christ.

**Figure 3. *Desecration of the Host***



**Source:** John Siferwas, *Desecration of the Host*. 1400-1410, Missal Pages, detail of two men desecrating the host in a marginal painting. The British Library Digital Catalogue. Available from: British Library MS, <http://www.bl.uk>.

The following Polish song describes host desecration:

O Jesus, unsurpassed in your goodness,  
Stabbed by Jews and soaked in blood again  
Through your new wounds  
And spilled springs of blood  
Have Mercy on Us, Have Mercy on Us, Have Mercy!<sup>78</sup>

Similar to how a bleeding corpse could reveal its murderer, contemporaries believed that the Eucharist, when stolen by Jews, would bleed in the Jews' presence, "crying out" to reveal its location to Christians and alert them of the Jews' crime of

---

<sup>78</sup> Teter, *Sinners on Trial*, 89.

stealing the Eucharist.<sup>79</sup> In a tale told by Rerus, the Jews' testing of the hosts to either confirm or deny their legitimacy as the body of Christ seems to act as a sort of trial by ordeal, similar to the test of the bier. The Jews' test of the host results in a Eucharistic miracle, because by bleeding and staining the Jews' faces with blood, the hosts revealed wrongdoing that questioned the legitimacy of the "Lord and Savior" Jesus Christ, thus reaffirming the power of God's ability to grant miracles. Because the host is supposed to be a part of Christ's body, and because the lyrics in the Polish song above refer to wounds Jesus received when he was "stabbed by Jews," this suggests that there is a connection between cruentation and Eucharistic miracles.<sup>80</sup> In both instances, physical connection – or at the very least proximity between body and criminal – is confirmed with the emergence of blood. Blood marks the wrongdoer; similar to how a corpse on the bier would bleed when touched by its murderer, blood serves to mark the Jews as criminals in this tale, this time literally since the blood stains their faces.

It is also important to note here that no matter how many times the Jews stabbed the hosts or tried to burn, bury, or destroy them, the hosts endured, another sign of a miracle attributed to God. Blood was understood to be the life force inside the human

---

<sup>79</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 149. "The hosts supposedly desecrated at Sternberg, at Berlin-Brandenburg-Stendal, and at Heiligengrabe stream forth blood as if they are living bodies, crying for vengeance but proving that God cannot perish."

<sup>80</sup> Eucharistic miracles also featured in Catholic exorcisms as well. See Levack, *The Devil Within*, 105. The use of the Eucharist in exorcisms occurred for several reasons: to show God's presence, as well as to "expose the inability of Protestants to achieve the same miraculous results" as Catholics. Fragments of God's body, in the form of the Eucharist, had power over bodies possessed by demons. See Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, "Devil Theatre: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642 (*Studies in Renaissance Literature*, Vol 19, 2007): 59. "The host was used as an instrument of exorcism, while exorcism was often triumphantly presented as evidence for the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation... it was through the power of the host that the devil was expelled from Nicole's body: *Le thesor en entiere histoire de la triomphante victoire du Corps du Dieu sur l'esprit maling Beelzebub, obtenu à Laon, l'an 1566.*"

body, so one can interpret the emanation of blood as a sign of God's endurance and desire to avenge wrongful actions brought against Christians. Even though a bleeding corpse was dead, the fact that it was bleeding was believed to be a sign of action, and proof that God was very much alive within this corpse, giving it the power to speak out against those who violated the natural order of life.<sup>81</sup>

The early modern motif of Christ in the winepress (Figure 4) is another example of how religious understanding converged with the biological understanding of the body. With transubstantiation, early modern Christians believed that the wine and Eucharist were actually Christ's blood and body. A popular motif that illustrates this process is *Christ in the Winepress*, which shows Christ standing in a winepress, and his body replaces the grapes used to make wine. Some scholars interpret the winepress motif as an image of suffering that contemporaries could relate to by placing themselves in Christ's role.<sup>82</sup> Because contemporaries could place themselves in the position of *Christ in the Winepress*, this suggests the universality of a male bleeding corpse. *Christ in the Winepress* represented any male body that could potentially bleed.

Bleeding corpses parallel Christ's body in another way as well; just how Christ sacrificed his body for sinners on earth, the bleeding corpse is also a sacrificial body of sorts. While life was no longer a viable option for the bleeding corpse, cruentation nevertheless allowed dead bodies to serve a greater purpose beyond their deaths, just like

---

<sup>81</sup> In addition to the belief that Jews supposedly practiced host desecration, early modern Christians also believed that Jews committed ritual murder by killing Christian children and using their blood for Jewish magic. This rumor stemmed from gossip, illustrated depictions of Jewish ritual murder, and folk tales from the past. See R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 29.

<sup>82</sup> John R. Decker, Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, ed. *Death, Torture, and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300-1650* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 10.

how Christ's blood and body served a greater purpose beyond his death. Contemporaries believed that Christ gave his body and blood for sinners on Earth, and the bleeding corpse mimics this sacrificial offering by offering the hidden truth; thus, the bleeding corpse serves the purpose of revealing its murderer.

**Figure 4.** *Christ in the Winepress*, 16th century



**Source:** *Christ in the Winepress*. Netherlands, 16th century. Print of woodcut, hand-colored. Rosenwald Collection. Available from: National Gallery of Art, <https://images.nga.gov>.

God's ability to bring about miracles was a common belief in early modern Europe, and divine providence worked in other instances when the truth was hidden which did not involve the victim's bleeding corpse. *The Horrible Murther of a Young Boy of Three Yeres of Age* (1606) describes a murder committed by a Hertfordshire woman, Mother Dell, and her son. According to the pamphlet, a robber who had murdered the children's parents brought them to Mother Dell's home. Dell and her son murdered the young boy, and also cut out the boy's older sister's tongue, "hard by the rootes," so she could not speak out against them and reveal their crime. The young boy was found later "dead in a ditch of water not farre from towne," and the tongue-less girl was found inside a tree in a forest far away from town, where Dell had led her after cutting out her tongue, to what was supposed to be "her grave."<sup>83</sup>

Although still tongue-less, the young girl miraculously was able to make a noise, albeit not yet speech, so that a man walking by "(not by chance, but surely by the providence and appointment of God)," heard her. The young girl left the town where her brother was murdered by Dell. Four years passed, and the murderers had still not been discovered. For some reason, (probably due to divine providence again), the tongue-less girl returned to the town where she witnessed her brother's murder, and pointed at the murderers, alerting the neighbors. The town tailor, having remembered the murdered boy found in a ditch four years ago, suspected that the people the girl was pointing to might be the murderers. Brought before the court justices, the murderers still did not confess to the crime, and the tongue-less girl remained unable to speak. However, when Mother

---

<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, *The horrible murther of a young boy of three yeres of age, whose sister had her tongue cut out and how it pleased God to reueale the offenders, by giuing speech to the tongueles childe. Which offenders were executed at Hartford the 4. of August. 1606.*, (London : E. Allde, 1606), NP.

Dell and her son were “put to the ordinarie tryall,” the tongue-less girl stood before the jury and told them what had happened to her and her brother. Looking inside the girl’s mouth and only seeing a “stub” where a tongue should be, the jury returned with their verdict: guilty.<sup>84</sup>

While this story does not involve a dead body, let alone a bleeding body speaking out against its murderer, the tongue-less child’s ability to speak out against the criminals in order to reveal the truth exemplifies the early modern belief in divine providence, as well as the idea that the body was capable of performing miracles, if it was God’s will. The jury uses this girl’s lack of a tongue, yet her ability to speak, as proof of God’s intervention on behalf of this murder trial.

The reason why early modern Europeans were willing to listen to “speaking bodies,” both in the form of bleeding corpses and demoniacs, is largely dependent on who exactly was controlling these bodies. As early modern understanding of the body shows us, God was considered the great animator of the human body. When bodies that spoke revealed murderers or brought justice to the deceased, these speaking bodies’ knowledge was deemed true and divine, as if God Himself spoke through the guise of these bleeding corpses. Therefore, knowing where the speaking bodies received their knowledge was vital, since it could either determine divine or diabolical ties. Demoniacs, on the other hand, also had truth or knowledge to share with their audiences. While early modern Europeans could have considered speech emanating from a demon’s mouth to be false – if the demon was speaking of its own will – the speech brought about by the exorcist, the earthly extension of the great animator Himself, was considered legitimate.

---

<sup>84</sup> Anon., *The horrible murther of a young boy of three yeres of age*, NP.

Therefore, bodies could speak of their own accord; but the power they received as a result of this speech was left in the hands of the manipulators, who must have possessed some form of religious authority if their power to manipulate these bodies was to be accepted as true.

### BIOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS OF THE BODY

Are religious understandings of the body the only reason why male bleeding bodies might be more susceptible to speaking through an effusion of blood or demonic internal forces and not women's bodies? While early modern Christian beliefs distinguished between male and female bodies, so did biological beliefs. Early modern European conception of biological distinctions between a male and female bodies differs greatly from our twenty-first-century understanding. For instance, in the early modern period, people believed that four humors existed within the human body, and men and women had different humoral compositions. The four humors were yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm. These humors, or fluids, determined the sex of a human being as well as the person's temperament. Therefore, intersectionality existed between a human's physical health as well as his or her emotional health.<sup>85</sup> While men were considered hot and dry, women were cold and wet; women were also supposedly more likely to experience melancholy due to their cold humoral composition. Men, according to early modern Europeans, were prone to being more violent than women because they associated the male humoral composition of hot and dry with anger. Because of the early modern belief in the four humors and the way in which the humors existed in male and

---

<sup>85</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 2.

female bodies, the two genders were understood to be opposites of one another. This idea of sexual difference based on the four humors was not a new concept, but one that had survived from ancient times.

What can we make of this idea of opposite biological body types in relation to possessed bodies and bleeding corpses? Because female bodies were considered to be biologically weaker due to their humoral composition, contemporaries felt this explained why women were more prone to falling victim to demonic forces, because their physical bodies were biologically constructed in a weaker fashion than men's. Other kinds of bodies that were susceptible to demonic possession included the bodies of epileptics. According to Pierre Le Loyer, "divells did easily enter [the bodies of epileptics], at such time as the evill or fit tooke them, and did speake by their mouthes unto the Magicians, or by some other externall signes."<sup>86</sup> Because diseased bodies were also likely to become possessed by demonic forces due to their "weak" biological state, one could argue that early modern Europeans believed that the female sex was a "disease" in its own sense, and contributed to a higher instance of demonic possession in bodies that were ascribed female.

### SPIRITS AND SOULS

While early modern Europeans believed that male and female bodies differed biologically due to their humoral composition, their belief in the soul was more ambiguous and lacked strict gender boundaries. Early modern Europeans believed that all

---

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Le Loyer, *A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights, Visions, and Apparitions Appearing Sensibly unto men* (London: 1605), 134.

humans were composed of two parts which made a person whole: a body and a soul.<sup>87</sup> In *The Visions of the Soul, Before it comes into the Body* (1692), the anonymous author wrote the treatise in the form of a dialogue between different spirits and the souls of various people who have died. The prefatory dialogue of the treatise involves a conversation between the “secretary of fate” and the author’s soul, thus giving speech to the soul. In a conversation between the spirits of a poet and a drunkard, for instance, the poet spirit is confused about its gender, now that the spirit remains incorporeal, and therefore separated from its soul. The poet spirit says to the drunkard spirit, “by all the observations I can make of my temper, I cannot resolve my self whether *I’m a Male, or a Female Spirit*. But why do I thus busie my self about Sexes?”<sup>88</sup> The poet spirit’s dialogue suggests that after death, it is almost impossible to discern whether a spirit belonged to a male or female body in life. Furthermore, the fact that the poet spirit asks the drunken spirit why it “busies [itself] about Sexes” also suggests that after death, it does not really matter what sex a spirit or a soul was.

However, this indifference to gender did not apply to physical bodies, only to spiritual ones. In another dialogue from the same treatise, this time a dialogue between a Jacobite and a Williamite, the Williamite spirit says that “*All souls are equal, and are only diversify’d by the Dispositions of the Organs.*”<sup>89</sup> That being said, this spirit claims that gender can only be determined in life, when a spirit, as well as a soul, is attached to a corporeal body. Diversification which makes bodies either male or female did not have

---

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, *The Visions of the Soul, Before it comes into the Body. In several dialogues. Written by a member of the Athenian Society.* (London: 1692), NP.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous, *The Visions of the Soul*, NP.

<sup>89</sup> Anonymous, *The Visions of the Soul*, NP.

anything to do with spirits or souls, but with the physical composition of a body, especially with its “organs,” presumably sexual “organs.”

However, the issue of gender differentials between spirits becomes even more complicated when a “whole consistory of spirits” debates what gender the Devil is as a spirit in *The Visions of the Soul, Before it comes into the Body*. According to the consistory of spirits, the “devil is a Male Spirit.”<sup>90</sup> Yet it seems the spirits in this treatise are confused about the true gender of the devil, since they contradict themselves many times throughout the treatise. Even after agreeing upon the idea that the devil is a “male spirit,” a heretic spirit claims that the devil is a

*hermaphrodite*, [and] my reasons are these: ‘Twas a brave and masculine sort of impiety when he pretended himself to be a God, and gave Oracles, and Propheci’ d; but ‘twas a feminine sort of wickedness, to be afraid of the Pentangle of Solomon, the Liver of Tobias...<sup>91</sup>

Early modern documents such as pamphlets, plays and treatises often portrayed the Devil as a masculine entity.<sup>92</sup> However, according to this heretic spirit, the Devil is both man and woman, because the Devil exhibits behaviors that are both masculine *and* feminine. The heretic spirit further describes the Devil’s ambiguous gender, saying,

can the Devil be any thing else but a *Rigil*, that is, either *Man* or *Woman*, to gratifie the Witches, and the Wizards of the world below, Can he be anything else but an *Hermaphordite*, whose Language looks both ways at once, and is either true or false.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous, *The Visions of the Soul*, NP.

<sup>91</sup> Anonymous, *The Visions of the Soul*, NP.

<sup>92</sup> For example, the Devil was often described as appearing in the form of a “black man.” See John Ashton, *The Devil in Britain and in America* (York: Ward and Downey, 1896). The devil was also described as a man wearing a feather cap. See also Alison Rowlands, ed., *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Furthermore, Levack explains how early modern Europeans believed that the Devil could borrow semen from men and use the stolen semen to procreate in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>93</sup> Anonymous, *The Visions of the Soul*, NP.

Even though the heretic spirit says the Devil is a hermaphrodite, notice how the spirit uses the masculine pronoun “he” to describe the devil, despite claiming “he” is a hermaphrodite. Therefore, the gender of spirits was often contested, contradictory, and always confusing.<sup>94</sup> However, even though the sex of the Devil is ambiguous, the ways in which gender are described by these spirits are clearly coded as either male or female. Therefore, while spirits had the potential to be either male or female, their gender was coded by their behaviors, or performances, which were either masculine or feminine. As displayed in the explanation of the devil above, early modern people attributed bravery with male bodies and wickedness with female bodies.

#### DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS IN BODIES

‘tis hard to know by their Words or Signs, when it is a Devil, and when it is a Humane Soul that appeareth.<sup>95</sup>

How did contemporaries know which speaking bodies’ speech they should or should not trust? Early modern Europeans were quite preoccupied with the discernment of good versus bad spirits within a body, a form of epistemological inquiry that related to their desire to know whether evidence was true or not, particularly during the period from 1500-1700.<sup>96</sup> Discernment of spirits was not an easy process; Satan, the Devil, was a fallen angel expelled from heaven, so being able to tell the difference between “good” and “evil” was a complex issue and not as dichotomous as one might think. How did

---

<sup>94</sup> Gowing comments on the confusion of early modern medical books, which she attributes to the medical books’ “composite nature, cobbled together from ancient, medieval, and sixteenth-century texts augmented with folklore and travel stories... it also represents a sense of uncertainty and debate which characterised vernacular guides to the body’s mysteries.” See *Common Bodies*, 3-4.

<sup>95</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 19.

contemporaries separate the good from the bad spirits? In cases of exorcism, it was an exorcist's duty to communicate with the demoniacs, being controlled by the demons inside of them. And for bleeding corpses, the corpses themselves were generally thought to be trustworthy, since contemporaries believed that the reason they had the power to speak through blood was because God granted them the power to do so.

If both good and bad spirits could take over a physical body, how did contemporaries determine if a body was possessed by a divine or a diabolical spirit? Contemporaries did not seem to have a set way to discern the difference, despite the value they placed on discernment. Francis Young explains that “it was a well-established Catholic teaching that only an evil spirit could re-animate a corpse.”<sup>97</sup> Considering this belief, it is important to consider the distinction between a body being occupied by a spirit, and a dead body retaining the soul of its original owner. Why was the re-animation and ability of a body to “speak” by means of cruentation not deemed evil? Perhaps because the reanimation was not caused by an evil spirit, but by God’s divine providence. Despite the possibility that demonic possession might contaminate the testimony of cruentation, it seems as if contemporaries placed trust in the testimony of cruentation because diabolical spirits were more likely to possess living bodies than they were dead ones.<sup>98</sup>

Most people are familiar with the fact that exorcism was used to expel demons, but not everyone is aware of the fact that it was also used to determine whether a demon

---

<sup>97</sup> Francis Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553-1829* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 85.

<sup>98</sup> Le Loyer, “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Spirits,” 5. A diabolical spirit entering a dead body “is a thing that happeneth very seldome, and is against the nature of Spirits and Apparitions.”

was or was not inside a living body in the first place. Early modern Catholics relied on an experienced priest in the role of exorcist to determine whether a person was possessed by a diabolical spirit or not.<sup>99</sup> According to D.P. Walker, contemporaries believed that even if a person was possessed by a demon, the exorcist had the power to manipulate the body into speaking the truth. Even when a demoniac was “interrogated by an experienced priest, the devil’s word may be trusted.”<sup>100</sup> Because contemporaries believed that exorcists possessed the power to accurately distinguish between divine and diabolical spirits, most of the early modern documentation for the discernment of spirits can be found in exorcism records and manuals for exorcists.<sup>101</sup>

How did early modern Europeans distinguish between the physical body and the spiritual body? In the early modern period, it was believed that incorporeal spirits such as specters could visibly appear to people by taking over the physical body of a living person. Because specters did not possess corporeal form, early modern people distinguished them from monsters, which were beings with “corporeal substance.”<sup>102</sup> However, just because a specter was not a monster does not mean that it was not an evil spirit. Both good and evil spirits had the power to occupy a human body. Contemporaries believed that both “Angels and the Divels do take unto them a bodie, not to unite it to their nature... but they doe it onely, that they may visibly represente themselves unto the sight of men.”<sup>103</sup> According to Pierre Le Loyer, it was “proper and naturall” for angels

---

<sup>99</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky also argue that the “professionalization of exorcists [wa]s linked to the growing attention of discernment of spirits in early modern Catholic Europe.” “Spiritual Physiologies”: 28.

<sup>100</sup> Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 19.

<sup>102</sup> Le Loyer, “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Spirits,” 5.

<sup>103</sup> Le Loyer, “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Spirits,” 44.

and devils “not to be united unto a bodie.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, bodies that were united with a spirit, whether it was divine or diabolical, were not natural, and went against human nature.

In “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights” (1605), Le Loyer writes that a devil entering a dead body was “a thing that happeneth very seldome, and is against the nature of Spirits and Apparitions.”<sup>105</sup> This could explain why living human beings believed that dead bodies who bled received the power to speak from a divine origin, and were not being manipulated by the Devil. However, this belief could also be tied to early modern gender differentials. Perhaps the reason why living human beings believed these bleeding bodies were speaking as a result of a good spirit entering their body was because these bleeding corpses were typically male.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned earlier, male bodies were considered less likely to become susceptible to outside forces due to their humoral balance, and contemporaries considered male speech more trustworthy than female speech. But what about when a devil occupied the body of a living person?

When either divine or diabolical spirits entered a living body, early modern Europeans believed that they “doe speake through the bellies of the parties possessed with them.”<sup>107</sup> While the “Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights” (1605) claims that diabolical spirits entered dead bodies “very seldome,” it does not mention how often spirits would typically occupy living bodies. However, judging by the commentary of a document from the end of the seventeenth century, Richard Baxter’s *The certainty of the*

---

<sup>104</sup> Le Loyer, “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Spirits,” 44.

<sup>105</sup> Le Loyer, “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Spirits,” 5.

<sup>106</sup> For a list of examples of cruentation cases involving male bodies, see Appendix.

<sup>107</sup> Le Loyer, “A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Spirits,” 14.

*worlds of spirits and, consequently, of the immortality of souls of the malice and misery of the devils and the damned* (1691), it seems as if contemporaries believed that spirits occupied living bodies far more often than they occupied dead bodies, and that these spirits were typically diabolical ones. According to *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, “bad Spirits Apparitions and Actions, are far more frequent, and more Sensible than good ones.”<sup>108</sup> Despite the fact that Baxter acknowledges the frequency of spirits occupying living bodies, he acknowledges the difficulty in discerning spirits based solely on a supposed demoniac’s speech or actions. Baxter writes, “’tis hard to know by their Words or Signs, when it is a Devil, and when it is a Humane Soul that appeareth.”<sup>109</sup>

What sort of explanation can we come up with for this contemporary belief? Did early modern Europeans trust female “speaking bodies” in the form of demoniacs less than male bodies because they believed living bodies were more likely to be occupied by diabolical spirits? Or did contemporaries believe that the spirits occupying living bodies were more likely to be diabolical because these bodies were more likely to be female?

With female bodies, it was especially difficult to determine if the spirit inside was divine or diabolical. Female visionaries were often mistaken for demoniacs, since both exhibited the same types of behavior, entering into “immobile trance states, and claim[ing] special gifts such as xenoglossia and prophetic knowledge.”<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the reason why women’s behaviors were viewed negatively and attributed to diabolical spirits not only had to do with the fact that demoniacs were usually women, not men, but

---

<sup>108</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 221.

