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PART 2

Emotive Models to Rule Society

CHAPTER 5

Sensing the Devil – Creating the Sacred? Sensory Elements of Demonic Possession in Canonization Processes (Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa

"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24), a demon inside a possessed man cried out to Christ in Capernaum, confirming his divinity and powers. Saints who followed Christ were also the holy ones of God. The powers of God were omnipresent, but so was demonic presence. These binary forces, the sacred and the diabolical, were inseparably linked, and even necessary for each other's existence. Saints were fierce opponents of demonic forces and battles against malign spirits was a manifestation of holy powers and saintly status. Cases of demonic possession encapsulated the combat of supernatural forces, illustrating the opposite yet intertwined nature of the demonic and the sacred.

The sacred, as a physical place (such as a saint's shrine), or as a socially constructed space, was an integral part of the medieval worldview. It was not, however, stable or fixed but required reconstruction and repeated renegotiation. The sacred was not only a product of elite domination but also a joint enterprise: without devotees there was no cult, without pilgrims no

pilgrimage site.[1] The construction process was multifaceted, involving behavioural expectations, including reverence shown to the relics, as well as sensory and emotional responses.[2] The different signs, gestures and rituals, like kneeling by the shrine, were essential for reinforcing the sacredness of a space and even a prerequisite for its construction. This notion is manifest in cases of demonic possession when the holy powers of relics drove away the malign spirits, simultaneously reinforcing the mutual bond between the devotees and the heavenly intercessor.

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[1] See also Pierre Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson (Cambridge, Eng., 1983), pp. 189–216.

[2] On various meanings and uses of the sacred, see: Tobias Döring, "Introduction," in *Performances of the Sacred in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, eds. Susanne Rupp, Tobias Döring (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 7–11. On the evolution of the concept sacred in Western tradition, see: Lawrence Besserman, "Introduction: Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: Issues and Approaches," in *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York, 2006), pp. 1–15; Will Coster, Andrew Spicer, *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005); Jennifer Mara de Silva, ed., *The Sacralization of Space and Behaviour in the Early Modern World: Studies and Sources* (Aldershot, 2015). On fluidity and porous boundaries between sacred and secular: Sarah Hamilton, Andrew Spicer, "Defining the Holy: Delineation of Sacred Space," in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Sarah Hamilton, Andrew Spicer (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 1–26. On construction of sacred space and uses of sacred places, see: Michel Kaplan, ed., *La Sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident. Etudes comparées* (Paris, 2001).

Delivery miracles confirmed the thaumaturgical powers of the heavenly patron and his or her protection for the local community.[3]

Miracles of exorcism were regularly recorded in canonization processes. By the thirteenth century, canonization had become a papal privilege: all new saints and cults needed to be evaluated by the papal curia before an official proclamation of sainthood was announced. Therefore, an official judicial inquiry into the life, merits and miracles of the candidate was needed. Canon law guided the practicalities of these *inquisitiones*: the pope opened the process and sent (usually three) commissioners of high clerical rank to carry out the interrogation of the life and miracles of the saintly candidate.[4] Local proctors helped in the practicalities of hearings

[3] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 101–29.

[4] On the technical and judicial aspects of canonization hearings: André Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident* (Paris, 2014); Thomas Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht: Das Kanonisationsverfahren im europäischen Spätmittelalter* (Köln, 2004); Roberto Paciocco, *Canonizzazioni e culto dei santi nella christianitas (1198–1302)* (Assisi, 2006); Otfried Krafft, *Papsturkunde und Heiligsprechung: Die päpstlichen Kanonisationen vom Mittelalter bis zur Reformation. Ein Handbuch* (Köln, 2005). See also: Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Christian Krötzl, "Approaching Twelfth- to fifteenth-Century Miracles," in *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes: Structures, Functions, and Methodologies*, eds. Christian Krötzl, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (Turnhout, 2018), pp. 1–39.

and official notaries recorded the testimonies in *formam publicam*, guaranteeing the judicial reliability of the process.[5]

Witnesses were summoned in front of the inquisitorial committee. Witnesses were those laymen and women who had personally known the saintly candidate or who had experienced or witnessed a miracle, in this case demonic presence and delivery from it. They swore an oath before being interrogated. While witnesses were usually free to narrate their experiences, they chose the rhetoric they were expected to use at an interrogation and selected the details they were willing to make public. Personal preferences shaped the content of depositions. Simultaneously, the hagiographic genre, especially miracle narratives as well as the questionnaire of the inquisitorial committee, affected the outcome of hearings and the written canonization records.[6]

At the same time witnesses were giving judicial evidence about the miraculous cure, they were also simultaneously narrating details of their religious experience and, in cases of demonic possession, describing how they saw, heard, smelled and sometimes even touched and tasted the demonic presence. The aim of this chapter is to analyse how visual, auditory and olfactory sensations were mixed with emotions and utilised in cases of demonic possession found in

[5] On notaries and interpreters: Christian Krötzl, "Prokuratoren, Notare und Dolmetscher," *Hagiographica* 5 (1998), 119–40; Christian Krötzl, "Vulgariter sibi exposito. Zu Übersetzung und Sprachbeherrschung im Spätmittelalter am Beispiel von Kanonisationsprozessen," *Das Mittelalter* 2/1 (1997), 111–18.