<sup>109</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 6.

because sainthood was “overwhelmingly associated with the masculine sex.”<sup>111</sup> Because divine visions were associated with sainthood, and sainthood was associated with men, it seemed more plausible to contemporaries that these women’s visions were brought about by demons. Discrediting women’s spiritual experiences, which started around the late Middle Ages, became more popular as the discernment of spirits gained visibility amongst the lay people, either in the form of exorcisms or in written documents. In fact, by 1630, the French word for a female spiritual person, a *spirituelle*, “acquired the meaning of a *folle*, a foolish or silly woman.”<sup>112</sup> At the peak of spiritual discernment’s popularity in the early modern period, the idea that a woman’s body was an unlikely vessel for a divine spirit, and the idea that women’s bodies were biologically more susceptible to demonic possession, converged.<sup>113</sup>

~

Not all scholars agree that there were distinct sex differences in the early modern period. Thomas Laqueur, for instance, introduces the idea of a “one-sex body,” and explains that male and female attributes were a matter of varying degrees, and that there was not an absolute difference between the two. Within this paradigm, men and women’s bodies contained the same organs, but were constructed differently in the sense that women were “inverted, [...] less perfect” versions of men, containing a less perfect balance of humors, for example. According to Laqueur, the idea that female and male

---

<sup>111</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 11.

<sup>112</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 32.

<sup>113</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 22. For further discussion of the devaluation of women’s speech, see also Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

bodies were inherently different did not emerge until the eighteenth century.<sup>114</sup> However, even if contemporaries were not consciously aware of it at the time, they socially constructed gender by describing male and female bodies differently, especially in the context of exorcism and cruentation.<sup>115</sup>

Problems with possession had to do with weaknesses of the female sex, or rather, contemporaries' belief in the weakness of the female sex. Because cruentation could happen with any gendered body (although the bleeding bodies were most often male), these bleeding bodies were considered legitimate evidence compared to knowledge acquired vis-à-vis possession, which almost always involved female bodies. In early modern Europe, people believed that because of women's "cold and moist" humoral compositions, they were more susceptible to outside forces. Contemporaries believed women easily fell victim to melancholia, which made women "particularly prone to egocentric and delusional fantasies," which could easily mimic demonic possession.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, it was the biological make-up of the female body that people did not trust, and the social construction of the humors that made a body "female" were considered weaker and less trustworthy than a male body.

---

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 25-27.

<sup>115</sup> See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 7. "gender is culturally constructed." See also Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, ix. "To be human is to be physically sexed and culturally gendered."

<sup>116</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, "Spiritual Physiologies": 12. Sometimes contemporaries dismissed the possibility of demonic possession altogether, and felt that women were merely experiencing melancholia despite the fact that their symptoms exhibited signs of possession. For example, "during a mass possession in a convent in Carpi, the local Inquisition and the Roman Congregation intervened and forced the exorcists to cease their work, arguing that they mistook melancholy for possession, giving improper credence to women whose humors were unbalanced in order to pursue their own professional agenda and reputation.": 23.

## CHAPTER IV

### GENDERED BODIES AND GENDERED SPEECH

Here God joyns them together in his own Image,  
and makes no such distinctions and differences as  
men do; for though they be weak, he is strong...<sup>117</sup>

In *Womens speaking justified* (1666), Quaker Margaret Fell uses examples from the Bible to support her argument that women are just as worthy of preaching as men are, because God created both man and woman. While Fell's advocacy for "women's speaking" has to do with women's agency in ministry, Fell's argument reveals a crucial issue in early modern European society: even though the Bible states that both men and women were created in God's image, and therefore should be equal in the same way that God treated them, making "no such distinctions and differences," these "distinctions and differences" are nevertheless constructed by early modern patriarchal society, and therefore suppress women's speech.

Judith Butler credits Simone de Beauvoir for the argument that men are "bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood," and early modern Europeans' construction of gender was no different.<sup>118</sup> This viewpoint can be applied to early modern European female bodies in the sense that female bodies at this time were considered the exception to normalcy, and were defined in contrast to to "universal" body – the "normal" body – which was male.

---

<sup>117</sup> Margaret Askew Fell Fox, *Womens speaking justified, proved and allowed of by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the spirit and power of the Lord Jesus and how women were the first that preached the tidings of the resurrection of Jesus, and were sent by Christ's own command, before he ascended to the Father*, *John 20:17* (London: 1666), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9.

When the pamphlets, court records, and other sources describe bleeding corpses, the texts suggest that the body is male, because of the way in which the sources are written. For example, when early modern sources make general references to a body, the sources lead the reader to assume this “universal” body is male. Even when the sex of a body is not specified, the very fact that the body is supposed to be universally representative, and universal so often refers to the male body, genders the genderless. Being female meant being something different than human in early modern Europe.<sup>119</sup> When it comes to bleeding corpses, the use of male pronouns is almost taken for granted; but when a female corpse bleeds or is the subject of a bier test, then this draws more attention, since these female bodies deviate from the norm of “universal personhood.”<sup>120</sup> However, despite the fact that male bodies, and even the genderless bodies (that are also presumably male) are considered to some degree to be normal or “natural” when bleeding, the female bodies are viewed with far more scrutiny.

Demoniacs, on the other hand, were not considered to be part of the universal personhood, not simply because being possessed was abnormal, but because being a demoniac typically meant being female, and being female meant being abnormal. Possession’s association with the female sex is an example of how the demoniac condition was a “natural indisposition.”<sup>121</sup> Therefore, the description of demoniacs’ bodies being female is not surprising, but expected.

---

<sup>119</sup> See Also Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 19. Butler cites Monique Wittig and writes, “In other words, only men are ‘persons,’ and there is no gender but the feminine.”

<sup>120</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9. According to Butler, some feminist theorists “would argue that only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood.”

<sup>121</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, x.

Early modern men and women were placed under the same types of trial by ordeal and the same exorcism tests, and both male and female murdered corpses placed on the bier experienced the same ordeal. However, the gender of these bodies affected the way in which contemporaries described these events in written records. Even when murdered corpses of both men and women bled in the same manner, for example, contemporaries categorized their descriptions of these tests' outcomes by gender, describing the same outcome differently based on whether it was a male or female body. This suggests that while on the surface early modern men and women seemed to place little importance on gender distinctions in terms of the practices of cruentation and exorcism, their written work subverts their daily actions and behaviors.<sup>122</sup>

Gender distinctions can be seen in contemporaries' descriptions of speech, which creates a stark dichotomy between what was acceptable for men and women in terms of speech. For example, Sandy Bardsley claims that contemporary works such as devotional texts and "advice poems" discouraged women from speaking too much, and warned men that "women's words were dangerous and even demonic."<sup>123</sup> By warning men about women's potentially dangerous and demonic speech, contemporary texts cultivated a belief that female speech was untrustworthy, and quite possibly not even their own speech.

The idea that female speech could be demonic contributed to contemporaries' detection of signs of possession of a human body. One way to determine whether a

---

<sup>122</sup> Of course, examining the literate discourse about early modern bodies is not without its problems, since these texts do not necessarily reveal what the illiterate people of early modern Europe believed about bodies.

<sup>123</sup> Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues*, 58.

person was possessed or not was to detect a “noticeable change in the demoniac’s voice, which was often described as deeper and gruffer than the normal voice of the afflicted person.”<sup>124</sup> Because females typically were not described as having “deep” and “gruff” voices, this indicated that the speech emanating from the demoniac’s body was not her own, but belonged to a demon, which was almost always gendered male.

As both speaking bodies and objects, demoniacs and bleeding corpses held hidden knowledge, and the public sought to extract this knowledge by means of exorcism and cruentation, processes that called upon these mysterious bodies to speak. With female bodies, there remained too great a variety of causalities for speech. A woman could have been melancholy, had “ffits of the mother,” or indeed have been possessed as a demoniac claimed to be.<sup>125</sup>

### DEMONIACS AND GENDERED SPEECH THROUGH THE TONGUE

According to Carla Mazzio, the tongue, as it is described in early modern “religious, rhetorical, anatomical, and literary texts,” is “the most powerful *and* the most vulnerable member of ‘man.’”<sup>126</sup> This obviously phallogocentric description of man’s “most vulnerable member” shows how the tongue as an extended representation of speech was a male privilege rarely extended to women. The tongue also means language (i.e. if a person is speaking “in another tongue,” this means that person is speaking

---

<sup>124</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*, 12-13.

<sup>125</sup> “Ffits of the mother” refers to a condition that closely resembled melancholy, caused by an imbalance of the four humors. See Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 82.

<sup>126</sup> Carla Mazzio, “Sins of the Tongue,” in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, edited by David A. Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge University Press, 1997), 53.

another language, presumably a foreign one), so there is a “relation between word and flesh,” and therefore a relation between speech and gender.<sup>127</sup> Because the tongue is gendered male, and speech is not intelligible without the tongue and its ability to enunciate words, speech is therefore gendered male, and female speech is rendered unintelligible or silenced altogether.

In the play *A Warning for Fair Women*, a “tongue” is ascribed to George Sanders’ bleeding corpse, and this metaphorical tongue serves to show how the bleeding corpse speaks out against its murderer. By describing Sanders’ emanation of blood as “a bloody tongue” coming from “ev’ry wound,” the playwright ascribes the male privilege of a “tongue,” and by extension, speech, to Sanders.<sup>128</sup> The speech coming from these “bloody tongue[s]” is trusted more than Sanders’ wife’s attempts to conceal her crime, supporting the idea that even though all humans possess literal tongues, the only humans who seem to be capable of using the metaphorical “tongue that is your sword” are men.<sup>129</sup> When women attempt to wield words like swords, their use of this phallogocentric symbol is delegitimized.

#### SPEECH TRANSFORMED FROM FEMININE TO MASCULINE IN LOUDUN

One of the best examples of women’s inability to use the power of the “tongue as a sword” while in their female state can be seen in the case of the Loudun possessions.

---

<sup>127</sup> Mazzio, “Sins of the Tongue,” 54.

<sup>128</sup> Charles Dale Cannon, ed. *A Warning for Fair Women (1599): A Critical Edition* (Netherlands: Mouton & Co. Publishers, 1975).

<sup>129</sup> Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues*, 10. “Anyone could use the ‘tongue that is your sword,’ but when women did so it was more likely to be perceived as an illegitimate weapon.”

There is a general consensus among historians that Grandier was executed for witchcraft due to political motivations and actions his enemies took against him. However, if one considers Grandier's trial, the possessed nuns, and the verbal exchanges between the exorcists and the demoniacs from a gendered perspective, one can see that it was more complicated than just a matter of political conflict, due to the various ways in which gender functions.

Here we have a case where a group of women accused a man of using sorcery to cause their possessions. While one might assume that contemporaries would dismiss the nuns' speech merely due to the fact that women's speech was considered less trustworthy than men's, the speech is validated. However, this speech does not belong to the nuns, but rather to the demons inside their bodies. Because the Catholic Church described the demons that possessed the nuns' bodies with masculine pronouns and words, the nuns' speech was transformed from feminine to masculine. And by performing the role of the demoniac, the nuns participated in their own oppression of speech.<sup>130</sup> Thus, gender was used as a symbol of power asserted by the Catholic Church through speech in order to exert control over women by denying them the right to speak on their own behalf – only through the guise of demons. Gender complicates this case by allowing the Church to use female bodies in order to bring forth masculine demonic speech as a way to reaffirm their power.

Furthermore, in 1691, Richard Baxter reminisced about a possession he witnessed when he was a boy, and his written description of the demoniac mirrors the written

---

<sup>130</sup> According to Butler, "Discourse becomes oppressive when it requires that the speaking subject, in order to speak, participate in the very terms of that oppression- that is, take for granted the speaking subject's own impossibility or unintelligibility." *Gender Trouble*, 116.

descriptions that were recorded by contemporaries during the Loudun possessions.<sup>131</sup> He described the possessed woman, writing,

They found her a poor ignorant Creature, and seeing nothing extraordinary, the Minister says in Latin to the Knight, *Nondum audivimus Spiritum loquentem*; presently a Voice comes out of the VVomans Mouth, *Aud[...] loquentem, audis loquentem*: This put the Minister into some amazement.<sup>132</sup>

In the quote above, Baxter describes the voice that comes out of the demoniac's mouth as "a" voice, not "her" voice, or "the woman's" voice. By describing the voice in this way, Baxter disassociates the voice from the woman, implying that while the woman takes full possession of her mouth, she does not have ownership over this voice.

According to contemporaries such as Baxter, demoniacs, unlike bleeding corpses, were not in control of their own bodies, nor were they in control of the speech coming out of their own mouths. Rather, the demons that possessed them controlled the words emanating from their bodies. These were words of literal speech, not the metaphorical speech of bleeding corpses. Therefore, early modern Europeans identified demoniacs such as the Ursuline nuns as "victim's of the Devil's malice."<sup>133</sup>

As the pamphlet *La demonomanie de Lodun qui montre la veritable possession des religieuses ursulines...* (1634) explains, the Catholic Church held authority in exorcism practices. "In order to prove this certain truth, it is necessary to establish a foundation, that the church alone is given the power not only to drive out demons, but

---

<sup>131</sup> See Alexander Balloch Grosart, "Richard Baxter," in *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900, Volume 3*. Richard Baxter was a theological writer best known for his ministry at Kidderminster, England.

<sup>132</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 84.

<sup>133</sup> Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes*, 42.

also to recognize possession.”<sup>134</sup> In this sense, the pamphlet argues that the nuns’ possessions were only validated by the exorcists, and no one else’s opinion was legitimate. People believed the possessions not because they believed what the nuns were saying was true, but because they believed in the power of the Catholic Church and its sole authority to evaluate whether one was possessed or not. Because the Church alone was able to officially recognize possession, the nuns could not even validate their own actions and speech as authentic, and instead had to rely on confirmation from male ecclesiastical authorities.

One can draw conclusions about early modern Europeans’ understanding of gender in relation to the body by looking closely at the text of Grandier’s interrogation. Unlike other pamphlets describing Grandier’s supposed crime, Grandier’s voice is well represented in *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier* (1634). When the exorcist conversed with the demons “Behemot, Baharon, and Balons,” all of whom are identified as male, they claimed Grandier had made pacts with them. The specific identities of the demons were revealed when the demons stated their names during the exorcists’ questioning. Because early modern Europeans believed that demons were incorporeal and therefore could not speak, the only way the demons could identify themselves verbally was when they possessed humans’ bodies.<sup>135</sup> The names of the demons are mentioned in

---

<sup>134</sup> <sup>134</sup> *La demonomanie de Lodun qui montre la veritable possession des religieuses ursulines...: avec la liste des religieuse et seculicres possedees*. (Paris: Chez George Griveau, Imprimeur du Roy, 1634), 12. “Et pour preuve de certe verite, il faut établir pour fondement, qu'a l'eglise seule est donnée la puissance non seulement de chasser les Demons, mais aussi de cognoistre de la possession.”

<sup>135</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*, 102.

the Old Testament, so the Ursulines would have been very familiar with these names.<sup>136</sup>

Rather than being given the creative license to name these demons, the nuns instead utilized the names of demons clearly established and recognized by the Church. When nine possessed nuns came into contact with Grandier in the public square, they called Grandier “their master,” and proclaimed with “joy to see him,” proof that the animating spirits inside the women’s bodies were not their own. In fact, Grandier had never had contact with these women before, since the Ursulines belonged to a cloistered convent.<sup>137</sup>

The location of the exorcisms is also significant. They occurred in a “public” place, which was considered a masculine space, since the separate spheres of the public and private spaces separated men and women respectively. The “public” display of possession reaffirms the idea that exorcisms were a way for the Catholic Church to display its power. This also served to bring Protestants back into the “true” church.

The exorcists took the demons’ words to be true, effectively placing the nuns in a position of power higher than Grandier. Yet, the nuns’ position of power depended on the demons’ manipulation of their bodies in order to bring forth speech. Their physical embodiment by these demons transformed their speech from feminine to masculine. The nuns seemed to hold power only when possessed by the demons, since this power while possessed derived exclusively from the society of seventeenth-century Loudun. The nuns themselves were not powerful in the social climate of early modern France, but the demonic forces contained inside their bodies were.

---

<sup>136</sup> From Job 40: 10-12; “Behold behemoth whom I made with thee, he eateth grass like an ox. His strength is in his loins, and his force in the navel of his belly. He setteth up his tail like a cedar, the sinews of his testicles are wrapped together.” From Numbers 22:22; “And God was angry. And an angel of the Lord stood in the way against Balaam, who sat on the ass, and had two servants with him.”

<sup>137</sup> *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier* (1634), 4.

The text distinguishes between the demons possessing the nuns and the nuns themselves by repeatedly referring to the nuns as “poor girls,” thus suggesting that they were in a pitiable position, and at the mercy of the demons.<sup>138</sup> The text does refer to the nuns by their names (i.e. Sister Claire, Sister Catherine), but only when the exorcist asks the demons questions in foreign languages such as Latin or Greek. The devil responds to such questions “by the mouth of sister Claire.” For example, the text does not state “Sister Claire says”; instead, the text states that the devil responds “by” her mouth. Sister Claire herself does not, according to the text, speak on her own behalf, but rather as the mouthpiece of the devil. She herself remains passive.

Furthermore, male pronouns are used throughout *A Relation of the Devil Balam’s departure out of the body of the Mother Prioress of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun* (1636) to refer to Prioress Jeanne des Anges’ verbalizations, as well as the other Ursuline nuns, thus transforming their speech from feminine to masculine. The male pronouns applied to des Anges actually refer to the demon Balam, who was occupying her body. However, feminine pronouns still describe the bodily actions of des Anges. This occurs once when the author describes how her physical body convulsed and moved about. For example, “Then was the said maid up on her knees, with her body bended back upon her heeles, and as stretched out her left arme aloft to the view of every one.”<sup>139</sup> This masculinization of speech and feminization of bodily actions suggests that women were to be seen, yet not heard, since the only time des Anges and the other Ursulines were truly heard was through the guise of demons. Therefore, these were bodies that could speak, not women

---

<sup>138</sup> *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier* (1634), 5. From the original text: “filles pauvres.”

<sup>139</sup> *A Relation of the Devil Balam’s departure out of the body of the Mother Prioress of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun* (London: 1636), 2.

who could speak. The women's bodies were manipulated by the demons, which was the only way their speech could have been heard. Because contemporaries believed that female bodies were weaker and more permeable than men's, they felt women were more susceptible of falling victim to pacts with the Devil as well as to demonic possession. Such views fostered a strong link between the demoniac and the female gender, making exorcism a practice chiefly concerned with the control of female bodies.<sup>140</sup>

If the "said maid" the author is referring to is des Anges, the Mother Prioress, then why is she not referred to by her ecclesiastical title, much like the Jesuit and Capuchin male witnesses were? And furthermore, since the Mother Prioress' identity is known to be Jeanne des Anges, then why is she not referred to by her name in the same way that the Jesuit and Capuchin witnesses were? Despite the fact that the pamphlet's title identifies her as the Mother Prioress, the rest of the pamphlet refers to des Anges as the "said maid," or sometimes avoids referring to her altogether and addresses the demon Balam instead, thus placing her in a passive position, similar to Sister Claire. Further along in the pamphlet, des Anges loses ownership of both her feminine identification as the "said maid" as well as her authoritative identification as Prioress. Instead, the document frequently refers to des Anges as "the body," which is neither feminine nor masculine. For example, when the exorcist was performing the exorcism, the pamphlet states that "Hereupon the Father having the holy Sacrament in his hand, commanded the devill that was in the body to come forth."<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Anita M. Walker and Edmund H. Dickerman, "A Notorious Woman: Possession, Witchcraft, and Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century Provence," *Historical Reflections*, 27 (2001): 3.

<sup>141</sup> *A Relation of the Devil Balam's departure out of the body of the Mother Prioress of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun* (London: 1636), 4.

Another way in which des Anges' speech is silenced and delegitimized is when the author explains that des Anges cannot be held responsible for anything she says, since "whatsoever she doth or speaketh, is presently expounded to be no words or gestures of her owne, but of the Devill that rageth in her."<sup>142</sup> The "Devill" that inhabits des Anges' body is therefore used as a tool to transform her speech from masculine to feminine, since this "Devill" is a masculine entity. According to Brian Levack, both Protestants and Catholics performed exorcism rituals. However, in Protestant rituals anyone could perform the exorcism, whereas in Catholic rituals the exorcist had to be a priest.<sup>143</sup> While Protestantism placed an emphasis on the personal responsibility of the demoniac, Catholicism emphasized the demoniac's passivity, and the priest's control of the situation. In terms of identity and names, the "devill" Balam has ownership of his name whereas des Anges does not, since she was not male.

In *Relation of the Devill Balams Departure..., Arrest de condemnation...,* and *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier...,* the specific words used to identify the subjects such as the demoniacs, exorcists, and Grandier suggest hierarchical roles based on gender and power. Oftentimes the nuns lost power by losing their own personal identities, and were instead used as mouthpieces for various male demons. The only time the exorcists seemed to be interested in any speech passing through the nuns' lips was if it was the "demon" or "devill" responding to the exorcist's questions. In Grandier's situation, he was similarly placed in a subordinate position like the nuns, since his speech is often absent from the documents. In *Arrest de condemnation,* for instance, his voice is

---

<sup>142</sup> *A Relation of the Devil Balam's departure out of the body of the Mother Prioress of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun* (London: 1636), 4.

<sup>143</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*, 193.

not represented at all; he was not given the opportunity to deny the charges brought against him, nor did he confess to the crimes he had been convicted of.

Who exactly controlled demoniacs' bodies? While early modern Europeans certainly believed that demons primarily had control of demoniacs, the exorcists also had physical control over the demoniacs' bodies. For example, according to an English witness to an exorcism at Loudun in 1635, the exorcist "step[ped] on the breast of one of the demoniacs, str[uck] her while she lay on her back with her heels under her buttocks, and set his foot upon her throat while commanding and interrogating the demon" who controlled her body.<sup>144</sup> While the demon may have had internal control of the demoniac, the exorcist in this instance clearly had external control of the demoniac's body.

The reason the demons seemed to hold power over both the nuns and Grandier is because the exorcists and other religious officials took the demons' responses to their interrogating questions seriously, perhaps because demons, extensions of Satan himself, were in direct opposition to God and divine power. If the exorcist could successfully expel a demon from a demoniac's body, then the exorcist's power was publicly displayed, and by extension, the Catholic Church's ultimate power. If the exorcists were to discredit the demons and not place importance on the words they spoke through the possessed nuns' bodies, then this would almost discredit the exorcist himself, and make his position of power and the need for exorcisms irrelevant. Also, whenever a demon blasphemed God, the pope, or the king, but seemed to speak favorably of Protestants, the exorcists used this as evidence to prove that Catholicism was the one true faith.

---

<sup>144</sup> Levack, "The Horrors of Witchcraft and Demonic Possession," *Social Research*, 81:4 (2014): 935.

Even after Grandier's execution, the Ursuline nuns were still exhibiting signs of possession. *Relation véritable de ce qui s'est passé aux exorcismes des religieuses ursulines possédées de Loudun* (1635) is a witness account of exorcisms that occurred on Wednesday, May 9, 1635, approximately one year after Grandier died. Sister Elizabeth, for instance, was possessed by a demon named Agal, and the exorcist performed the exorcism in front of the altar of Saint Croix, an open public space.<sup>145</sup> The exorcist performed a series of actions, which the pamphlet describes step by step. The exorcist "got down on one knee... clasped his hands together... prayed an Our Father and a Hail Mary," and so forth.<sup>146</sup> The detailed description of the exorcist's process does not make any mention as to what the demoniac was doing while this ritual was taking place. Instead, the pamphlet places the exorcist's actions at the center of attention, and completely ignores the demoniac's individual behavior. The only time the pamphlet mentions the demoniac is in relation to the exorcist himself, in order to describe what the exorcist was doing *to* her, not how *she* was responding to him.

A literary allusion to the power of speech can be found in *La demonomanie de Lodun*. According to the pamphlet, scripture states that the possessed are mute.<sup>147</sup> If early modern Europeans believed this was true, then one can argue that not only were female

---

<sup>145</sup> Anonymous, *Relation véritable de ce qui s'est passé aux exorcismes des religieuses ursulines possédées de Loudun : en la présence de Monsieur, frère unique du roy...* (Reprod.). (Paris: 1635), 37.

<sup>146</sup> Anon., *Relation Véritable* (1635), 37.

<sup>147</sup> Anon., *La demonomanie de Lodun* (1634), 13. Some Bible verses that relate to demons and muteness are the following: Luke 11:14 ("Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled"), Mark 9:25 ("And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'"), and Matthew 12:22 ("Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw").

demoniacs silenced by the demons using their bodies for agency, but that the demoniacs were literally silent; they did not have ownership of anything that came out of their mouths.

By examining the verbal exchanges between the exorcists and the nuns, we can see that the church legitimized these accusations against Grandier in order to eliminate a member of the community who violated the church's gender norm expectations. However, the nuns were not directly responsible for Grandier's execution. The only way the nuns, as women, were able to have agency and be heard by men was by adopting the persona of devils, and allowing these demons to use their bodies to communicate with the exorcists. Thus, by referring to the nuns with male pronouns and by using the demons that inhabited their bodies as a tool to transform the nuns' accusations against Grandier from feminine into masculine speech, the Catholic Church simultaneously held power over the demons, denied the nuns the right to speak on their own behalf, and placed Grandier in a position of subordination not typical for a priest.

Through pamphlets' literary descriptions of the possessed Ursulines, the nuns lose their legitimacy and power of feminine identity. Because these pamphlets were created for the purpose of telling an account of the nuns' exorcisms, one would imagine that the nuns themselves would be the focal point of attention. However, they are often rarely mentioned. The pamphlets either do not refer to the nuns by their specific names, or because the pamphlets describe them in generic terms, the nuns are given less importance than the demons that inhabited their bodies. For example, in a witness account entitled *Relation Véritable...* (1635), "a demon named Iscaron occupied the face of the mother Prioress, and talking with her mouth, has seen like the demon threatening

audaciously.”<sup>148</sup> In this sentence, the demon is the agent of the action, whereas the prioress is the object receiving the action, thus implying passivity and loss of power. Moreover, the demon “Iscaron” is referred to by name, whereas the prioress, who we know was Jeanne des Anges, is not. Also, because Iscaron is described as occupying the prioress’s face, this suggests that the demon has stolen her identity, since personal visage is how we recognize and identify individuals. Judging by the importance we place on naming objects and individuals, to not be called by one’s name is by extension, to lose one’s identity. *La demonomanie de Lodun* even goes so far as to describe the nuns as “possessed creatures.”<sup>149</sup> In this instance, the nuns not only lost their ecclesiastical titles, individual names, and status as females, but now they ceased to be considered human. In pamphlets that describe the Loudun exorcisms, the objects of the exorcism – the nuns themselves – are rarely mentioned as individuals, whereas the demons retain specific identities. Therefore, this suggests that the pamphlet’s author intended for readers to focus on the demons, in order to witness the exorcists’ successful expulsion of the demons from these nuns, the objects of exorcism.

~

So did the issue of using female demoniacs as a reliable testimony in court have to do with their feminine speech, or their feminine bodies? According to Butler, we must be aware of whether there is a difference between agency of language and agency of the

---

<sup>148</sup> Anon., *Relation Véritable*, (1635), 22. From the original text: “... un demon nommé Iscaron occupoit le visage de la mere Prieure, & parloit par sa bouche, a veu comme le Demon menassant audacieusement...”

<sup>149</sup> Anon., *La Demonomanie de Lodun*, (1634), 13. From the original text: “les creatures possédées.”

subject.<sup>150</sup> In the case of the female demoniacs in Loudun, agency of language is distinguished from the agency of the subject, the nuns themselves, since the speech is not identified as belonging to the subject. Because the Ursuline nuns were possessed by demons, the speech belonged to the demons inside their bodies; therefore, the demons were the ones with agency.

As the pamphlets describing the events of the Loudun exorcisms show, contemporaries circumvented the issue of having to accept feminine speech by insisting that the demons used the nuns' bodies as mouthpieces; the speech the exorcists recognized, therefore, was not feminine but masculine, because they claimed it was actually the demons inside the nuns' bodies who they recognized as speaking. While contemporaries could effectively change the gender of the speech being presented during the exorcisms, they ultimately could not transform the nuns' physical bodies from female to male. Thus, the gender of a physical body did not always match the gender of the speech emanating from it, which brings us to a discussion of Grandier's emasculation.

#### EMASCULATION OF URBAIN GRANDIER

Despite the fact that Grandier was a man, the Catholic Church did not find the speech he presented to his contemporaries to be agreeable; so, they emasculated him for attempting to exert masculinity through the form of written word. Grandier wrote a treatise on celibacy, *Traicte du coelibat par lequel il est prouue qu'un ecclesiastique se peut marier...* (1634) in which he defied priestly male gender norms by arguing that it was justifiable for a priest to have sexual relations, and that Catholic priests should be

---

<sup>150</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge University Press, 1997), 7.

allowed to marry. He bolstered his argument by citing biblical passages such as in Genesis, “where it is said that God, having created man, judged that it was not right to leave him alone and promptly gave him a woman to be his help and comfort.”<sup>151</sup> To deny a priest the help and comfort of a woman then, is to deny that he is a man. Grandier proceeded to compare priests to other “sacrificers,” who gave themselves to God, such as “Cain, Abel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were all married.” And as a priest, Grandier regarded the Bible as the ultimate written law that he strove to live by. In the Old Testament, according to Grandier, “there was never any mention of celibacy.”<sup>152</sup> Rather than abiding by the Catholic Church’s rules, Grandier felt that man should abide by the Bible, and should have the freedom to choose if he wanted to marry, regardless of whether he was a priest or not. Thus through his *Traicte du coelibat*, Grandier advocated for the intersectionality of sexuality and priestly status. The Catholic Church emasculated Grandier by placing him outside of the community circle, and not allowing him to marry. Unlike other men, he was denied the opportunity to lawfully pursue sexual relations with a wife of his choosing. Therefore, the Church denied Grandier what he considered to be man’s rights “by nature.”<sup>153</sup>

The speech of the male demons occupying the nuns’ bodies represented suppression of female speech. However, this masculinized speech was also used to assert

---

<sup>151</sup> Urbain Grandier, *Traicte du coelibat par lequel il est prouue qu’un ecclesiastique se peut marier, par des raisons et autorités claires et evidentes qui seront deduities succinctement et nuement, sans ornement de langage, afin que la verité, paraissant toute nue et sans fard, soit mieux recue* (1634) in Michel de Certeau, *Possession de Loudun* (Paris: Archives Gallimard Julliard, 1970), 92. All English translations are my own. “Tirée de l’histoire de la creation du monde écrite en la Genèse, où il est dit que Dieu, ayant créé l’homme, jugea qu’il n’était pas juste de le laisser seul et soudain lui donna une femme pour être son aide et son réconfort.”

<sup>152</sup> Grandier, *Traicte du coelibat* (1634) in de Certeau, *Possession de Loudun*, 92.

<sup>153</sup> Grandier, *Traicte du coelibat* (1634) in de Certeau, *Possession de Loudun*, 91.

power over Urbain Grandier – the priest accused of causing the nuns’ possessions – because he had tried to assert his manhood by writing a treatise opposing the celibacy of priests.

On August 18, 1634, peering out of a small hole in the wall of his jail cell, Urbain Grandier watched the sun rise for the last time. Meanwhile, the Capuchins were busy making preparations for his torture prior to the final death sentence: burning at the stake. Despite being a fellow man of the cloth, the Capuchins denied Grandier’s pleas to see a priest prior to his death, because he refused to admit to having used witchcraft to possess the Ursuline nuns, which is what they wanted to hear. Thus, both parties were unsatisfied with the outcome for their own reasons, and Grandier would face death with sin still clinging to his conscience. Strapped to a wooden board, Grandier lay in wait for the executioner to arrive. A few hours later, the executioner exited the torture cell, and Grandier, still strapped to the board, continued to weep at the sight of his bloodied and broken limbs.<sup>154</sup>

Much like the nuns’ lack of control of their own bodies, Grandier was placed in a similarly passive position during torture prior to his execution, which is recounted in *Recit de la mort dudit Grandier* (1634). The Capuchins overseeing Grandier’s torture said that he could not see a priest to confess and absolve his sins prior to execution, unless he confessed to using witchcraft to possess the nuns. By not allowing Grandier to receive the sacrament of confession, Catholics believed he was therefore not cleansed of his sins, and his soul would be condemned to hell. Not only did the ecclesiastical

---

<sup>154</sup> Anonymous, *Recit de la mort dudit Grandier* (1634), in *La demonomanie de Lodun qui montre la veritable possession des religieuses ursulines...: avec la liste des religieuse et seculicres possedees*. Paris: Chez George Griveau, Imprimeur du Roy (1634).

authorities overseeing Grandier's execution have control over his physical body, ordering the executioner to break his legs and other body parts before he was burned at the stake, but they also had control of his soul, or spiritual body, since they would not allow him to repent unless he repented what they wanted to hear.<sup>155</sup>

Grandier was “attached to a pole there on a pyre” in the public square outside St. Peter's Church, where he was burned alive.<sup>156</sup> The fire used to burn Grandier alive was created using “pacts” (physical paper documents as opposed to a mark on the body referring to a pact with the devil) and “a manuscript book by [Grandier] composed against the celibacy of priests.”<sup>157</sup> So not only did the Catholic Church emasculate Grandier by executing him for a crime typically attributed to women, but the Church also literally destroyed his manuscript advocating for the removal of celibacy from a priest's expected sexual norm, thus denying his petition for masculine privilege equal to men outside the clergy. Assuming that Grandier did indeed have an affair with Phillippe – daughter of the prominent Louis Trincant – and impregnated her, this most likely influenced the pamphlet's emphasis on Grandier's manuscript book “against the celibacy of priests,” since impregnating a woman was in clear violation of his priestly vows of celibacy.<sup>158</sup> By drawing attention to Grandier's violation in this pamphlet, this further

---

<sup>155</sup> Anon., *Recit de la mort dudit Grandier* (1634), in *La demonomanie*, 43.

<sup>156</sup> Anonymous, *Arrest de condamnation de mort contre Maistre Urbain Grandier, Prestre, Curé de l'Eglise de saint Pierre du Marché de Loudun, & Chanoine de l'Eglise sainte-Croix dudit lieu: atteint & conuaincu du crime de magie, & autres cas mentionés au procès* (Paris: Chez Estienne Hebert, & Jacques Poullard, rue des sept Voyes, au Roy Henry le Grand, 1634), 6. From the original text: “attaché à un poteau sur un bucher...”

<sup>157</sup> Anon., *Arrest de condamnation de mort* (1634), 6. From the original text: “Ensemble un livre manuscript par luy composé contre le Coelibat des Prestres...”

<sup>158</sup> Anon., *Arrest de condamnation de mort* (1634), 6.

undermined his authority as a parish priest and portrayed him as corrupt and somewhat anti-Catholic for not abiding by the Church's rules.

Yet even as a condemned person sentenced to death, and someone who was not an example of a "speaking body," Grandier still held more power than the Ursuline nuns. There were virtually seventeen nameless nuns – with the exception of the prioress Jeanne des Anges – and only one Urbain Grandier. In contemporary printed materials pertaining to this case, accounts of the nuns' possessions and exorcisms are referred to interchangeably, whereas Grandier maintains a sole identity as an individual, even if it is the identity of an individual accused of witchcraft.

*Arrest de condemnation* does not state whether Grandier actually confessed to violating his priestly vows, or even causing the possession of the Loudun Ursulines, which is the primary cause for his execution in the first place. Similar to how Jeanne des Anges is passive and silent in the first primary document, Grandier is equally as silent and his voice is unrepresented in this pamphlet. And because demoniacs were considered mute, and were typically female, one can argue that early modern Loudunais believed that to be silent was to be female, thus gendering silence as feminine. Therefore, Grandier's silence and absence of voice in this pamphlet contribute to his emasculation. *Arrest de condemnation* portrays Grandier as being undoubtedly guilty, and does not include a record of anything Grandier may have proclaimed to the court during his trial.

~

Published one year after Grandier's execution, the pamphlet *A Relation of the Devil Balam's departure out of the body of the Mother Prioress of the Ursuline nuns of*

*Loudun* (1636) not only describes the exorcism of the Ursuline Mother Prioress in Loudun, but it narrates the “departure out of [her] body,” thus emphasizing a successful exorcism, which could be considered a sign of the Catholic Church’s power to expel demons from the nuns’ bodies. Based on the pamphlet’s inclusion and exclusion of specific names and occupational titles, one can see gender distinctions between the witnesses involved in the spectacle of the exorcism and the demoniacs. For example, the pamphlet begins by introducing the witnesses to the exorcism, all of whom are male – specifically male religious figures – such as Jesuits and Capuchins. The clergymen are identified both by their religious groups, as well as by their individual names. It seems unlikely that there were no female spectators present at the event, or even laymen; yet they are not included in this list of witnesses to the exorcism. Therefore, this suggests that the only people present at the exorcism who the author thought were worth mentioning were male, and were affiliated with the Catholic Church. The pamphlet’s stark contrast between the named male witnesses and the nameless nuns highlights the fact that these nameless nuns not only lacked autonomy in speech, but individual identity as well.

#### THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JEANNE DES ANGES

One might think that the existence of an autobiography written by Jeanne des Anges (Figure 5) may indicate that female demoniacs did indeed possess the capability to speak – or rather, to write – on their own behalf. But in actuality, even des Anges’ autobiography serves as an example of contemporaries’ suppression and delegitimization of female speech. For example, one must consider the nature of this source, and how contemporaries chose to distribute it. Even though des Anges supposedly wrote her

autobiography in 1644, it remained inaccessible to readers until it appeared in a nineteenth-century publication, *Progrès médical*, in 1886. The fact that it took over two hundred years for des Anges' autobiography to be published suggests that contemporaries did not value what des Anges had to say about her own experiences as a demoniac, and would rather rely on male witness testimonials instead.

Ironically so, the document that we recognize today as des Anges' autobiography does not even contain a title des Anges ascribed to her own writing; instead, nineteenth-century male writers took control of her writing – and by extension her bodily experiences – and gave her autobiography the title *Soeur Jeanne des Anges, supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun, XVIIe siècle: autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée, d'après le manuscrit inédit de la bibliothèque de Tours*.<sup>159</sup> Not only do the nineteenth-century publishers describe des Anges as a possessed person, but they describe her as a “hysterical” possessed person. The addition of the adjective “hysterical” further denotes des Anges as a female body, since the word “hysterical” retained feminine connotations relating back to the concept of the “fits of the mother” from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>160</sup>

Because nineteenth-century neurologist Georges Gilles de la Tourette was responsible for publishing des Anges' autobiography in a medical publication, he spends a great deal of time in the introduction explaining that des Anges' possession was caused by medical imbalances, not a true possession. So not only does des Anges' autobiography

---

<sup>159</sup> Jeanne des Anges, *Soeur Jeanne des Anges, supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun, XVIIe siècle: autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée, d'après le manuscrit inédit de la bibliothèque de Tours*, ed. Gabriel Legué and George Gilles de la Tourette (Paris: Aux Bureaux du Progrès Médical, 1886).

<sup>160</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “hysterical.”  
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/view/Entry/90640?redirectedFrom=hysterical#eid>.

not exist as a publication in its own right, but it is contested by a nineteenth-century doctor who both rejects des Anges' attempts to speak through written word and effectively re-writes her experiences by including his own annotations. For example, Tourette writes that "we were guided by the firm belief in the fact that all the phenomena presented by [des Anges] were perfectly understandable today, as in the past, by medical knowledge alone."<sup>161</sup>

Even though the publication supposedly focuses on des Anges' autobiography, her words are glossed over by Legué and Tourette with their argumentative annotations, and we do not know how much of her autobiography was altered when they decided to publish it. And because we do not know how much of des Anges' words were altered when transferring her manuscript into print in the nineteenth century, this thesis does not attempt to analyze des Anges' autobiography for the purpose of decoding her own words. Instead, des Anges' autobiography and the attention (or lack thereof) that it received at the time of its conception, as well as the time of its publication in the nineteenth century, support the idea that female speech was either suppressed or deemed illegitimate, especially in the context of demonic possession. Despite the fact that des Anges was the one who experienced demons occupying her body, early modern French society did not recognize her as an authority figure in charge of her own experience, and des Anges' lack of agency persists well into the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>161</sup> des Anges, *Soeur Jeanne des Anges*, 203. "Nous avons été guidés par la ferme croyance où nous étions que tous les phénomènes que présenta Mme de Belcier [des Anges] étaient parfaitement expliquables, aujourd'hui comme autrefois, par les seules connaissances médicales."

Figure 5. Jeanne des Anges



Source: Mathias Van Somer, *Portrait de la Soeur Marie Jeanne des Anges, Ursuline, decedee le 29 Janvier 1665*. 1665. Engraving.

## CHAPTER V

### CRUENTATION AND POSSESSION IN LEGAL CASES

Compared to men, women's voices were underrepresented in the early modern period. As we will see from the following court cases, women in court, whether they were the suspected murderers, the demoniac victims, or the witnesses to a crime, did not benefit from the ability to "speak out" in the same way that men did.

#### THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES

The Lancashire witch trials of 1612, some of England's most famous witch trials, inspired plays, novels, and other pieces of literature beginning in the seventeenth century.<sup>162</sup> While the play and the novel are based on the actual trials, Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (1613) is a first-hand account of the indictment, arraignment, and trial of the witches. For the majority of the trials featured in Potts' work, the victims' corpses were never brought to court, (or at least Potts did not say that they were). Most of the suspected witches were condemned for murder based on the consistency of people's accusations against them. According to Potts' *Wonderfull Discouerie*, a body was not brought to court until Jennet Preston's trial, when the court compelled her to participate in the bier test.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Literature inspired by the Lancashire witch trials includes Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's play *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), and William Harrison Ainsworth's book, *The Lancashire Witches: A Romance of Pendle Forest* (1848).

<sup>163</sup> Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster, With the Arraignement and Trialle of Nineteene notorious Witches, at the Assizes and generall Gaole deliuerie, holden at the Castle of Lancaster, vpon Munday, the seuenteenth of August last, 1612. Before Sir Iames Altham, and Sir Edward Bromley, Knights; Barons of his Maiesties Court of Exchequer: And Iustices of Assize, Oyer and Terminor, and generall Assizes holden at the Castle of Yorke, the seuen and twentieth day of Iulie last past, with her Execution for the murther of Master Lister by Witchcraft* (London: 1612), 93.

In the section of Pott's account titled "The Evidence for the Kings Majestie Against Jennet Preston, Prisoner at the Barre," Anne Robinson and other neighbors testified against Preston, a suspected witch, saying that she was responsible for Master Lister's death. When Lister was on his death bed, both Robinson and Lister's relative Thomas claimed that Lister "cried out in great extremitie; Jennet Preston lyes heavie on me... helpe me, helpe me."<sup>164</sup> People often accused witches of entering their homes at night and lying upon them while they slept, describing it as a suffocating sensation.<sup>165</sup>

In addition to Thomas and Robinson's testimonies, the court examined several other witnesses, who all attested to Preston's witchcraft. When Lister's corpse was brought into the courtroom, Preston was

brought to M. Lister after hee was dead, & layd out to be wound up in his winding-sheet, the said Jennet Preston comming to touch the dead corpse, they (the wounds) bled fresh blood presently, in the presence of all that were there present.<sup>166</sup>

According to Potts, cruentation rarely failed in trials. The judge told the jury to pay attention to the "particular circumstances" of Master Lister's murder – the testimonies, examinations, and confessions of witnesses and Preston herself – but the one piece of evidence that mattered more than all the others was the "tryall" of cruentation.<sup>167</sup> The jury witnessed Lister's body bleeding "freshly" in front of their eyes when Preston approached it, and this concluded the trial. Pott's description of Preston's presence in the courtroom almost objectifies her: she is seen, and not heard. Her presence in the

---

<sup>164</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, 93.

<sup>165</sup> Elizabeth Lynn Linton, *Witch Stories* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861), 272.

<sup>166</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, 93.

<sup>167</sup> Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, 96.

courtroom serves the purpose of putting her body in contact with the corpse, which bleeds when in proximity to her.

To conclude his account of the witch trials, Potts reminded readers of their moral obligations as good members of society. He wrote, “Forget not the bloud that cries out unto God for revenge, bring it not upon your owne heads,” to reinforce his claim that good citizens must strive to discover the guilty in order to bring justice to the innocent person who the perpetrators wronged. In the trial against Jennet Preston, we see a female suspect accused of both witchcraft and murder. Yet, Preston’s voice is absent from this document. Even though Potts explains that the judge told the jury to pay attention to Preston’s statement, the reader does not hear about a confession on her part, or about anything that Preston herself said about the matter of the murder. The male murder victim’s blood, however, is granted speech in Potts’ description of it “cr[ying] out unto God for revenge.” This absence of information is important for two reasons. First, the fact that Potts chose not to record Preston’s speech in his document indicates that he did not consider anything she had to say worthy of recording and presenting to his readers; and second, Preston’s lack of speech in the document paired with the fact that the jury seemed to consider the corpse’s emanation of blood the most important piece of evidence against her indicates that above all, the dead man’s blood flowing “freshly” proved to be more valuable than any spoken words females had to say.

#### A FEMALE CORPSE IN QUESTION

Colonists brought the belief in cruentation to the Americas with them when they crossed the Atlantic. In Calvert County, Maryland in 1660, Governor Phillip Calvert gave

the sheriff a warrant, allowing a jury of twelve men to examine Catherine Lake's corpse and determine whether she had been murdered or not. Thomas Mertine, Lake's master, had been accused of murdering her. Three of Mertine's servants – William Sankeh Richard Garner Palmer, John Meeres, and Thomas Cosby – came forward to serve as witnesses. According to Mertine's servants,

when Thomas Mertine shoved the said Catherine Lake with his hand on the Shoulder and also gaue her a Kick upon the britch, and the said Lake being troubled with ffitts of the mother fell into the said ffitts as formerly, and soe departed this world within one hower.<sup>168</sup>

Despite the fact that witnesses testified that Mertine inflicted violence upon Lake, the jury ultimately did not consider this to be the cause of her death, and therefore ruled out the possibility of murder. However, they did not dismiss the possibility of murder until after having performed the bier test. In order to determine whether Mertine was innocent or guilty, the court ordered

the said Thomas Mertine and the Servants of the howse to ley their hands upon the dead Corps, and there was noe issue of bloud from the Corps, neither could they perceiue any alteration in the Corps or any action from any personal man that was the Cause of her Death but the providence of the Almighty.<sup>169</sup>

While the bier test was performed in the case of *Attorney General v. Mertine*, Lake's body did not bleed. However, based on the text from the court record, it did not seem to matter to the jury whether Lake's corpse bled or not. In order for the jury to be convinced of Mertine's innocence, they attributed Lake's death to her emotional state – “ffitts of the mother” – not her master's physical abuse.

---

<sup>168</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, “Proceedings of the Provincial Court, 1658-1662, Volume XLI,” <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000041/html/index.html>, 385.

<sup>169</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, “Proceedings of the Provincial Court, 1658-1662, Volume XLI,” 385.

“Fits of the mother” refers to a condition that closely resembled melancholy, caused by an imbalance of the four humors.<sup>170</sup> It was also known by contemporaries as “suffocation of the mother,” and Edward Jordan, a “doctor in Physicke,” wrote a treatise explaining the causes of this sickness, which he connected to either possession by an evil spirit, or mental weakness.<sup>171</sup> As the wording of the term makes so evidently clear, this was a gendered affliction that affected women. According to Jordan, the Devil can be an external effect of a disease caused by a woman’s internal fluids, “by kindling or corrupting the humors of our bodies.”<sup>172</sup>

Interestingly enough, “fits of the mother” relates to possession both in its classification as a typically female-gendered malady and in its description of how it affects the women who have it. Contemporaries described both “fits of the mother” and possession as conditions that caused a woman to lose control of her body. For example, Jordan gives an example of a “maide of 18 years of age” named Clara, who experienced “fits of the mother.” When the fits occurred, “every part of her body was distorted, she felt nothing, nor perceived any thing: but had all her senses benumbed, her hart beating,

---

<sup>170</sup> Neely, *Distracted Subjects*, 82.

<sup>171</sup> Edward Jordan, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother. Written upon occasion which hath beene of late taken thereby, to suspect possession of an evill spirit, or some such like supernaturall power. Wherein is declared that divers strange actions and passions of the body of man, which in the common opinion are imputed to the Divell, have their true naturall causes, and do accompanie this disease* (London: 1603), NP. See also Doctor Lockman, *A Treatise of the Suffocation of the Matrix, commonly called, the Fits of the Mother wherein are not only explained the Cause, Progress, and Danger of that Deplorable Distemper, but the proper remedies prescribed at Large, for the Prevention and Cure of the same.* (London: 1731).

<sup>172</sup> Jordan, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, NP.

[and] her teeth close shut together.”<sup>173</sup> Jordan describes another young woman’s experience, explaining that a 22-year-old woman

fell also into these fits of the Mother: ... her whole body being pulled to and fro with convulsive motions, her belly sometimes lifted up, and sometimes depressed, a roaring noise heard within her, with crying and howling, a distortion of her armes and handes: insomuch as those about her thought her to be possessed with a divell.”<sup>174</sup>

In this description of the “fits of the mother,” Jordan draws an explicit comparison to demonic possession, citing how the 22-year-old woman seems to be “possessed with a divell.” Much like how the Loudun nuns did not seem to have control of their own bodies or even the speech emanating from their mouths, this woman also lacks personal agency. Also, it is important to notice Jordan’s sentence structure in his description of the woman’s malady. Whether it was a conscious decision on his part or not, Jordan uses passive voice language when writing about the 22-year-old woman. Rather than writing “she made a roaring noise,” he writes, “a roaring noise [was] heard within her,” implying that a spirit or other force not belonging to the woman herself is the cause for this noise.

Similar to how the Loudun nuns could only speak through the guise of demons, and similar to how contemporary skeptics often described the nuns’ speech as “noise” and not intelligible words, Jordan presents another example of a woman with “fits of the mother” using similar descriptive language. He writes,

sometimes she would only stirre her legges, the rest of her bodie being dull: and although she could not speake, yet she would cry and laugh by turns, and then be sullen and dumpish, as if she were deade.

---

<sup>173</sup> Jordan, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, NP. For more contemporary references of “fits of the mother,” see Anonymous, *A Relation of the Devil Balam’s departure out of the body of the Mother Prioress of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun* (London: 1636).

<sup>174</sup> Jordan, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, NP.

Here again we see Jordan contribute to the cultural construction of women as weak, passive recipients of forces beyond their control.

Although contemporaries firmly established the belief that “fits of the mother” was a malady that exclusively affected women, Jordan also gives an example of a young man who has fits. However, Jordan does not refer to this young man’s fits as being “of the mother,” and instead describes them as “fits of the falling sickness.” While the female-gendered “fits of the mother” could either be a physical or a mental illness, according to Jordan, these male-gendered fits are distinctly attributed to biological causes, since contemporaries did not believe that the male mind was as weak as the female mind. Jordan explains that the young man experiences the fits after getting into a disagreement with his father. After sending his father an apology letter, he was “presently delivered from that dreadfull disease.”<sup>175</sup> Compared to the female bodies suffering from the “fits of the mother,” this young man retains full bodily function, to the point where he is able to compose a written letter of communication to his father. The females suffering from the “mother,” however, lose control of their bodies, making their affliction seem closer to demonic possession than to “fits of the falling sickness.”

~

The provincial court record involving Catherine Lake’s murder leaves many questions unanswered. It does not state whether there was any evidence brought forth against Mertine other than the testimonies made by his servants, nor does it state if Mertine had to undergo any other types of ordeal besides the ordeal of the bier.

---

<sup>175</sup> Jordan, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, NP.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that there was indeed a warrant to have Lake's body tested to see if her body would bleed or not.

In the specific description from the court proceedings, Lake's name is only used to refer to her twice: once when the warrant is presented, and once when the servants accusing their master describe what they witnessed. When the court proceeding record mentions the trial by ordeal, however, Lake's name is replaced with the word "corps," which suggests that her identity as a person is no longer important. Instead, the court is concerned about determining either Mertine's innocence or guilt.

Even though we will never know, it is worth pondering over the following questions: did the jury decide to acquit Mertine because they did not believe his violent actions towards Lake caused Lake's death? Did they actually believe in cruentation and consider the lack of blood emanating from her corpse to be a sign of innocence? Or did they think that Lake having "ffitts of the mother" seemed like a more plausible reason for her death?

What if Lake had been a man? If Mertine had shoved and kicked a man who died suddenly afterwards, contemporaries would not have attributed this hypothetical man's death to "fits of the mother," since that was an affliction that only befell women. So if the "fits of the mother" would not be an acceptable explanation for the death of a man who experienced the same violence as Lake, why would it be an explanation for her death? One of the most logical explanations for Lake's treatment is that gender distinctions crept into the courtroom and influenced the turn of events. We will see violence against a servant in another case, this time a male servant, and that suspect is condemned for causing this servant's murder.

Cruentation aside, it seems questionable that the court even performed the bier right in the first place, especially since Mertine's servants never explicitly accused him of murder. The bier test performed in this case is problematic, since it is not entirely clear what to make of this lack of blood. However, one thing is certain: gender is quite central to this case. Ideas about gender infuse with the notion of cruentation. The only people present in this courtroom are men, with the exception of the female lying dead on the bier. Not only does Lake's body not bleed, but her death is suggested to have been caused by a condition attributed to women, not murder. Does Lake's body not bleed because the contemporaries classified her death as non-murder, attributing it to "fits of the mother" instead, and cruentation only reveals murder?

#### MASTER MURDERS SERVANT

The following year in Maryland, in 1661, another master was brought to court for inflicting violence upon a servant who ended up dead. However, unlike Catherine Lake's case, this servant was male, and his death was not attributed to "fits of the mother." On July 17, 1661, Thomas Bradnox was accused of murdering his servant, Thomas Watson.

In this case, the bier test did not occur in the courtroom, but was merely being recounted by someone who supposedly witnessed it. Sarah Taylor, one of Bradnox's servants, claimed that Bradnox and his wife beat Watson so severely that it eventually killed him. Taylor said, "Master pulld him out of the Corner and struck him soe violently with his hand on his Brest and face that the blood issued out of his mouth and nose."<sup>176</sup> Although Taylor did not say that this beating killed Watson immediately, she said she

---

<sup>176</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume XLI, 501.

heard Watson cry out before he died that his “Master and Mrs. was the cause of his death.”<sup>177</sup>

John White, another servant, also testified against Bradnox. White’s deposition went into further detail than the other servants’ testimonies, and he specifically mentioned that Bradnox gave Watson “fifty cruell blows upon the head and sides with a good round hickory stick.”<sup>178</sup> A servant named Southerne also mentioned the hickory stick, but not the number of blows.

The decisive turning point of Bradnox’s murder trial happened when one witness said he saw Bradnox touch Watson’s corpse, which did not bleed. The witness described how Bradnox

Thrust his Thumb upon his body to shew him how his flesh did dent and stirred and shogd the Corps which on my oath at Poynt Loue I did then relate the 17<sup>th</sup> July las past and further I did not in the leaste see any blood come from the Corps where Capt Bradnox touched him.<sup>179</sup>

Although Bradnox died before the jury reached a verdict, the court dropped the charges against his wife.<sup>180</sup> Bradnox’s physical contact with Watson’s corpse, and the absence of blood oozing from it, cleared his name. Therefore, this case revealed that cruentation as a tool of discovery could go both ways: the emergence of blood proved guilt, and the lack of blood confirmed innocence.

Based on the context of these cases, cruentation seemed to transcend social status and show how bloody wounds blurred any dividing lines of role hierarchy. Regardless of

---

<sup>177</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume XLI, 501.

<sup>178</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume XLI, 502.

<sup>179</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume XLI, 504.

<sup>180</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume XLI, 505.

status or role in society, cruentation was the ultimate equalizer, since it could reveal either servant or master to be a murderer. While cruentation may have been the ultimate equalizer when it came to social status, it was not an equalizer when it came to gender, as the two colonial cases above show. Both of these bodies placed on the bier for the blood ordeal did not bleed, and yet the only body that was considered a legitimate possible victim of murder was the male body, despite the fact that both Lake and Watson's bodies experienced a similar infliction of violence.

### A BLEEDING SEVERED HEAD

In another case from Maryland, in 1657, hangman John Dandy was accused of murdering his servant, Henry Gouge. William Wood, a miller who lived in Dandy's household, spoke in court about what he witnessed. When walking back from Dandy's mill, Wood found "a Servant of John Dandies naked and Dead in the Creeke," and pulled him out of the water. When he brought Dandy to Gouge's body that he left on the shore, Dandy "Said he should Come into a great Deale of trouble about this boy."<sup>181</sup> Although Wood's testimony made Dandy look guilty because of his concern about getting into "trouble about this boy," Dandy did not confess.

In addition to Wood, a few of Dandy's other servants testified against him in court. Sarah Middleton said that she heard Gouge cry out "'O Lord!" when Dandy was beating him, on the same night when Gouge went missing.<sup>182</sup> Fourteen-year-old Darbey Canneday, another household servant, testified that he heard the same cries that Middleton

---

<sup>181</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, "Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Volume X," <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000010/html/index.html>, 535.

<sup>182</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 536.

mentioned.<sup>183</sup> Dandy's wife also testified in court, saying that her husband ordered Gouge to go collect coal, and that Gouge did not do so and had run away, perhaps due to the beatings he had received.<sup>184</sup> One neighbor, John Harwood, did not hear Gouge cry out from Dandy's supposed physical abuse, but he "did not hear the Said Dandy make any Enquiry after his Servant Henry Gouge that Night that the Said Servant was missing," which he considered to be suspicious action.

Harwood and other witnesses also testified that they saw the old wound on Gouge's corpse bleed when Dandy stood near the corpse that Wood pulled to shore. Wood said the corpse "did bleed a fresh, at the Said Scar in his head and at the nose." Harwood said he similarly saw the "old Soare upon his head, which was reported that the Sd Dandy had given the Said Servant, about three months before with an Axe, which Soare did bleed a fresh."<sup>185</sup>

Because there were no living witnesses to the actual occurrence of the supposed crime other than Dandy himself, the court had to rely on another way to obtain evidence and discover the truth. After having heard that Gouge's body had bled while it was ashore, the court ordered James Veitch, second in command of the Puritan Militia, to go to the place where Gouge's body was buried, exhume it, and have "So many of the

---

<sup>183</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 537.

<sup>184</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 539.

<sup>185</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 537. Additional neighbors who viewed the corpse reported that it bled from the wound Dandy had inflicted on Gouge, but the court record does not specify when the other witnesses saw the corpse bleed.

Neighbors as Conveniently as can be procured” view it.<sup>186</sup> The court ordered Veitch and the neighbors to take a “diligent View of the Said Corps” and sever the head from the body, and ordered that “The Said head... be Carefully [w]rapped up and warily brought to the Court, with “what Convenient and possible Speed may be.”<sup>187</sup>

When court reconvened on September 24, the severed head of Henry Gouge’s corpse was present. As were the eleven men who were Dandy’s neighbors, who had been called forth to take a “diligent View.” With the dead head present, the witnesses testified to the following statement:

we can See nor find nothing about the Said Head, but only two places of the Skin and flesh broke on the right side of the head and the Scull perfect and sound, and not any thing doth or can appear to us to be any Cause of the Death of the Said Gouge.<sup>188</sup>

Why did the court order Veitch and the neighborhood witnesses to bring only the head of the corpse back to the courtroom? Since we do not know how much time had passed since Gouge’s death and the exhumation of his corpse, perhaps this was the only part of the body that had not completely decayed to the point that it was incapable of serving as a subject in the bier test. However, the significance the court placed on the corpse’s head seems to stem from the belief that dead bodies could “speak out” and identify their murderers. If Gouge’s body were to have spoken out, presumably it would have been from his head, and from his mouth. Gouge’s head did not speak nor bleed in

---

<sup>186</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 524. For information on James Veitch, see <http://www.colonial-settlers.md-va.us/getperson.php?personID=1010190&tree=tree1>. James Veitch was part of one of the first groups of Puritans who settled in lower Calvert County under the leadership of Richard Preston around 1652. He received two grants of land on the south side of St. Leonard’s Creek called “Veitch’s Rest” and “Hatton’s Cove.” Under Captain Peter Johnson, he was second in command of the Puritan Militia. He was sent to seize and arrest John Dandy, who was suspected of murdering several people. See also, Charles F. Stein, *A History of Calvert County*, 328-9.

<sup>187</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 525.

<sup>188</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 525.

the courtroom, but it did provide forensic evidence that brought about Dandy's conviction as Gouge's murderer.

For many juries and court spectators in the early modern period, to see was to believe. They could not see the internal injuries Dandy inflicted on Gouge, so the possibility of murder was not entirely certain. However, the fact that witnesses saw blood oozing from the corpse was difficult for the jury to ignore. The Maryland jury members' faith in cruentation outweighed the lack of other medical evidence, and they considered this sufficient evidence to sentence Dandy to death.<sup>189</sup> This case demonstrates that despite the lack of concrete medical evidence in the courtroom, the jury and Maryland provincial judge placed their trust in cruentation, therefore legitimizing its practice.

But why did the absence of blood in this courtroom count, whereas the absence of blood emanating from Catherine Lake's body did not count? Both cases involved bringing the body (or the body's head) into the court room for examination. Both cases involved witnesses stating that the deceased endured some form of physical violence from their masters. The only apparent difference between the two victims here is their gender. In Dandy's trial, the court determined that the cause of Gouge's death was severe head trauma. But in Mertine's trial, the court ruled out the possibility that Lake died from physical violence, and attributed her death to a female-gendered affliction, "fits of the mother."

---

<sup>189</sup> Archives of Maryland Online, Volume X, 545.

## DEMONIACS IN A COURT ROOM SETTING

Not only were female corpses treated differently in the courts, with particular causes of death being ascribed to female bodies, but female living “speaking bodies” were associated with particular types of crime as well. The case of the Loudun possessions, however, reflects a shift away from the concept of the woman as a malevolent witch – a type of criminality typically associated with women – and towards the concept of the female demoniac. Thus, we see female bodies shift from being perpetrators of crime in one setting to victims of crime in another setting, both of which are associated with femininity.

While supposed witches were accused of having relationships with the Devil, demoniacs were not. Instead, early modern Europeans did not hold demoniacs accountable for their actions, and identified them as “victims of the Devil’s malice.”<sup>190</sup> Unlike witches who actively and voluntarily chose to make a pact with the Devil, women who were demoniacs were placed in a pitiful passive position, supposedly unable to control the demons that possessed their bodies. Early modern Europeans believed that women were more susceptible of falling victim to both pacts with the Devil as well as demonic possession, since they believed female bodies were weaker and more permeable than men’s.<sup>191</sup> Thus, women go from being characterized as criminals in the form of witches, to victims in the form of demoniacs.<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes*, 42.

<sup>191</sup> Walker and Dickerman, “A Notorious Woman”: 3.

<sup>192</sup> The accusations that Grandier used witchcraft to cause the Ursuline nuns’ possessions suggests that he, like a woman, was weak. Perhaps his objection to priestly sexual norms, as explained in his treatise, motivated the Church to emasculate Grandier by condemning and executing him for a crime typically associated with women.

## CHAPTER VI

### “IN EV’RY WOUND THERE IS A BLOODY TONGUE”: SPEAKING BODIES IN LITERARY AND VISUAL ARTS

“O, gentlemen, see, see dead Henry’s  
wounds Open their congealed mouths  
and bleed afresh! Blush, blush, thou  
lump of foul deformity,  
For ’tis thy presence that exhales this blood  
From cold and empty veins where no blood  
dwells. Thy deeds, inhuman and unnatural,  
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.  
O God, which this blood mad’st, revenge his  
death!”

- *Richard III* (I.ii.56-63)

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote *Richard III* (1592) over one hundred years after Richard III of England (1452-1485) died.<sup>193</sup> Although the events in the play are historically inaccurate, such as Richard III’s murder of Henry VI, the dramatic interpretation of history sparks excitement. In the play, Lady Anne states how Henry’s wounds bleed when Richard III, his murderer, enters the room. She further describes the event as “unnatural,” a word Shakespeare used as double entendre. The first use of “unnatural” in the passage refers to the action of murder, which is treacherous and goes against human nature. The second “unnatural” refers to the occurrence of the bleeding corpse, which reveals the murderer. Lady Anne also personifies Henry’s wounds, stating that they “open their congealed mouths” as a way of speaking out against this “inhuman act,” as if these wounds are the mouthpiece for the bleeding corpse.

---

<sup>193</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (1592) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Unlike Richard's bleeding, speaking corpse, contemporaries suppressed female speech both in real life and in imitations of life on stage. As we have seen, victimized demoniac women in a court-room setting did not have much credibility, unless the voices emanating from their bodies were demons deemed male. However, at the same time that early modern Europeans characterized women as victims in the form of demoniacs, not allowing them to speak on their own behalf, they also characterized women as murderous wives. Yet even when playing the role of the murderous wife, women did not have the power to speak in the same way that their murdered husbands' corpses did.

As literary and visual representations of "speaking bodies" show, women garnered far more attention as murderous wives than they did as bleeding corpses. In this sense, gender's relation to the element of the culturally available symbol of the "wife" shows that contemporaries built their perceived differences between male and female around this symbol. While a wife had the potential to be dutiful to her husband, she also could be categorized as a murderous.<sup>194</sup> Why did contemporaries describing murders involving cruentation tend to utilize the symbolic representation of the wife as a murderer?

### ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM

Cruentation often revealed the female crime of murdering one's husband. On February 14, 1551, Alice Arden (1516-1551) murdered her husband in Faversham,

---

<sup>194</sup> Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis": 1067. "... culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations – Eve and Mary as symbols of woman, for example, in the Western Christian tradition – but also, myths of light and dark, purification and pollution, innocence and corruption."

England, and a play about the murder was published several decades later in 1592.<sup>195</sup> In both real life and in the play, Alice had an affair with a man named Mosby. She wanted to get rid of her husband so she and Mosby could be together. But why did this particular murder become a play? Plenty of women committed crimes – infanticide being a particularly popular one associated with women – so why has this murder been preserved on stage?

Alice Arden's interaction with her husband's corpse caused it to bleed when she called out his name in the play. However, *The Newgate Calendar*, a popular English publication that featured stories about morality, made no mention of the corpse bleeding in real life when mentioning the murder.<sup>196</sup> Did *The Newgate Calendar* simply leave out this information because during the time of its publication, the publishers felt its seventeenth-century readers would not be interested in cruentation? Or did it never actually occur, and the play merely used cruentation as a literary device to increase viewership? We will never know for sure whether the body actually bled in real life or not. But judging by *Arden of Faversham*'s success and survival into the twenty-first century, we know that at the very least, it is a play people are still interested in viewing and reading.

In the play, Alice first hires a man named Clarke to poison Arden, but this plan proves to be unsuccessful. Afterwards, she decides to murder him in the game room. Mosby, a hired murderer named Shakebag, and Alice all take turns stabbing Arden in the

---

<sup>195</sup> Catherine Belsey, "Alice Arden's Crime," in *Staging the Renaissance*, ed. David Scott Kastan et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 133.

<sup>196</sup> "Alice Arden of Faversham," (accessed 25 January 2017), <http://www.exclassics.com/newgate/ng4.htm>. The exact date when this entry was published in *The Newgate Calendar* is unknown, but we do know that it was published sometime between 1800-1842. See <http://www.exclassics.com> for more information about the Newgate Calendar.

game room.<sup>197</sup> Even though Alice commits the murder with accomplices, she is considered the primary murderer, since she is the one controlling the hired murderers' actions. However, Mosby eventually grows to fear Alice, and worries that she will try to get rid of him just like she tried to get rid of her husband. He says, "'Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent's bed, / and I will cleanly rid my hands of her."<sup>198</sup> Similar to Alice's capricious nature, Mosby reveals through this statement that he would just as easily betray her in the same way that she betrayed her husband.

After murdering her husband, Alice attempts to remove the bloodstain from the floor, but it will not go away. Susan the servant says, "the blood cleaveth to the ground and will not out."<sup>199</sup> Just as Alice cannot undo her crime, she also cannot remove the bloodstain, which has permanently stained the floor. Because Arden was missing and no one had seen him for at least one day, the mayor and the rest of the town begin to search for him. Before they arrive at the Arden estate, Alice orders the hired criminals to hide her husband's body in the woods.<sup>200</sup> Franklin, Arden's friend, tells the mayor and the neighborhood watch that he thinks Alice is lying about the murder:

And look about this chamber where we are,  
And you shall find part of his guiltless blood;  
For in his slipshoe I did find some rushes,  
Which argueth he was murdered in this room.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> Anonymous, *The Lamentable and True Tragedy of M. Arden of Faversham, 1592* (Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1971), 124.

<sup>198</sup> Anon., *The Lamentable and True Tragedy*, 74.

<sup>199</sup> Anon., *The Lamentable and True Tragedy*, 125.

<sup>200</sup> Anon., *The Lamentable and True Tragedy*, 130.

<sup>201</sup> Anon., *The Lamentable and True Tragedy*, 133.

Franklin logically arrives at this conclusion since the slipshoe (part of a rug) was stuck in Arden's shoe, revealing that he had been murdered inside his home and most likely dragged out of the room. Therefore, cruentation does not spark Franklin's suspicion; instead, it confirms and reveals his suspicions to be true.

When Alice is brought forth to her husband's body, his body "speaks" out against her, revealing that she is the murderer. She says,

the more I sound his name, the more he bleeds.  
This blood condemns me and in gushing forth  
Speaks as it falls and asks me why I did it.<sup>202</sup>

In the play's depiction of Alice's interaction with her dead husband's body, the dialogue explicitly describes the blood, a bodily extension of Arden himself, as speaking directly to Alice. So not only does this bleeding corpse reveal the identity of the true murderer, but it metaphorically allows the dead body to, in a sense, come alive and question Alice about why she would commit such an "unnaturell" act. Thus through cruentation, the body is given agency to speak out and provide the truth for the community, which has its suspicions about Alice already.

#### A WARNING FOR FAIR WOMEN

Similar to how *Arden of Faversham* was based on a murder that occurred in real life, Arthur Golding's pamphlet *A briefe discourse of the late murther of master George Sanders, a worshipful citizen of London and of the apprehension, arreignment, and execution of the principall and accessaries of the same, Seene and allowed* (1577) inspired the play *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599). Both the play and the pamphlet

---

<sup>202</sup> Anon., *The Lamentable and True Tragedy*, 135.

describe how Master George's wife, Anne Sanders, murdered him with the help of M. Browne, Mistress Drewry, and Trusty Roger, similar to Alice Arden's murder of her husband.<sup>203</sup>

In the play, tragedy and murder are personified and stand on stage with the other characters. When all the characters are asleep, "Tragedy settes down her blood, and rubs their hands."<sup>204</sup> Not only is tragedy personified, but tragedy is feminized, and described with female pronouns. The smearing of blood onto the characters' hands is a visual representation that foreshadows the murder Anne Sanders and the others will commit. Hands are the instruments of murder, and bloody hands show that their crime cannot be washed away.

The mayor arrests Browne because he suspects that Browne murdered George Sanders, and has sergeants bring George's body forth to see if Browne recognizes the corpse. Upon seeing the body, Browne says to himself, "Swounds, live the villaine yet? / Oh how his very sight affrights my soule! / His very eies will speake had he no tongue, / and he will accuse me."<sup>205</sup> Master Barnes observes the corpse's reaction when Browne is present, and says, "See how his wounds break out afresh in bleeding."<sup>206</sup> Also, the mayor and Barnes notice that the dead Sanders "openeth his eyes" and "lookes upon

---

<sup>203</sup> Arthur Golding, *A briefe discourse of the late murther of master George Sanders, a worshipful citizen of London and of the apprehension, arreignment, and execution of the principall and accessaries of the same, Seene and allowed* (London: 1577), 32. In the pamphlet M. Browne and the others confess to the murder, whereas in the play cruentation reveals the murder.

<sup>204</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, line 850.

<sup>205</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, lines 1987-1990.

<sup>206</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, line 1991.

[Browne].”<sup>207</sup> The bleeding wounds, paired with the body staring at Browne, cause Browne to say aside,

I gave him fifteen wounds,  
Which now be fiftene mouthes that doe accuse me,  
In ev’ry wound there is a bloody tongue,  
Which will all speake, although he hold his peace,  
By a whole Jury I shalbe accused.<sup>208</sup>

Here we see an obvious connection between a bleeding male corpse, the tongue, and speech. While Browne literally stabbed Sanders with a knife fifteen times, Sanders’ bleeding corpse produces “fifteene mouthes,” each with their own “bloody tongue[s],” which serve as literal knives that in return will metaphorically stab Browne by revealing his crime. While Browne discloses his guilt to the play’s audience, the other characters on stage do not hear his confession. Instead, the body of the man he murdered “speaks out” against him and reveals the truth, thus displaying that “in ev’ry wound there is a bloody tongue.”

Because Anne Sanders was involved in orchestrating her husband’s murder, she is imprisoned and sentenced to death as well. Right before Anne Sanders’ execution, her children come to visit her at Newgate Prison. In the play, she apologizes for taking their father away from them, and warns her daughters to “learne by your mothers fall / To follow virtue, and beware of sinne.”<sup>209</sup> As the title states, the play is a “warning” for “fair” women, not men, and uses Anne Sanders as an example of how women should not act, unless they want to face the same tragic end.

---

<sup>207</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, lines 1993-1994.

<sup>208</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, lines 1995-1999.

<sup>209</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, lines 2686-2687.

The play is a contemporary comment on how women should act, and how they should *not* behave. Despite the fact that Browne is revealed to be Anne's husband's murderer, the consequences for his actions are not emphasized at the end of the play. Instead, the play focuses on the wife's betrayal and actions, deemed "unnaturell" for a woman. The fact that the play chooses to focus on warning "fair women" about how not to act and does not focus so much on Browne's consequences shows that contemporaries believed in disciplining women on how to act. Otherwise, they could have titled the play "A Warning for Fair People," but instead chose a gender-specific title.

#### NATURAL VS. UNNATURAL BEHAVIOR

Because demonic possession was generally thought to afflict women more than men, and because demons were considered unnatural beings, one can argue that contemporaries were suggesting that because female bodies were inhabited by demons – unnatural beings – these women were more susceptible to behaving unnaturally. Furthermore, when cruentation reveals females to be murderers, the texts reporting on their crimes emphasize the females' violation of the natural order of society, as we see in *Arden of Faversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women*, for instance. What does it mean to behave naturally, however? According to Judith Butler, there is no such thing as a pre-existing state of naturalness; instead, what is considered "natural" is socially constructed, much like gender is. While Butler's gender theory does not refer to early modern Europe per se, we can apply this understanding of gender as a "repeated stylization" which

reveals how the idea of “natural,” and by extension, “unnatural,” were developed within a specific time, thus revealing early modern European ideas about gender roles.<sup>210</sup>

Female murderers were the ultimate example of a person violating the natural order of things. *Arden of Faversham* (1592) and *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), which both fit under the “domestic tragedy” genre of theater, follow the same stock pattern: the unfaithful wife betrays and murders her husband, often with help from accomplices of a lower social stature.<sup>211</sup> Usually, domestic tragedies are based on actual murders, as we see in *Arden of Faversham*. The word “domestic” describes the familial connection of the characters involved in the plot and the setting of the domestic sphere where the murder takes place.

Part of the wives’ treacherous betrayal stems from their co-conspirators. While it is bad enough that wives murder their husbands, alliances with men of a lower social stature further emphasize their violation of the proper social structure, and “nature” as a whole. In *Arden of Faversham*, Alice’s lover Mosby is of a lower social status than her husband. One account of the murder described him as a “black, swarthy fellow,” using blackness to describe his evilness.<sup>212</sup> The fact that the perpetrator in domestic tragedies is always a woman suggests that early modern Europeans believed women were more

---

<sup>210</sup> According to Butler, “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.” *Gender Trouble*, 33. For information on demons as unnatural beings, see Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>211</sup> Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women*, line 58. See also Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 58, 201-2. Gowing references the “familiar plots about sex and marriage: women killing their husbands to marry their apprentices,” or men of lower social stature. Gowing cites *Arden of Faversham* as an example of “double treachery,” and argues that when a wife murdered her husband, it was the final straw in a culmination of consequences related to adultery.

<sup>212</sup> Anon., “Alice Arden of Faversham,” *Newgate Calendar*.

treacherous than men, and more susceptible to sin. This could be related to their humoral imbalance, since women were perceived as spongy, cold and wet, and therefore permeable to outside forces.<sup>213</sup> Perhaps this is the playwright's way of tying women's sins back to the first woman to sin in the Garden of Eden and violate nature: Eve.

When Eve gave in to temptation and ate the apple, she defied God. Similarly, by attempting to control someone's life and even further control it by ending it, a female murderer as a central figure defied God and by extension, the natural order, just like Eve did. Christians believed that God possessed the power to control life, so anyone who committed murder therefore challenged God's power. And specifically, when women killed their husbands, they disobeyed God because a "wife's inferiority and subordination to her husband was ordained by God."<sup>214</sup> Thus, women's moral inferiority stemmed from biblical origins and women's descent from Eve, the first woman.<sup>215</sup>

Furthermore, another way in which women defied God's power and acted "unnaturell" was by refusing to maintain a traditional family. Women were responsible for creating life by giving birth to children.<sup>216</sup> But as these plays reveal, they were also capable of destroying the family, or "domestic" space, by murdering their husbands, thus eliminating the possibility of having potential children with their spouses. In seventeenth-century Franciscan Friar Ludovico Maria Sinistrari's *De delectis et poenis (On crimes*

---

<sup>213</sup> Neely, *Distracted Subjects*, 82. See also Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 82. Contemporaries thought women's immorality was linked to their permeable bodies, and described them as "unstable vessels with dangerous, leaking orifices."

<sup>214</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138.

<sup>215</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 3. According to Gowing, "Biblical texts and medical theories provided the key to a basic understanding of gender... Moral frailty was the foundation of feminine weakness."

<sup>216</sup> According to Gowing, women were expected to abide by "biological functions of maternity," and being a mother was their "greatest fulfillment and their natural role." *Common Bodies*, 205.

*and punishments*), Sinistrari supports this idea of the murderous “unnaturell”-behaving wife by claiming that “sins against nature are those that do not lead to reproduction.”<sup>217</sup> By murdering their husbands, the wives permanently broke the familial bond. While this popular play genre may be fiction, it still gives us a glimpse of what the family could have possibly looked like, or what people feared it could turn into, when women challenged the natural order.

Female murderers reinforced the early modern belief that women were “unnaturell” and went against the natural order of things, and cruentation sought to reestablish order by revealing them for their unnatural crimes. Domestic tragedies such as *Arden of Faversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women* not only upheld the symbol of the murderous wife, but contemporaries also used plays such as these to reaffirm the idea that murder was the “ultimate result of adultery,” and was a grave consequence men would face if they allowed their wives to have too much power in the domestic sphere.<sup>218</sup>

### LE CHEVALIER AU LION

Written in the 1170s, several hundred years before both *Arden of Faversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women*, Chrétien de Troyes’ French poem *Le Chevalier au Lion* (*The Knight with the Lion*) is one of the first pieces of literature to mention cruentation. In order to understand *Le Chevalier au Lion*’s significance in relation to gender differentials and cruentation, it is necessary to highlight its differences with *Arden of Faversham* and

---

<sup>217</sup> Ludovico Maria Sinistrari, *De delectis et poenis* in Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 143.

<sup>218</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 205. “Figured as the ultimate result of adultery, murder acted as a symbol of the dangers of disordered households, and specifically, the results of women’s unchastity.”

*A Warning for Fair Women*. Unlike these two plays, de Troyes' poem does not feature a female murderer, but a male murderer, and this gender distinction results in an entirely different outcome for this tale.

Yvain, one of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, goes on an adventure seeking revenge against a powerfully strong knight who defeated his cousin in battle. Yvain slays the knight and tries to escape the kingdom undetected. The queen's maid offers to help Yvain escape from the castle, and gives him a magical ring that makes him invisible. Determined to find the man who killed their lord, the dead knight's people search the castle, and enter the room where Yvain is hiding. While they cannot see him due to the magical ring Yvain is wearing, the dead knight's corpse acts as a detector of Yvain's presence. His corpse begins to bleed, since Yvain is in the room:

The procession passed on, but in the middle of the room there was a great commotion about the bier, for warm blood, clear and red, was flowing again from the dead man's wound; and this was proof positive that he who had done battle with him, and who had defeated and killed him, was undoubtedly still there within.<sup>219</sup>

No matter how hard they look, the people inside the castle do not find Yvain.

Because of the people's belief in cruentation, they

grew more and more distraught because of the wounds that had opened; and they wondered why they bled when they could not find the cause, and each and every one of them said: 'among us is the one who killed him, yet we do not see him at all; this is a wondrous and devilish thing!'<sup>220</sup>

The wording of the quote above is slightly ambiguous; perhaps the author's intention was for the people searching inside the castle to be speaking, but the sentence's

---

<sup>219</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*. Series A. Vol, 48, ed. William W. Kibler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 49.

<sup>220</sup> de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion*, 51.

construction makes it unclear whether “they” refers to the people, or “they” refers to the wounds, which are “wonder[ing] why they bled.” The use of the single pronoun “they” to refer to both the people and the wounds makes it seem as if the wounds are personified, and speaking out on their own behalf.

Even though the dead knight’s corpse bleeds, the people in the castle never manage to find Yvain, who escapes. Compared to the other plays and epic poems that reference cruentation, Yvain, unlike the murderous wives, is the only character that kills his victim solely by his own hand; every other person hires someone else to commit the act on their behalf, or they have accomplices. Interestingly enough, Yvain, unlike Alice Arden or Anne Sanders, does not end up being executed or revealed to be the true murderer. Instead, he repents for his actions by embarking on a chivalric adventure, and eventually returns home with his lion after facing difficult tasks on his knightly journey.

Yvain is the only character from literature featuring cruentation discussed in this thesis who gets away with his crime, and it is no coincidence that he happens to be a male character. De Troyes implies that because Yvain did not betray the trust of a kinsman, his actions are not considered treacherous, and therefore the consequences for his actions are far less severe. Yvain’s killing is almost justified, since he conquered his enemy in a chivalric battle. There was no deception or confusion about his actions – he won the duel by fighting fairly – unlike the characters in other works of literature that killed unsuspecting victims. Yet were the other murdered characters unsuspecting victims, or is this simply how the contemporary authors chose to portray them?

As the two Maryland court cases revealed, with the male corpse being classified as murdered and the female corpse being classified as having died from “ffitts of the

mother” – despite their remarkably similar violent treatment from their masters – gender determined the outcome of trials that otherwise featured the same crime. Yvain’s actions are characterized as “chivalric” and “honorable” because he is male; had Yvain been a woman, contemporaries most likely would have chosen to describe his actions as treacherous, since this was typically how they described female murderers. Because of socially constructed gender roles, late medieval and early modern Europeans considered it perfectly acceptable for men to battle in duels. Ultimately, Yvain’s character did murder another man. But because of the way patriarchal society classifies this type of action – as dueling and not murder – this makes it virtually impossible for women to get away with the same type of crime, since dueling was typically a male-gendered practice.

#### POSSESSION AND EXORCISM IN VISUAL ARTS

Despite the fact that the exorcism of female demoniacs was a popular public spectacle, there do not seem to be as many contemporary visual representations of the practice as one might think. Perhaps there was a lack of visual depictions of possession in early modern Europe because the criteria for determining whether a person was possessed or not had too many variables; as previously mentioned, demoniacs could be identified by contortions, vomiting, or verbalization of foreign languages, with the latter being the key sign of possession this thesis focuses on. Emanation of speech, particularly speech of a foreign language, would be difficult to depict in visual imagery. Or perhaps there is a lack of visual depictions of possession because contemporaries would rather witness the possession in person, since exorcisms were such publicized events.

Regardless of the reason why there seems to be a smaller amount of visual depictions of the phenomenon despite its popularity in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, one can argue that this scarcity of visual representation of demoniacs in the early modern period was influenced by contemporaries' efforts to suppress female speaking bodies, both in person, and in artistic representation. Thus, not only did female demoniacs lose control of their own bodies during the process of possession and exorcism, but they are in a sense "silenced" by this paucity of artistic representation. By choosing not to create quite as many images of female demoniacs, contemporaries seem to be displaying yet another form of control of these female bodies. Artistic visual depictions of demonic possession that we do have access to almost always involve the process of exorcism, and the central focus of the image is on the exorcist, not the demoniac.

Literary arts involving demons often depict the battle between a male saint and a demon, emphasizing the triumph of male religious power over evil. However, there is a curious observation to mention: despite the fact that demonic possession was generally thought to affect women more than men, there seem to be quite a few images of male demoniacs in visual arts, but not female demoniacs. Take Francisco Goya's painting of Saint Francis Borgia performing an exorcism, *Saint Francis Borja at the Deathbed of an Impenitent (Saint Francis of Borgia Exorcising a Demonized Dying Man)* (1788), for example (Figure 6). In the painting, a halo surrounds Saint Francis Borja's head, and the cross he holds in his hand clearly identifies him as the exorcist. He is positioned standing towards a man lying in bed, half-naked, with demons cowering over the bedridden man. The man's facial expression of anguish, paired with the title of the painting, both indicate

that this man is in a passive, pitiable position, much like how female demoniacs are described in textual documents. Images of Christian men – particularly Christ – exorcising other men possessed by demons was a common theme in late medieval art, and another example can be seen on the following page (Figure 7).

**Figure 6.**



**Source:** Francisco de Goya, *Saint Francis Borja at the Deathbed of an Impenitent (Saint Francis of Borgia Exorcising a Demonized Dying Man)*. 1788, oil on canvas, 350 x 300 cm. Scala Archives, Florence. Available from: <http://www.scalaarchives.com>.

Why would male artists choose to create paintings with male demoniacs, when they must have been fully aware of the fact that, according to textual documents, female bodies were possessed by demons more often than male bodies? While one could interpret the artists' uses of male bodies to as representations of demoniacs in their paintings as men in vulnerable, passive positions, this does not seem to be as important as the absence of women. Perhaps early modern artists used male bodies in their paintings to give their subject matter greater credibility, since female bodies only seemed to possess credibility when speaking through the guise of male bodies.

**Figure 7. Jesus Performs an Exorcism**



**Source:** Meister Konrad von Freisach, illustration from a section of the abstinence cloth in the Cathedral of Gurk, Carinthia, Austria. 1458. Available from Wikimedia Commons, <http://www.commonswikimedia.org>.

However, this is not to say that female demoniacs do not feature in visual arts at all. One particularly important image of a female demoniac being exorcised by a monk comes from the Mariazell shrine at Zell in the Duchy of Styria (Figure 8). At first glance, this image seems to merely feature a female demoniac in the process of being exorcised, as is evident by the black insect-like demons flying above her head. However, the Mariazell shrine illustration is more complicated than that; it is yet another artistic example of the symbol of the “murderous wife,” much like the wives featured in the domestic tragedy plays. In a bloody heap on the ground behind the demoniac are the murdered corpses of this woman’s children, parents, and husband.<sup>221</sup>

**Figure 8. A monk exorcising a "murderous wife"**



**Source:** Panel of the Small Mariazell Miracle Altar, Danube School, 1512. Alte Galerie, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria.

<sup>221</sup> Brian Levack, “Exorcism.” Last modified October 24, 2012. "<http://notevenpast.org/exorcism/>" <http://notevenpast.org/exorcism/>.

While this is a painting of an exorcism, it is also a painting about a murder, and about a wife behaving unnaturally by murdering her family. However, unlike the other murderous wives such as Alice Arden and Anne Sanders, the female subject of this painting is identified as a demoniac, and contemporaries did not consider the murders to be her own actions, but rather the actions of the demons possessing her. Thus, this image is complicated for two reasons. At first it seems as if this woman has garnered attention in the visual depiction because she is a demoniac. But then when one considers the fact that this woman was also a murderer, one begins to question whether that is the reason why this story has been preserved in the form of a shrine image. However, because contemporaries did not consider her responsible for these murders, she is not granted the same agency as the other murderous wives discussed in this thesis. Her actions cease to be considered her own, and all culpability – or agency – belongs to those who are controlling her body: first the demons possess her, and then the monk exorcises her.

In literary arts involving these forms of speaking bodies brought about by means of possession and cruentation, the only times women seem to speak or garner attention are when they are revealed to be murderers. Therefore, contemporary art seemed to allow women to “speak” or be the focus of speech when the woman is behaving unnaturally. When a woman is the victim, however, such as a demoniac, she is silenced or placed in a position of passivity in artistic representation.

#### WOMEN’S SILENCE IN VISUAL ARTS

Even when female corpses are not the ones revealing murder but rather living female accusers or witnesses to the crime, women only seem to have their speech

validated when it involves a male body. Aside from textual work, cruentation featured in visual imagery as well. Visual representation of cruentation in art that involves women further supports the idea that women were silenced or men did not listen to them.

Even when accusing men of murder, females are silent, and are depicted using gestures rather than speech to accuse a murderer. For example, German Romantic painter Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld's *Bahrprobe*, (1846) (Figure 9) is inspired by the German epic poem *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1230). In *Nibelungenlied*, King Gunther's half-brother Hagen murders Siegfried, a dragon slayer married to King Gunther's sister. Even though Hagen committed the murder in order to protect Gunther's title as king, Gunther was aware of the plan and consented to assisting in the treacherous act. The painting depicts Kriemhild's discovery of her husband Siegfried's murder. In the painting, Kriemhild points at the bleeding wound on her husband's body with one hand, and points towards Hagen with her other hand. Other people in the painting all look at Hagen. Because the bleeding corpse Kriemhild gestures at is a male corpse, it seems to be taken seriously by the bystanders. Thus, Kriemhild is, in a sense, taking agency and control of the situation due to the blood emanating from her husband's corpse. However, if her husband's corpse had not bled, would people have taken her murder accusation seriously?

**Figure 9. A visual depiction of *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1230)**



**Source:** Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Bahrprobe*. 1846. Available from: Eichfelder, <http://www.eichfelder.de/kunst/tumulus/reuter2.html>.

~

At Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest, there is a painting by a nineteenth-century Hungarian painter named Jenő Gyárfás (1857-1925) called *Ordeal of the Bier* (1881). Gyárfás's *Ordeal of the Bier* (1881) (Figure 10) won a prize from the National Fine Arts Society in Budapest because it represented Hungarian national ideals, since it illustrated a famous Hungarian ballad, and featured a "supposedly ancient Hungarian custom (the ordeal of the Bier)."<sup>222</sup> The painting contains a bleeding

---

<sup>222</sup> Nóra Veszprémi, "A Baedeker of the Soul: Dangerous Games and Hungarian Gothic," <https://hungarianartist.wordpress.com/2013/05/02/a-baedeker-of-the-soul-love-dangerous-games-and-hungarian-gothic/>."

corpse, with a crowd of people around it. A woman flees down a staircase, and a corpse laid out on a bier can be seen in the shadows of the upper right hand corner of the painting. This painting also features a crowd of onlookers, who point at the suspicious woman. In *Ordeal of the Bier* (1881), all eyes are directed towards the woman in the center, dressed in white. Gyárfás' decision to dress her in white makes her the central focus of the painting.

If one does not look at this painting carefully, or does not know what the title of the painting is referring to, one could easily overlook the bleeding corpse in the shadows. It seems fitting that the woman in white is the main focus of the painting, since the whole point of cruentation is for the bleeding corpse to reveal its murderer. Thus, the painting similarly reveals this woman to be the murderer. The woman in white is assumed to be the murderer, which is obvious to the viewer of the painting judging by the fact that all of the other characters in the painting are looking at her, with expressions of concern, fear, and even suspicion. Another aspect of the painting that cannot be overlooked is the bloody dagger shown on the ground at the top of the steps behind the woman. The black and white checkered floor also draws the reader's eye, thus highlighting the dagger. It would make sense for the artist to draw attention to the dagger, since this is the murder weapon that is connected to the bleeding corpse in the other room.

Finally, one last point that must be mentioned is the setting of the painting. We do not know exactly where this scene is taking place, but it seems to be in either a public space, or an area that people have access to. The fact that this woman is discovered to be a murderer, while she is standing around a crowd of on-lookers, reveals the fact that cruentation was a highly public event, and involved several members of the community.

A crowd's presence was just as important as the murderer's presence in an instance where cruentation occurred, because there needed to be witnesses to the event who could receive the knowledge from the bleeding body, and discover who the murderer was. Much like exorcisms of demoniacs, cruentation was a visual spectacle that needed to be seen to be believed.

**Figure 10. *Ordeal of the Bier***



**Source:** Jenő Gyárfás, *Ordeal of the Bier*. 1881, oil painting, 190.5 x 282 cm. Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Budapest, Hungary. Available from: MNG, <http://mng.hu>.

Gyárfás' *Ordeal of the Bier* (1881) represents a scene from a ballad by János Arany (1817-1882), a Hungarian poet who translated Shakespearian plays into Hungarian.<sup>223</sup> The ballad, written in 1877, is supposedly entitled "Call to the Ordeal,"

---

<sup>223</sup> Veszprémi, "A Baedeker of the Soul," NP.

(*Tetemre hívás* in Hungarian). While some sources refer to it as “Call to the Ordeal,” others refer to the ballad as “Ordeal by Blood,” so there are some inconsistencies. It is most likely that “Ordeal of the Bier” and “Ordeal by Blood” are two rough translations from Hungarian into English that are used interchangeably to refer to the same ballad.<sup>224</sup> Arany’s ballad is about a man named Benő Bárczi, whose murder was a mystery. The family had people approach his corpse, one by one, and it bleeds when his bride-to-be, Abigail, stands in front of it. Supposedly Abigail says that she did not murder him, but merely provided him with the dagger which leads to his death. She says that Bárczi told her to either proclaim her love for him, or give him a dagger to drive through his heart; she chose the latter.<sup>225</sup>

Even though both *Ordeal of the Bier* and the ballad it was based on were both created in the nineteenth century, their existence matters to our understanding of bleeding corpses and “speaking bodies” in early modern Europe. Gyárfás’ painting, as well as Arany’s ballad, both represent a persistence of the “ancient custom” of cruentation, as well as the symbol of the murderous wife that became so popular in the early modern period. The existence of these visual and literary artworks suggest that even in the

---

<sup>224</sup> Also, when searching for information about Arany’s ballad, I discovered another image depicting the bier test, “*Tetemre Hívás*,” painted by Mihály Zichy in 1894. Because both Gyárfás and Zichy’s paintings have the same title in Hungarian, this leads me to believe that the title is not an original title, but rather a simple title referring to the action occurring in the painting. Regardless of what it is called – cruentation, ordeal by blood, ordeal of the bier, bier test, etc. – the title is referring to the same phenomenon.

<sup>225</sup> This information can be found in the following books: Ninon A.M. Leader, ed., *Hungarian Classical Ballads: and their Folklore*, and Lajos Vargyas, *Hungarian Ballads and the European Ballad Tradition*, translated into English. While searching for another source that could reaffirm Vespérmi’s information about the “Call to the Ordeal” ballad, I also ended up finding a book called *A Hungarian Nabob* by Mór Jókai, translated into English by R. Nisbet Bain. While Jókai’s book does not contain an English translation of Arany’s ballad, it does include several folk tales about murders discovered using the bier test, so it is relevant in the sense that it is about the same subject matter I was searching for information about.

nineteenth century, Hungarians were still quite familiar with the concept of cruentation and the male bleeding corpse that “spoke out” to reveal his murderous wife.

~

What does examining cruentation and possession in visual and literary artwork teach us? To start, visual and literary arts reveal an intellectual and cultural place developed at a very specific moment in time. The world that creates the context to think in this way – that bodies could bleed and “speak out” against their murderers, and female bodies could become possessed by demonic forces – creates the same world views that influence this art, and vice versa. And when considering the fact that artwork created in a particular time and place reveals to us the context of this time and place, it is worth noting that the symbol of the murderous wife and the phenomenon of cruentation persist; possession and exorcism, on the other hand, garner far less attention from artists of the nineteenth century, similar to how it fell out of practice in the courts while cruentation survived.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONTEMPORARY SPECULATION OF “SPEAKING BODIES”

On June 23, 1634, Urban Grandier (Figure 11) was transported from his prison cell to witness the exorcism of the Ursuline nuns he was accused of having possessed. When the exorcist, Capuchin Father Tranquille, arrived, he asked the bishop, “who must I exorcise?” The bishop responded by identifying the possessed nuns. Because each nun had one or more demons inside her body, Tranquille had to perform the exorcism ritual on each nun individually. He started with sister Catherine, “possessed as the most ignorant of all.” While Tranquille began the exorcism ritual in the usual manner, he modified it to address Catherine’s ignorance. In the place of the necessary words *Precipio, aut Imperio*, Tranquille addressed Catherine in the French vernacular, beginning his questioning by saying, “I ask you.”<sup>226</sup>

The Bishop of Poitiers was alarmed by Tranquille’s modification to the proscribed ritual, and told Tranquille that the demons possessing these poor nuns’ bodies responded to the language of the devil. While trying to exorcise the demons out of Sister Catherine, Sister Claire advanced toward Tranquille, creeping up towards him while at the same time muttering and “reproaching him [for] his blindness and stubbornness.”<sup>227</sup> This time, the exorcist lost interest in Sister Catherine and turned to Sister Claire, now addressing her in his ritual.

Meanwhile, Grandier, who was trying to think of ways to prove his innocence, suggested that the exorcist might interrogate these demons in Greek, since this was “one

---

<sup>226</sup> Anon., *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier*, NP.

<sup>227</sup> Anon., *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier*, NP.

of the marks required for justifying a possession.” Upon hearing his suggestion, the demon occupying the body of Prioress Jeanne des Anges shouted at Grandier in French that “one of the first conditions of the pact made between you and us, do not respond in Greek.” An argument between Grandier and the demon “by the mouth of the Prioress” ensued. The demon remained firm and persistent in his argument, and silenced Grandier, the “magician who said no more words.”<sup>228</sup>

Coming from the mouths of the possessed nuns, voices multiplied and grew even louder, as the nuns persistently continued to accuse Grandier of “magic and evil that he worked on them.” Grandier, languishing from their verbal attacks, cried out to the Bishop and the commissioner, pleading for them to stop.

The exorcist commanded silence from the devils, and the room grew quiet. The quiet lasted until the exorcist began burning the supposed pacts the nuns accused Grandier made with them. As the flames crackled and the pacts disintegrated into the fire, the demons in control of the nuns’ bodies “began to do the Sabbath with more violence and disorder than previously.” Their cries echoed throughout the room, and they contorted their bodies, twisting their arms and legs in unnatural poses. The more charred the pacts became in the burning stove, the more the demons screeched and used the mouths of the nuns to speak horrible profanities. The devils continued their accusations against Grandier, and began to shout out the “places, hours, and days of their communion with him.”<sup>229</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> Anon., *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier*, NP.

<sup>229</sup> Anon., *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier*, NP.

Crying out in his defense, Grandier proclaimed, “I have never given a place for these abominations!” to which one of the demons responded that Beelzebub was present at their communion, standing at Grandier’s side. Grandier, frustrated and fearing the outcome of these interrogations, prayed to God, who we knew was “much stronger than all in Hell.” Despite the fact that these demons called Grandier “their master,” they still wanted to throw objects at him, rip him up, and strangle him. Still, amongst the chaos of accusation and threats, Grandier fervently proclaimed his innocence, crying, “I am not their master and not their manservant!”<sup>230</sup>

Urbain Grandier never admitted to causing the possession of the Ursuline nuns; in fact, he claimed he had never even met these women, or visited the cloistered convent where they all came from. Grandier insisted that he was innocent, up until the end of his life. After his interrogation and confrontation with the possessed nuns, Grandier was brought back to his prison. At six o’ clock the next day, Grandier was convicted of magic, sorcery, and irreligion, and was sentenced to death.

While there were contemporaries who did not believe that Grandier caused the possessions, this group of people was divided in two: some of these contemporaries did not believe Grandier caused the possessions because they believed Grandier himself was innocent, whereas there were others who believed that Grandier was innocent because the possibility of possession was impossible, and that these nuns were faking their afflictions.

~

---

<sup>230</sup> Anon., *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier*, NP.

Why was Grandier accused of causing these Ursuline nuns to be possessed in the first place? While there were people living in early modern Europe who firmly accepted possession and bleeding corpses as legitimate, there were also people who speculated the validity of the phenomena.

**Figure 11. Urbain Grandier**



**Source:** *Urbanus Grandierius*. 1627. Portrait. Available from: Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

The pamphlet *La demonomanie de Lodun qui montre la veritable possession des religieuses ursulines...* (1634) debates whether the possessions were “madness” or not, and claims that the possessions could be explained as melancholy or hypochondria.<sup>231</sup> *La demonomanie de Lodun* certainly focuses on the demoniacs’ actions more so than any of the other pamphlets examined in this paper. According to the author of this pamphlet, the demoniacs used their condition as a sort of immunity which allowed them to violate female gender norms by acting abnormally, “jump[ing] in the fire and in the water,” without having to suffer repercussions.<sup>232</sup> The author of *La demonomanie de Lodun* was not convinced in the validity of the possessions, and instead argued that the only way nuns could “make grimaces in public,” as well as “indecent gestures and say dirty words... without being ashamed” was if they were mentally ill.<sup>233</sup>

It is important to notice the emphasis *La demonomanie de Lodun* places on the demoniacs, and not the exorcists, and then take into consideration the viewpoint of its author. The pamphlets that centered their descriptions around the demons and exorcists were written by people who believed in the legitimacy of exorcism, and supported the Catholic Church’s ability to successfully expel demons from female demoniacs’ bodies. *La demonomanie de Lodun*, however, was written by someone who rejected the validity of the possessions, attributing them to mental illness. One can argue that the reason this pamphlet focuses more on the actions of the demoniacs and rarely refers to the demons

---

<sup>231</sup> Anon., *La demonomanie de Lodun*, 5. From the original text: “folie,” “melancholoques & hypochondriaques.”

<sup>232</sup> Anon., *La demonomanie de Lodun*, 5.

<sup>233</sup> Anon., *La demonomanie de Lodun*, 7-8. From the original text: “comment une fille bien née se portera-elle à faire en public des grimaces, des gestes indecents, dire des paroles sales, et s'explorer a la risée et a la veue de tout le monde, sans en avoir honte.”

and exorcists, either generally or specifically, is because the author wanted to draw attention to examples of what he believed was madness. This pamphlet does not focus on the demoniacs in order to give these women importance; instead, it uses the women and their actions to undermine the authority of the Catholic Church. So even though *La demonomanie de Loudun* centers the female demoniacs at the center of the document, they are merely used as a tool to reveal the falsities of Catholic exorcism, thus placing the women in a position of passivity in the same way that the pro-Catholic exorcism pamphlets do. This pamphlet is also similar to the others because it describes the nuns as “poor girls,” and does not refer to them by their individual names.<sup>234</sup>

At the end of the seventeenth century in 1691, Richard Baxter published his correspondences with the Duke of Lauderdale on matters pertaining to the “worlds of spirits.”<sup>235</sup> In letters sent to Baxter, John Maitland, the Duke of Lauderdale (Figure 12), explains how he was a witness present at the Loudun possessions, and he proceeds to explain why he thinks they were false. However, this is not to say that Maitland was not a believer in the possibility of demonic possession. In fact, he tells Baxter (Figure 13) that he had seen a “[r]eal Possession near the place [he] was born,” using this bit of information to establish the fact that he was not completely close-minded when it came to possession. It seems as if Maitland purposefully told Baxter that he has witnessed a “real Possession” before in order to establish his creditability, and to prove that just because he was “not a papist” does not mean that he doubted the possibility of demonic possession.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Anon., *La demonomanie de Loudun*, 11. From the original text: “ces pauvres filles Ursulines.”

<sup>235</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 1.

<sup>236</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 83.

So why did Maitland think the Loudun nuns were pretending to be possessed, and why was he convinced the other possession he had witnessed was real? When he was a boy, Maitland had witnessed a “poor woman” who was supposedly believed to be possessed, because she had the ability to speak in Latin, a language previously unbeknownst to her. He describes how the minister spoke in Latin to the woman, and “a Voice comes out of the Woman’s Mouth, *Aud[...]* loquentem, *audis loquentem.*”<sup>237</sup> Because the woman, prior to her supposed possession, did not have the ability to speak Latin, Maitland wrote that this “is Evidence enough, I think” that her supposed possession was legitimate.<sup>238</sup>

Maitland automatically assumed that because the demoniac in question was a woman, she must therefore have been possessed, and not faking her possession, because how could women possibly be intelligent enough to know foreign languages such as Latin? Maitland’s belief in possession, at least in this particular case, ties back to the theme of speaking bodies and their gendered implications. In this case, the “voice” that comes out of the woman’s mouth is not believed to be her own. Therefore, the woman is not speaking, but rather the devil inside of her is. Maitland’s explanation for this supposedly legitimate case relies on his belief that the woman’s knowledge of Latin is not her own. This speaking body is recognized as legitimate not because it is a female speaking Latin, but because it is a demon speaking Latin through the mouth of a poor possessed woman.

---

<sup>237</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 84.

<sup>238</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 84.

How does this case differ from Maitland's description of what he witnessed at the Loudun possessions? When many people in Paris were writing and publishing "strange stories" of the occurrences of a "whole cloyster" of nuns that happened to be possessed, Maitland "was perswaded such a thing might be, and that it was not impossible the Devil could possess a nun as well as another, doubted it as little as any body."<sup>239</sup> So he decided to visit Loudun and see for himself whether these nuns were indeed possessed. Because he had seen a "real Possession" in the past, Maitland explained in his letter to Baxter that when he arrived at Loudun, he brought with him "as little prejudice as any could have," since he had seen strange sights before. However, after witnessing the exorcism of "three or four" nuns in the chapel, Maitland's skepticism increased. As he described it to Baxter,

[When] I could hear nothing but wanton Wenches singing bawdy songs in *French*, I began to suspect a Fourbe, and in great Gravity went to a Jesuite, and told him, I had come a great way in hope to see some strange thing, and was sorry to be disappointed.<sup>240</sup>

Here again we see Maitland focus his attention on the language being used by the supposed demoniacs. While the poor woman who he had witnessed being exorcised when he was a small boy had been speaking Latin, these nuns were speaking their native tongue, French. Convinced that in order for a possession to be real, the female demoniacs must be able to understand a language they did not have prior knowledge of, Maitland describes how he went to a Jesuit and "spoke his mind freely," expressing his frustration for what he thought to be a hoax. Maitland further described to Baxter his interaction with this Jesuit, writing,

---

<sup>239</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 89.

<sup>240</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 90.

He still maintained a real Possession, and I desired for a trial to speak a strange Language: He asked what Language? I told him I would not tell; but neither he nor all those Devils should understand me. He asked if I would be converted upon the Tryal, (for he had discovered I was no Papist) I told him that was not the Question, nor could all the Devils in Hell pervert me; but the Question was, If that was a real Possession, and if any cold understand me I shall confess if under my Hand: His answer was, These Devils have not travelled; and this I replied to with a loud Laughter...<sup>241</sup>

Again we see Maitland's fixation with language, and his belief that in order for a possession to be real, the demoniac must be able to understand and respond to foreign languages. Because these supposed demoniacs do not speak out since they do not understand the speech used in Maitland's test, he takes this to be evidence of false possessions.

In addition to noticing Maitland's focus on the language used by the nuns, it is important to also notice the gendered language Maitland uses himself when describing the nuns and their speech, which he refers to as "baudy songs" being sung by "Wenches."<sup>242</sup> The word "baudy," also sometimes stylized as "bawdy," was an insult linked to a gendered connotation; at the time of its usage in the seventeenth century, it meant "vile, abominable [and] barbarous."<sup>243</sup> Men in early modern London, for example, were called "bawds" when their wives had the reputation of being whores. In this sense, the word "bawd" was not gendered male, but was nevertheless used to describe men who were cuckolded as a way of drawing attention to their wives' immorality and sexual promiscuity outside the marriage. Thus, the power of the term as an insult derived from

---

<sup>241</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 90-91.

<sup>242</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 90.

<sup>243</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, "baudy."

<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/view/Entry/16362?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rsk=3MZib0&>

the women's behavior and their acting out against societal expectations, not the men's behavior. Despite the fact that men could be referred to using a term such as "baudy," the meaning of the term was nevertheless ascribed to their wives, not the men themselves. Why might Maitland have chosen this term to describe the nuns' speech, or "songs," as he describes them?

Perhaps Maitland chose to describe the nuns' speech as "baudy" due to the fact that he did not believe in the validity of their possession, and merely was describing what he considered to be fraud as "baudy" due to the word's association with a violation of morality. However, regardless of whether Maitland consciously chose a word with gendered connotations or not, the use of the word "baudy" highlighted the nuns' subordinate status as women who were not to be trusted. Perhaps by using the word "baudy," Maitland's particular word usage contributed to their discrediting, not the other way around. Rather than using a more gender-neutral term, Maitland chose a word that, in the early modern period, "constituted an occupational identity only for women," similar to how the word "whore" was reserved for women.<sup>244</sup>

In addition to his description of what he witnessed at Loudun, Maitland describes to Baxter another exorcism which he witnessed, this time near Antwerp in 1649. Maitland believes this case of possessions was also false, because these supposed demoniacs also did not have the capability to speak out in a foreign language. Instead, he "saw only some great *Holland* wenches hear Exorcism patiently, and belch most abominably."<sup>245</sup> Notice the Duke's specific language used to describe this exorcism he

---

<sup>244</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 97.

<sup>245</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 91.

witnessed. He again refers to the demoniacs as “wenches,” confirming the fact that they were female. What is more, the term “wench” not only has a feminine connotation, but it is a term that is sexually suggestive as well. Early modern Europeans often compared talkative women to women with sexually loose morals. In fact, in Richard Braithwait’s *The English Gentlewoman* (1641), he explains that “silence in a woman is moving rhetoricke, winning most, when it words it wooeth least... More shall wee see fall into sinne by speech than by silence.”<sup>246</sup> Thus, a woman’s lack of speech was directly tied to her chastity.

According to Maitland’s description of the demoniacs, rather than describing them as speaking, these supposed demoniacs only “hear[d]” the exorcism, thus drawing attention to their lack of agency and ability to speak out on their own. Hearing is the opposite of speaking: here the demoniacs were listening to someone else speak to them – not with them – thus suggesting that the person conducting the exorcism held the true power. Also, Maitland describes the wench’s interactions with the exorcism ritual as “belching.” So these supposed demoniacs made noise, but their noise was not speech. It is significant to notice here that Maitland describes their noise as unintelligible; he interprets their action of “belch[ing]” and not speaking as a sign that they were not truly possessed, because if they were possessed, the devils inside their bodies would use their bodies to speak intelligibly.

What else can we make of Maitland’s description of this possession case? Based on his opinion regarding the possession he witnessed as a boy, (where the woman could

---

<sup>246</sup> Richard Braithwait, *The English Gentlewoman* (1641) in Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women’s Voices in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 2.

understand and converse in a foreign language supposedly unknown to her, as a sign of legitimate possession), we can speculate that in order for Duke Maitland to consider this possession case to be real, he would need to hear the “wenches” speak in a foreign tongue. Like other contemporaries of his time, Maitland believed that devils had the capability to inhabit bodies and speak through these bodily vessels. If the “wenches” did not understand a foreign language, it served to confirm two commonly-held beliefs: the “wenches” could not understand the language because of ignorance, and they could not understand it because devils were not actually occupying their bodies. If devils had possessed them, the “wenches” would have been able to comprehend the foreign language spoken to them not by virtue of their sex, but by virtue of their demonic possession.

~

As the number of demoniacs increased in the sixteenth century, so did the number of skeptics. Both Catholic and Protestant authorities believed that a great deal of the supposed demoniacs were faking their possessions. In order to determine legitimacy or farce, the authorities ordered tests to be conducted, similar to the tests of the ordeal. Only this time, the tests were not being performed in order to discover a murderer, but rather to discover whether a person’s odd behavior – convulsions, blasphemy, contortions, and so forth – was actually being caused by a penetrating demonic force inside the body of the supposed demoniac. Thus, tests conducted on a living person’s body were equally as important in the case of ruling out demonic possession as they were in determining if God had granted speech to a corpse through divine providence. These tests were

performed on supposed demoniacs during exorcisms, and if the demoniacs did not pass these tests, they were subject to prosecution in either temporal or ecclesiastical courts. If a supposed demoniac failed one of these tests, usually he or she was accused of faking possession for the purposes of garnering attention, using the guise of possession to violate social or moral norms, or wrongfully accuse someone of causing possession by using witchcraft.<sup>247</sup>

Another contemporary who witnessed the Loudun exorcisms and was skeptical about the legitimacy of the nuns' possessions attributed the cause of their supposed possession to madness. In *A late Discourse made in a solemne Assembly... touching the cure of Wounds by the Powder of Sympathy* (1658), Kenelm Digby described the convulsions he witnessed in Loudun in 1634, arguing that the nuns played off of each other's actions and imitated the same convulsions.<sup>248</sup> Comparing the nuns to musical instruments, he writes,

when two Lutes, or two Harps, near one another, both set to the same tune, if you touch the strings of the one, the other consonant harp will sound at the same time, though no body touch it, whereof *Galileo* hath ingeniously rendred the reason.<sup>249</sup>

Although the term was not coined until much later around the nineteenth century, Digby seems to be alluding to the fact that the nuns were displaying signs of *folie à deux*, a shared form of psychosis.<sup>250</sup> And similarly to how Duke Maitland describes the nuns' verbalizations as "belching," Digby uses the metaphor of musical instruments. By

---

<sup>247</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*, 23.

<sup>248</sup> Kenelm Digby (1650s), (trans. R. White), *A late Discourse made in a solemne Assembly... touching the cure of Wounds by the Powder of Sympathy* (London: 1658).

<sup>249</sup> Digby, *A late Discourse made in a solemne Assembly*, 95.

<sup>250</sup> Wehmeier PM, Barth N, Remschmidt H, "Induced delusional disorder: a review of the concept and an unusual case of folie à famille". *Psychopathology*. 36:1 (2003): 37–45.

comparing the nuns to “Lutes” or “Harps,” one can speculate that Digby is also trying to describe how the nuns’ speech was unintelligible. They made noise, yes, but this noise could not be understood by male witnesses such as Digby. Therefore, even though the nuns speak out like lutes making musical melodies, the witnesses hear them, yet do not understand the nuns, rendering their speech worthless.

If a corpse placed on the bier did not bleed or “cry out to the heavens” declaring its wrongful murder, it was no worse off than before. The corpse tested by cruentation was dead, and would remain dead, despite the outcome of the ordeal. Therefore, the only person who would be affected by the corpse’s ability to speak would be its murderer. With a supposed demoniac, on the other hand, this person placed his or her own life in danger by faking possession, if that is what the test for legitimacy reveals to have happened.

**Figure 12. Duke of Lauderdale**



**Source:** Jacob Huysmans, *John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale*. 1665, oil on canvas. National Portrait Gallery, London. Available from: <http://www.npg.org.uk>

**Figure 13. Richard Baxter**



**Source:** Robert White, *Richard Baxter*. 1670. Oil on canvas, 724 x 616 mm. National Portrait Gallery, London. Available from: <http://www.npg.org.uk>.

## CHAPTER VIII

### RISE OF THE ANATOMICAL STUDY OF THE BODY AND DECLINE IN MAGIC

Ever since the thirteenth century, early modern Europeans viewed the body as an object meant to be manipulated for epistemological reasons, which we have seen through the practices of cruentation and exorcism. And by the time of the early seventeenth century, this time was referred to as the “golden age” of the demoniac, since this is when demonic possession cases reached their height in Europe.<sup>251</sup> But by the end of the seventeenth century, early modern Europeans either seemed to think that demoniac bodies no longer held hidden knowledge, or that the bodies themselves, for the most part being female, were not valid vessels for learning the truth.<sup>252</sup>

Contemporaries were less and less likely to deem possession legitimate evidence, and instead were more likely to explain it to be a medical illnesses women were prone to acquiring. Cruentation, on the other hand, converged the mystical with the medical, and the blood emanating from a corpse counted in court as both divine providence and medical evidence. Theologians Jean Gerson and Pedro Ciruelo both believed that “divine and demonic possessions were more likely to be deceptions or natural illnesses,” indicating that while contemporaries still retained belief in cruentation, possession’s legitimacy was highly in question in the early seventeenth century.<sup>253</sup> It was not that

---

<sup>251</sup> Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, ed., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 28.

<sup>252</sup> See also Levack, *The Devil Within*, 29. “By the late seventeenth century the belief that all early modern demoniacs faked their possession became widespread among English writers.” See also Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural*, 192. “The 1670s... was when exorcisms either ceased to be reported, or went into a rapid decline.”

<sup>253</sup> Caciola and Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies”: 29.

theologians doubted the existence and possibility that demons could possess a person; they believed in spirits' capabilities of possessing people, but did not consider "speaking" female bodies to be as trustworthy as male bleeding corpses. At this moment in time, several prominent theologians and demonologists, including Jean Gerson, Johannes Nider, Heinrich Kramer, and Martin del Rio, to name a few, "craft[ed] an authoritative litany: Women's fervor is too eager, their minds too weak, their bodies too humid."<sup>254</sup>

Meanwhile, a new professional group, anatomists, emerged in the early seventeenth century.<sup>255</sup> While many historians of early modern Europe attribute possession and exorcism's decline to the rise of science and rational thought, exploring the rise of anatomical study of the body as a scientific tool only partially paints the picture. While anatomy allows scientists to open dead bodies, revealing their interiors, cruentation allowed dead bodies to speak on their own behalf by bleeding. Because of the gender distinctions ascribed to male and female "speaking bodies," one possibility for possession and exorcism's decline, and anatomical study's coincidental rise, is gender differentials. "Magical" practices were not ceasing to exist, as we see with cruentation's survival well beyond exorcism's use. Instead, the emphasis placed on gendered differences between bodies being "manipulated" to acquire knowledge had changed.<sup>256</sup>

Despite the fact that an emanation of blood allowed corpses to "speak," their speech could only mean one thing: guilt of the suspect. Because the suspect was still a suspect, and not a confirmed murderer, the bier test could not fail either way, because it

---

<sup>254</sup> Caciola and Moshe Sluhovsky, "Spiritual Physiologies": 31.

<sup>255</sup> Rafael Mandressi, "Affected Doctors: Dead Bodies and Affective and Professional Cultures in Early Modern European Anatomy" (*Osiris* Jan 2016 31:1): 120.

<sup>256</sup> Mandressi, "Affected Doctors": 120.

could either result in innocence or guilt. If a body did not bleed, this did not mean that the practice did not work; instead, contemporaries just assumed that this body chose to remain silent, because the suspect standing before the corpse was not the true murderer. Therefore, a corpse that kept silence pronounced innocence.

Speech emanating from a demoniac's mouth, however, could pose problems for the church. There was no possibility for a variation in speech with cruentation, whereas with exorcism the speaking bodies could verbalize a variety of responses, including ones the church would not approve of. One possibility for why exorcisms declined could be because the practice involved interaction with a living, speaking body, and not a dead "speaking body." Displaying the power and legitimacy of the Catholic Church was a central component of exorcism, and if the exorcists could not control the speech coming out of the demoniacs' mouths, then these speaking bodies could work to undermine the Church. Also, one must consider the space in which exorcisms occurred. Exorcisms were highly publicized events, and if the witnesses were not convinced, they would write about what they saw, as we have seen with the contemporaries' accounts (such as that of Richard Baxter, the man who believed in cruentation but doubted the Loudun nuns' possessions), and these publications circulated, spreading doubt.

Scientists did not turn their backs on their belief of "supernatural" matters, nor did their treatment of male versus female bodies change overnight. In fact, one French medical doctor reaffirms the claim that Europeans retained belief and practice of magical practices, specifically cruentation. Dr. François Ranchin (1560-1641), medical professor at the University of Montpellier in France, wrote a book titled *Opuscules ou traictes divers et curieux en medecine* (1640). In his book, Ranchin devotes an entire section to

discussing the causes of cruentation.<sup>257</sup> He divided this section into twelve different subsections, which all address a different question about cruentation. Some of his questions ask whether cruentation really happened or not, if cruentation in front of the judges was “sufficient evidence” to condemn the accused, and if “demons and sorcerers” could cause this effusion of blood.<sup>258</sup> Ranchin argued that although many contemporaries debated the different causes of cruentation, they all agreed it was indeed a legitimate practice.<sup>259</sup>

Seventeenth-century French doctors, philosophers, and theologians all searched for an explanation for the cause of cruentation, yet came up with different answers. While most theologians were convinced that cruentation was a sign of the “just judgment of God,” there were doctors who believed that cruentation was a result of drugs administered to the body, and therefore not a sign from God.<sup>260</sup>

Dr. Ranchin received a letter from his nephew, a legal counselor, recounting a particular court case where a man named Jacob Lafont was accused of murdering another man, Daniel Pradel, in the French village Mas d’Azil in 1639.<sup>261</sup> Ranchin’s nephew described how the master surgeons brought the body into court to perform the bier test,

---

<sup>257</sup> D’Amador, *De la Vie du Sang*, 22. Ranchin, president of the University of Montpellier, and the first city consult under King Louis XIII of France, wrote an “extremely curious” book that discusses cruentation.

<sup>258</sup> D’Amador, *De la Vie du Sang*, 43.

<sup>259</sup> François Ranchin, *Opuscules ou traictes divers et curieux en medecine* (Lyon: Chez Pierre Rauaud, 1640), 715. “All the authors and others that I have not seen, argue quite differently about the causes of this experience, but they do not doubt the event.” “Tous ces auteurs, et autres que ie n’ay pas veu, disputant bien diffèremment sur les causes de çette expérience, mais ils ne doutée pas de l’évenement.”

<sup>260</sup> Ranchin, *Opuscules ou traictes*, 703. “Les Theologians... recognoissent que le pur miracle quand elle arrive, *Justo Dei Judicio*.”

<sup>261</sup> Ranchin, *Opuscules ou traictes*, 710. It is also important to note for purposes of demonstrating that cruentation occurred in both Catholic and Protestant areas to mention that Maz d’Azil was a Protestant stronghold from the 1630s to 1680s. See Robert Paul Weller and Scott Evan Guggenheim, ed., *Power and Protest in the Countryside: Studies of Rural Unrest in Asia, Europe, and Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), 38.

and “the wound opened three times when the murderer came over the dead body, but not when six others passed by, three before him and three after.”<sup>262</sup> Did the body bleed at the exact moment when Lafont passed it because he was the true murderer, or was it merely coincidental? Ranchin’s nephew had heard people talk of cruentation, but he had never seen it before this moment, and seemed surprised that Lafont was condemned to death due to this bleeding corpse. He wrote to his uncle, Dr. Ranchin, asking him to share any information he might have about this curious matter, since his uncle was a medical professional and therefore well-versed in using the human body for epistemological reasons.<sup>263</sup>

Ranchin’s expertise in medicine and surgery might cause one to believe that Ranchin’s opinion about cruentation would contribute to the idea of the rise of rational thinking and the decline in “magical” practices. However, this is not the case. Ranchin concludes his chapter by writing that we will never know exactly why cruentation sometimes worked and other times did not, since God was the cause, and He does not always make his miracles known:

God does not always accommodate our desires. He manifests His power when He pleases, and the miracles of His goodness we sometimes see by grace.<sup>264</sup>

Even though Ranchin was a professor of medicine and one might expect him to attribute cruentation to a more “rational” understanding of the body, his explanation does not

---

<sup>262</sup> Ranchin, *Opuscules et traites*, 706. “La playe s’ouvrit trois fois lorsque le meurtrier passa sur le corps mort, et non lorsque six autres passant, trois avant, et trois après.”

<sup>263</sup> Ranchin, *Opuscules et traictes*, 707. “Et vous avez quelque chose de curieux la dessus, je vous supplie m’en faire part, & me continuer toujours l’honneur de me croire.”

<sup>264</sup> Ranchin, *Opuscules et traictes*, 758-759. “Dieu ne s’accommode pas toujours a nos desirs: il manifeste son pouvoir, quand il lui plaisir, et les miracles que sa bonte nous faisons voir quelquefois par grace.” See also, “Mas Dieu pour descouvrir son meurtre, et pour donner suspect a la justice de le punir, cause la cruentation, afin que le sang du mort soit vangé.” “But God for discovering murder, and to give justice by punishing the suspect, causes cruentation, so that the blood of the dead is avenged.”

differ much from the explanations provided in the previous centuries. Ranchin's discussion of cruentation in his book exemplifies the overlap of science and "magical practice" that people thought no longer existed after the Protestant Reformation, due to Weber's coined term, the "disenchantment of the world." However, Ranchin proved quite the opposite, revealing that the world might still be "enchanted" after all.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, medical autopsies slowly replaced cruentation as a tool of discovery. First God revealed the wound; then the wound revealed the murderer, and finally, the wound revealed the physical cause of the crime, after being examined by medical practitioners. The method of discovery eventually shifted from what early modern people believed was divine intervention to a more medicalized interpretation of the body. However, many murder cases fused the two practices of cruentation and autopsy together, which suggests that cruentation still remained at the core of most murder cases.

Although medicalized observations of the body improved and developed over time, popular belief in cruentation still persisted well past the seventeenth century. As Ranchin showed us, medical observation and popular belief existed alongside of each other. While courts slowly replaced cruentation with more medicalized ways to discover murder, there was still some overlap; cruentation was used contemporaneously with autopsy. Post-mortem examinations were a medicalized way of determining murder. It was a way of interpreting the body similar to interpreting the emanation of blood from a corpse during the bier test, but in a scientific way, not in a "supernatural" way or a way by means of divine intervention. Forensic medicine became more commonly practiced

after the seventeenth century, which was the same time when cruentation was still being used in New Jersey.<sup>265</sup>

As medicine became more advanced and autopsy's popularity increased, the living started to treat corpses more like objects and less like people. Before the eighteenth century, dissections and autopsies were not common in England, and the courts could not force a family to consent to an autopsy.<sup>266</sup> Many people opposed autopsy and human dissection because they felt it was disrespectful to the dead, as well as dehumanizing and impersonal to treat the body as an object of medicine.<sup>267</sup> Recognizing the dehumanization and loss of gender identity that these dead bodies underwent is critical to understanding the reason for cruentation's eventual decline. The "demand for anonymity in the practice of dissection" led to a loss of identity both as an individual, as well as to a loss of identity with a particular gender.<sup>268</sup>

While contemporaries' accounts of cruentation describe the bleeding body in a way that indicates the gender mattered, ascribing speech to male corpses and silence to female corpses, anatomists made a conscious effort to keep the identity of the dead hidden. Yes, one can argue that this was not entirely possible for the anatomists to achieve, since they clearly could not ignore the external genitalia of their cadavers. However, once a corpse was cut open and the insides were revealed, covering up the outside parts, it became a "broken and bloody mess."<sup>269</sup> One could argue that with the

---

<sup>265</sup> See Lea, *Superstition and Force*, 367-368.

<sup>266</sup> Vanessa McMahon, "Reading the Body: Dissection and the 'Murder' of Sarah Stout, Hertfordshire, 1699." *Social History of Medicine*, 19:1 (2006): 20.

<sup>267</sup> Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 99.

<sup>268</sup> Mandressi, "Affected Doctors": 135.

<sup>269</sup> Mandressi, "Affected Doctors": 123.

rise of anatomists and dissections, male bleeding corpses lost agency and their ability to “speak” on their own behalf. But were female bleeding corpses any worse off than they were before? Not necessarily. In a sense, the rise of anatomy “leveled the playing field” and made both male and female bodies worthy objects meant to aid in the process of equipping medical students with knowledge of the human body, whether it be male or female. While cruentation and demonic possession placed such importance on the role of the gender of the body being examined, which ultimately affected how these results were interpreted, anatomists rejected a body’s identity, and therefore treated male and female bodies more or less the same.

When viewing the victims’ bodies as anatomical objects rather than corpses, the victims became objectified and lost their humanistic qualities. Perhaps because people were increasingly viewing dead bodies as tools for scientific discovery, it no longer seemed plausible that a body would “speak out” against its murderer, since the dead person had been reduced to a shell devoid of humanity.

Furthermore, because dead bodies were increasingly viewed as objects rather than human beings, their loss of human identity – and therefore loss of gender identity – can be seen in seventeenth-century medical books and journals. With very few exceptions, these medical resources do not specify the gender of the cadavers, and the “vast iconography have no visible distinguishing marks” that could help identify either a corpse’s gender or individual identity.<sup>270</sup> Rather than considering the images of the bodies in these anatomical books and journals as “portraits,” the contemporaries considered them to be images meant to assist in the acquisition of knowledge about the

---

<sup>270</sup> Mandressi, “Affected Doctors”: 135.

human body. Placing emphasis on the idea of “the human body” rather than a specific corpse further exemplifies this loss of individual identity. No longer do we see corpses being referred to by the names they bore in life, nor do we see the “human body” being described as either male or female.

More doctors began to view dead bodies as objects that could help the living rather than condemn suspects who still lived, despite their wrongdoings. English doctor Thomas Southwood Smith’s “The Use of the Dead to the Living” (1824) argues that dissection’s justification comes from its ability to help save the living.<sup>271</sup> Increasingly in the eighteenth century, early modern English courts’ perception of what qualified as sufficient evidence changed. While cruentation certainly highlighted a corpse’s wounds and gave medical practitioners a reason to examine a victim’s body, it slowly no longer provided the amount of proof needed to convict a suspect. Instead, it assisted in bringing about an autopsy, which then provided evidence that confirmed guilt.<sup>272</sup>

While autopsies may have slowly replaced cruentation in legal proceedings by the nineteenth century, which lasted even longer than exorcism and belief in demonic possession did, this does not mean that cruentation vanished entirely. Cruentation and the more generalized idea that “murder will out” persisted well into the late nineteenth century, and lived on in people’s minds all throughout Europe. However, despite their acknowledgement of cruentation, educated elites living in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to regard it as a superstitious practice that their ancestors before them had used. In a folklore collection compiled from original tract pamphlets

---

<sup>271</sup> Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies*, 119.

<sup>272</sup> McMahon, "Reading the Body": 24.

published between the years 1846 and 1859, Michael Denham (1800-1859) defined  
cruentation as a “vulgar superstition,” but nonetheless acknowledged his contemporaries’  
belief in it.<sup>273</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup> Michael Aislabie Denham, *The Denham Tracts: A collection of folklore reprinted from the original tracts and pamphlets printed by Mr. Denham between 1846 and 1859, volume 2* (London: Folklore Society, 1895), 58-60.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances. What is she? Angel, demon, one inspired, an actress? It may be supposed either that there are answers to these questions which are impossible to discover, or, rather, that no answer is adequate because a fundamental ambiguity marks the feminine being: and perhaps in her heart she is even for herself quite indefinable: a sphinx.<sup>274</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir's comparison of a woman to a sphinx succinctly illustrates early modern Europeans' understanding of women: women were riddles, or mysteries, to men. Furthermore, her likening of a woman to a sphinx is even more fitting to the early modern treatment of women in the context of cruentation and possession, because a sphinx was not fully human, only possessing a human head. If bleeding corpses and demoniacs were females, they were not granted the ability to speak in the same way that men were, and were therefore seen as inferior, almost subhuman.

As this thesis has attempted to explain, cruentation and exorcism merit closer examination and comparative analysis because contemporaries' treatment of gender was similar in these two instances. While contemporaries may not have explicitly identified bleeding corpses and demoniacs as "speaking bodies" in the same way that I have done, the same sentiment applies.

Duke John Maitland of Lauderdale, the same person who was convinced that the Loudun nuns' possessions were "pretended" as well as the exorcisms he witnessed in

---

<sup>274</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 98.

Antwerp in 1649, believed that cruentation, on the other hand, was “surely credible.”<sup>275</sup>

When discussing the “many certain Histories of the fresh bleeding of Murdered Bodies”

in his correspondence with Baxter, he explains,

when the Murderer is brought to it, or at least, when he toucheth it; whether it be by the Soul of the Dead, or by a good Spirit that hateth Murder, or by the Devil appointed for Revenge; it seems plainly to be by an invisible Spirit’s Operation. I have heard persons so Credible give Instances of it, seen by themselves, that (though it be not a constant Event) it is surely Credible.<sup>276</sup>

While Maitland may not have witnessed the occurrence of a body bleeding in the presence of its murderer firsthand, he nevertheless accepts others’ testimonies to its truth.

He continues his letter to Baxter by recounting an instance of cruentation that he had heard from another person. He writes,

For the strangeness of the thing (saith he) I will bring but one Example: In the County of *Lippia* at *Vftenia*, a Woman that had killed her Child, cast it into the next River Secretly; the Child after 3 weeks was found there by 2 Maids, and by the Command of the Magistrates it was put into the Lap or Bosom of the Mother, being in Prison, to try whether the Carkass would sweat Blood: Hereupon the dead Infant presently opened the left Eye, and weeping much, look'd on the Mother; and that Eye being shut, Blood flowed out of it: This Example is certainly a stupendous sign of God's Judgment: It was seen of very many most Grave Men, and is not doubted of by the Inhabitants of that place.

His problem with cruentation is not in determining whether its existence was legitimate or not, but where the cause of the phenomenon was coming from:

The doubt is, 1. Whether it be only other Causes that enter by this moving of them by Devils: 2. Or whether they Operate and enter only *Virtute*, by some force sent from their Substance; 3. Or Operate by Contiguity of their Substance it self in Men.<sup>277</sup>

---

<sup>275</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 106.

<sup>276</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 106.

<sup>277</sup> Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits*, 124.

It seems quite obvious to Maitland, as well as to other contemporaries, that possession came from demonic origins, and was an entirely “unnaturell” occurrence. The forces causing corpses to bleed by means of cruentation, however, was less clear to Maitland. Cruentation, unlike possession, could come from either natural or unnatural means. In *The Divel Conjur’d* (1596), for instance, author Thomas Lodge shared Maitland’s belief that the body of a victim would bleed in the presence of its murderer, but he wrote about his doubts, wondering whether this phenomenon should “be ascribed to divine miracle, or to natures power, or to devils working.”<sup>278</sup>

If the origin of the forces causing cruentation was unclear to Duke Maitland and other contemporaries such as Lodge, then why was cruentation’s legitimacy accepted more readily than demonic possession’s legitimacy? Perhaps because demonic possession dealt with living bodies, and therefore relied on determining whether the demoniac herself was speaking, or the demons controlling her, whereas the phenomenon of cruentation relied on unknown causes. Perhaps determining legitimacy also had to do with the fact that demoniacs were overwhelmingly female, and bleeding corpses, particularly bleeding corpses that would “speak out,” were male.

Gender affected Maitland’s perception of which bodies were capable of presenting legitimate evidence. Contemporaries hardly ever suspected male demoniacs of lying about their possession, whereas they believed this was something female “demoniacs” often faked. In the rare instance that a man was believed to be possessed by a demon, his speech was deemed more credible than a female demoniac’s.<sup>279</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> Thomas Lodge, *The Divel Conjur’d* (1596) in *English Catholics and the Supernatural*, Francis Young, 85.

<sup>279</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*, 181.

Even when bleeding corpses revealed their murderers, their agency was greatly dependent on the living. Yes, these bodies “spoke”; but the only reason they were able to do so is because the living were willing to listen. If it were not for the living to validate these signs of truth and justice through speaking bodies, they would otherwise have remained lifeless, silent corpses. A similar argument can be made for demoniacs; exorcisms took place in a public setting, and the success of an exorcism depended on a crowd to be present to witness the successful expulsion of a demon from a demoniac’s body. Without the presence of the exorcist, the demoniacs would not be able to speak out and be heard by anyone, because no one would be there to listen to the exorcist’s questioning of the demons occupying the nuns’ bodies.

Early modern Europeans silenced female bodies in both the courtroom as well as in written documentation of cases involving possession and cruentation. Even in the sources themselves, women generally tend to only act as “speaking bodies” through male voices, not their own. Because of the nature of the sources, written by men, presumably for other men, it is difficult to know what these women were thinking or how they experienced their own lives. Therefore, because of the social construction of gender, females’ speech was not validated, either in female corpses or demoniacs, because the living bodies with voices – males – determined what received attention in court.

## APPENDIX

### EXAMPLES OF CRUENTATION

<b>Name of Murderers</b>	<b>Date of Murder</b>	<b>Type of Murder</b>	<b>Gender of Murder Victim(s)</b>	<b>Factual or Fictional Depiction of Murder</b>	<b>Location</b>
Simon, Cistercian Monk	1170	Homicide	Male	Factual	France
Yvain	1170s	Homicide	Male	Fictional	France
Richard the Lionheart	1189	Patricide	Male	Factual	England
Hagen	1230	Homicide	Male	Fictional	Germany
“Some [male] Jews”	1261	Killing of young girl	Female	Factual	Germany
Drunken soldier	1324	Homicide	Male	Factual	Germany
“Some [male] Jews”	1331	Killing of young boy	Male	Factual	Minden
Hans Spiess	1513	Uxoricide	Male	Fictional	Lucerne
Alice Arden	1551	Viricide	Male	Factual	England
Anne Sanders	1577	Viricide	Male	Factual murder, but depiction of cruentation only in fictional play	England
Mr. Lincoln	1591	Filicide/ Prolicide	Not specified; 3 victims	Factual	England
Mr. Cosby	1591	Homicide	Male	Factual	Ireland
Richard III	1592	Homicide	Male	Fictional	England
Ms. Preston	1613	Homicide	Male	Factual	England

Jacob Lafont	1639	Homicide	Male	Factual	France
Ms. Imperia	1653	Viricide	Male	Fictional play based on real murder	England
John Dandy	1657	Killing of male servant	Male	Factual	Maryland
Thomas Mertine	1660	Killing of female servant	Female	Factual	Maryland
Thomas Bradnox	1661	Killing of male servant	Male	Factual	Maryland
Ms. Christian Wilson	1661	Fratricide	Male	Factual	Scotland
Mr. Francis Carpenter	1665	Killing of male servant	Male	Factual	Maryland
Paul Carter	1680	Infanticide	Unknown	Factual	Virginia
Philip Standsfield	1688	Parricide	Male	Factual	Scotland
Katharine Comrie	1693	Infanticide	Unknown	Factual	Scotland
Jack White	1730	Homicide	Male	Fictional	England
Ms. Gwenllian David	1753	Infanticide	Male	Factual	Wales
Agnes Walker	1762	Infanticide	Unknown	Factual	Scotland
Slave Harry	1767	Killing of Master Tuers	Male	Factual	New Jersey
Earl of Crawford	1828	Murder of a bonnet-maker	Male	Fictional	Scotland
Mr. Getter	1833	Uxoricide	Female	Factual	Pennsylvania

## REFERENCES CITED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Alberigo, Giuseppe and Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1990.
- Anonymous. *A relation of the deuill Balams departure out of the body of the Mother-Prioress of the Vrsuline nuns of Loudun: Her fearefull motions and contorsions during the exorcisme, with the extract of the proces verball, touching the exorcismes wrought at Loudun, by order from the Bishop of Poict[iers] under the authority of the king. Printed at Orleans 1635. Or the first part of the play acted at Loudun by two diuels, a frier, and a nun. Faithfully translated out of the French copie, with some observations for the better illustration of the pageant*. London: 1636.
- Anonymous. *Arrest de condemnation de mort contre Maistre Urbain Grandier, Prestre, Curé de l'Eglise de saint Pierre du Marché de Loudun, & Chanoine de l'Eglise sainte-Croix dudit lieu: atteint & conuaincu du crime de magie, & autres cas mentionés au procès*. Paris: Chez Estienne Hebert, & Jacques Poullard, rue des sept Voyes, au Roy Henry le Grand, 1634.
- Anonymous. *Interrogatoire de Maistre Urbain Grandier,... : avec les confrontations des religieuses possédées contre ledit Grandier... la liste et les noms des juges deputez par sa Majesté*. Paris: 1634.
- Anonymous. *La demonomanie de Lodun qui montre la veritable possession des religieuses ursulines...: avec la liste des religieuse et seculicres possédées*. Paris: Chez George Griveau, Imprimeur du Roy, 1634.
- Anonymous. *The horrible murther of a young boy of three yeres of age, whose sister had her tongue cut out and how it pleased God to reueale the offenders, by giuing speech to the tongueles childe. Which offenders were executed at Hartford the 4. of August. 1606*. London: Printed by E. Allde for VVilliam Firebrand, and are to be solde at his shop in the Popes-head alley, ouer against the tauerne doore, 1606.
- Anonymous. *The Lamentable and True Tragedy of M. Arden of Faversham, 1592*. Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1971.
- Anonymous. *Recit de la mort dudit Grandier (1634), in La demonomanie de Lodun qui montre la veritable possession des religieuses ursulines...: avec la liste des religieuse et seculicres possédées*. Paris: Chez George Griveau, Imprimeur du Roy, 1634.

- Anonymous. *Relation véritable de ce qui s'est passé aux exorcismes des religieuses ursulines possédées de Loudun : en la présence de Monsieur, frère unique du roy...* (Reprod.). Paris: 1635.
- Anonymous. *The Visions of the Soul, Before it comes into the Body. In several dialogues. Written by a member of the Athenian Society.* London: 1692.
- Anonymous. *Traité des droits, fonctions, franchises, exemptions, prérogatives et privileges annexes en France à chaque dignité: a chaque office & à chaque état, soit civil, soit militaire, soit ecclésiastique, Volume 4.* Paris: Visse, 1788.
- Archives of Maryland Online. "Judicial and Testamentary Business of the Provincial Court, 1649/50-1657, Volume X." <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000010/html/index.html>.
- Archives of Maryland Online. "Proceedings of the Provincial Court, 1658-1662, Volume XLI." <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000041/html/index.html>.
- Baxter, Richard. *The certainty of the worlds of spirits and, consequently, of the immortality of souls of the malice and misery of the devils and the damned : and of the blessedness of the justified, fully evinced by the unquestionable histories of apparitions, operations, witchcrafts, voices &c. / written, as an addition to many other treatises for the conviction of Sadduces and infidels.* London: 1691.
- Braithwait, Richard. "The English Gentlewoman (1641)." In Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.
- Cannon, Charles Dale, ed. *A Warning for Fair Women (1599): A Critical Edition*. Netherlands: Mouton & Co. Publishers, 1975.
- de Troyes, Chrétien. *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*. Series A. Vol, 48, translated by William W. Kibler. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985.
- des Anges, Jeanne. *Soeur Jeanne des Anges, supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun, XVIIe siècle: autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée, d'après le manuscrit inédit de la bibliothèque de Tours*. Edited by Gabriel Legué and George Gilles de la Tourette. Paris: Aux Bureaux du Progrès Médical, 1886.
- Digby, Kenelm. *A late Discourse made in a solemne Assembly... touching the cure of Wounds by the Powder of Sympathy*. Translated by R. White. London: 1658.
- Fox, Margaret Askew Fell. *Womens speaking justified, proved and allowed of by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the spirit and power of the Lord Jesus and how women were the first that preached the tidings of the resurrection of Jesus, and*

- were sent by Christ's own command, before he ascended to the Father, John 20:17. London: 1666.
- Golding, Arthur. *A briefe discourse of the late murther of master George Sanders, a worshipful citizen of London and of the apprehension, arreignment, and execution of the principall and accessaries of the same, Seene and allowed.* London: 1577.
- Grandier, Urbain. *Traicte du coelibat par lequel il est prouue qu'un ecclesiastique se peut marier, par des raisons et autorités claires et evidentes qui seront deduites succinctement et nuement, sans ornement de langage, afin que la verité, paraissant toute nue et sans fard, soit mieux recue.* Paris: 1634.
- Greenwood, Gregory. "A Short Account of the Blessings of the Catholick Church, Particularly of Holy Water" (c. 1723-1730), Downside Abbey MS 675 fol. 1. In Francis Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553-1829.* Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013.
- Jordan, Edward. *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother. Written upon occasion which hath beene of late taken thereby, to suspect possession of an evill spirit, or some such like supernaturall power. Wherein is declared that divers strange actions and passions of the body of man, which in the common opinion are imputed to the Divell, have their true naturall causes, and do accompanie this disease.* London: 1603.
- Kramer, Heinrich and Jacob Sprenger. *The Malleus Maleficarum.* University of Cologne, 1487.
- Le Loyer, Pierre. *A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights, Visions, and Apparitions Appearing Sensibly unto men.* London: 1605.
- Lodge, Thomas. *The Divel Conjur'd.* London: 1596.
- Luther, Martin. *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520).* Translated by Erik H. Herrmann. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Oelsner, Christianus Conr., ed. *Dissertatio de Jure Feretri sive Cruentationis vom Baar Rechte.* Literis Müllerianis, 1680.
- Papenfuse, Edward C. et. al. "A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature 1635-1789." Archives of Maryland Online. <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000426/html/am426--354.html>.
- Pendlebury, Henry. *A Plain Representation of Transubstantiation, as it is Received in the Church of Rome: With the Sandy Foundations it is Built Upon, and the Arguments that Do Clearly Evert and Overturn it.* London: J. Johnson, 1687.

Pitcairn, Robert. *Criminal Trials in Scotland, from A.D. M.CCCC.LXXXVIII to A.D. M.DC.XXIV, Embracing the Entire Reigns of James IV. and V., Mary Queen of Scots and James VI. Compiled from the Original Records and Mss. with Historical Notes and Illustrations.* Edinburgh: William Tait, Prince's Street, 1733.

Potts, Thomas. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster, With the Arraignement and Trialle of Nineteene notorious Witches, at the Assizes and generall Gaole deliuerie, holden at the Castle of Lancaster, vpon Munday, the seuenteenth of August last, 1612. Before Sir Iames Altham, and Sir Edward Bromley, Knights; Barons of his Maiesties Court of Exchequer: And Iustices of Assize, Oyer and Terminor, and generall Assizes holden at the Castle of Yorke, the seuen and twentieth day of Iulie last past, with her Execution for the murther of Master Lister by Witchcraft.* London: 1612.

Ranchin, François. *Opuscules ou traictes divers et curieux en medecine.* Lyon: Chez Pierre Rauaud, 1640.

Shakespeare, William. *Richard III* (1592). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Sinistrari, Ludovico Maria. *De delectis et poenis* (1700). In Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Ankarloo, Bengt and Stuart Clark, ed. *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Bardsley, Sandy. *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Bartlett, Robert. *Trial by Water and Fire: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

Belsey, Catherine. "Alice Arden's Crime." In *Staging the Renaissance*, edited by David Scott Kastan et. al. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Black, Winston. "Animated Corpses and Bodies with Power in the Scholastic Age." In *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*, edited by Joëlle Rollo-Koster. London: Routledge, 2017.

Blackstone, Sir William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England. Volume 2.* London: A. Strahan, 1765.

- Bonnier, Edouard. *Traité théorique et pratique des preuves en droit civil et criminal*. Paris: Auguste Durand, Libraire, 1843.
- Boureau, Alain. "La preuve par le cadavre qui saigne au XIIIe siècle, entre expérience commune et savoir scholastique." *Micrologus* 7 (1999): 247-281.
- Brittain, Robert P. "Cruentation in Legal Medicine and in Literature." *Medical History* 9, (1965): 82-88.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge University Press, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge University Press, 1990.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Caciola, Nancy and Moshe Sluhovsky. "Spiritual Physiologies: The Discernment of Spirits in Medieval and Early Modern Europe." *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 1 (2012): 1-48.
- Cameron, Euan. *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Clark, Sandra. *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- D'Amador, Professor R. *De la Vie du Sang au point de vue des Croyances populaires*. Paris: 1844.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon. "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon." *Past & Present*, no. 90 (1981): 40-70.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Decker, John R. and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, ed. *Death, Torture, and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300-1650*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015.
- Denham, Michael Aislabie. *The Denham Tracts: A collection of folklore reprinted from the original tracts and pamphlets printed by Mr. Denham between 1846 and 1859, volume 2*. London: Folklore Society, 1895.
- Ditchburn, David and Angus Mackay, ed. *Atlas of Medieval Europe*. London: Routledge Publishing, 2002.

- Encyclopedia Britannica. "Ursuline." <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ursulines>
- Ferber, Sarah. *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France*. London: Routledge University Press, 2013.
- Gabriel, M. *Essai sur la nature, les différentes espèces, et les divers degrés de force des Preuves*. Toulouse: Rue des Tourneurs, No. 45, 1824.
- Gowing, Laura. *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Gowing, Laura. *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Grosart, Alexander Balloch. "Richard Baxter." In *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900, Volume 3*. Oxford University Press Online Edition.
- Hsia, R. Po-chia. *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Huxley, Aldous. *The Devils of Loudun*. New York: Book of the Month Club, 1952.
- Kallendorf, Hilaire. *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Latin Dictionary. "Latin Definition." <http://www.latin-dictionary.net/definition/14913/cruentatio-cruentationis>.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- "Law of the Bier." *The Scots Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Edinburgh: 1833): 33-37.
- Lea, Henry Charles. *Superstition and Force: Essays on The Wager of Law, the Wager of Battle, the Ordeal of Torture*. Philadelphia: Lea Brothers and Co., 1892.
- Levack, Brian. *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Levack, Brian. "The Horrors of Witchcraft and Demonic Possession." *Social Research*, 81:4 (2014): 921-939.
- Levack, Brian. *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Linton, Elizabeth Lynn. *Witch Stories*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1861.

- Locard, Edmond. *Les crimes de sang et les crimes d'amour au XVIIe siècle*. Lyon: A. Storck & Cie, 1903.
- Mandressi, Rafael. "Affected Doctors: Dead Bodies and Affective and Professional Cultures in Early Modern European Anatomy." *Osiris*, 31:1 (2016): 119-136.
- Mazzio, Carla. "Sins of the Tongue." In *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, edited by David A. Hillman and Carla Mazzio. New York: Routledge University Press, 1997.
- McMahon, Vanessa. "Reading the Body: Dissection and the 'Murder' of Sarah Stout, Hertfordshire, 1699." *Social History of Medicine*, 19:1 (2006): 19-35.
- Muir, Edward. *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Neely, Carol Thomas. *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Newgate Calendar. "Alice Arden of Faversham, Executed with her lover Mosbie and Others in the Year 1551 for the Murder of her Husband."  
<http://www.exclassics.com/newgate/ng4.htm>. Accessed January 25, 2017.
- Oxford English Dictionary. "Cruentation."  
[https://www.oed.com\\_45172?redirectedFrom=cruentation&](https://www.oed.com_45172?redirectedFrom=cruentation&).
- Oxford English Dictionary. "Baudy."  
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/view/Entry/16362?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=3MZib0&>
- Pearl, Jonathan L. *The Crime of Crimes: Demonology and Politics in France, 1560-1620*. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998.
- Platelle, Henri. *Présence de l'au-delà : une vision médiévale du monde*. Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004.
- Rapley, Robert. *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.
- Sappol, Michael. *A Traffic of Dead Bodies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis": *The American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986): 1053-1075.
- Teter, Magda. *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege After the Reformation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

- Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.
- University of Virginia Library. "Virginia 1870." Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/state.php>.
- Walker, Anita M. and Edmund H. Dickerman. "A Notorious Woman: Possession, Witchcraft, and Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century Provence." *Historical Reflections* 27 (2001): 1-26.
- Walker, D.P. *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.
- Walker, Garthine. *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Walther, Suzanne. *Dance of Death: Kurt Jooss and the Weimar Years*. Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994.
- Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion* (1920). Translated by Ephraim Fischhoff. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
- Whitman, James Q. *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt: Theological Roots of the Criminal Trial*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Young, Francis. *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553-1829*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013.