[6] On methodological approaches to canonization processes in general and examples with a close reading of various processes, see: Gábor Klaniczay, ed., *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge – Medieval Canonization Processes* (Rome, 2004); Krötzl, Katajala-Peltomaa, eds., *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes.*

canonization processes from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries: what kind of role did demons and sensory and emotional perceptions of these play in the construction of sanctity and the sacred?

1 Demons in Canonization Processes

Miracles with biblical precedents were important proofs of sanctity and regularly recorded in canonization processes during the Middle Ages.[7] Within this category, delivery from demonic possession was not as important as resurrection from the dead or the healing of the blind and the lame, for example. Deliveries from malign spirits were never the most popular manifestations of saintly powers. Although the shared background for different canonization inquests was formed by the hagiographic genre, theological definitions based on the Bible, and the requirements of canon law, there were considerable differences between various processes. In addition to these shared elements, the local culture and socio-political milieu of each cult, personal interest, and

[7] Other miracles with biblical precedents, like resurrections of the dead and recoveries of the blind and the lame, were always more important proofs of sanctity. Typically, only a few examples of demonic possession can be found in each collection. On biblical miracles, see: Michael Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracles, 1150–1350* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 9–12; Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000–1215* (London, 1982), pp. 20–24. See also: Alain Boureau, *Satan hérétique. Histoire de la démonologie (1280–1330)* (Paris, 2004), who claims that obsession with demons was not a typical feature of medieval culture in general, but only emerged at the end of the thirteenth century.

the approach taken by both the inquisitorial committee and the witnesses affected the outcome. Demonic possession was not a uniform concept.

Demonic possession overlapped, yet not was synonymous, with raving madness. Raving madness, like other fits of insanity, was a medical condition, while demoniacs were taken over by an overpowering malign spirit literally dwelling inside their bodies. Similar symptoms – convulsions, foaming at the mouth, rolling eyes, aggression, verbal abuse, uncontrollable cries, aimless wandering and damaging things – confused the categorisation. Blaspheming God and saints and the abhorrence of sacred things were more readily linked with demonic presence, yet not even these actions were unmistakable signs.[8]

[8] On the distinction between raving madness, a medical condition, and demonic possession in hagiographic sources, see: Alain Boureau, "Saints et démons dans les procès de canonisation," in *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge – Medieval Canonization Processes,* ed. Gábor Klaniczay (Rome, 2004), pp. 199–221, especially 203–9; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca – New York, 2003), p. 236, who argues that decreasing numbers of exorcism miracles reflects the changed mentality: deliveries from spirit possession did not decrease as such, but became liturgical performances carried out by the clergy. Moshe Sluhovsky (Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago, 2008), pp. 3–6, 15) argues for undetermined symptoms and instability in the category of demonic possession. See also: Leigh Ann Craig, "The Spirit of Madness: Uncertainty, Diagnosis and the Restoration of Sanity in the Miracles of Henry VI," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 39/1 (2013), 60–93, for categorization between mental illness and demonic possession; Catherine Rider, "Demons and Mental Disorder in Late

I have argued elsewhere that demonic possession, albeit a spiritual state, in the depositions of canonization processes was essentially a social phenomenon, a result of communal negotiations arising from the needs of the community. The very same symptoms could have been categorised differently in different canonization processes.[9] Regarding demonic

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Medieval Medicine," in *Mental (Dis)Order in Later Medieval Europe*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Susanna Niiranen (Leiden, 2014), pp. 47–69, for demons as a cause for mental illness. She argues that Arabic medical authors from Constantine the African via Al-Zahrawi to Avicenna noted the possibility of demons as causes for various mental and physical illnesses and suggests that the cultural context of the medieval author, living in places with early witch trials, may have had an effect on the authors' interest in demonic mental disorder. On the disease called *incubus*, meaning either a sexual demon enticing to the sin of lust, a phantasma creating a sense of strangulation, or an actual disease with symptoms that included a sense of being strangled and inability to move, see: Maike Van der Lugt, "The *Incubus* in Scholastic Debate: Medicine, Theology and Popular Belief," in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, eds. Peter Biller, Joseph Ziegler (York, 2001), pp. 175–200.

[9] See: Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*. On demonic possession, the laity and everyday life, see also: Boureau, "Saints et démons dans les procès de canonisation," pp. 199–221; Michael Goodich, "Battling the Devil in Rural Europe: Late Medieval Miracle Collections," in *La christianisation des campagnes. Actes du colloque de C.I.H.E.C. (25–27 août 1994)*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1996), I: 139–52; Laura Ackerman Smoller, "A Case of Demonic Possession in Fifteenth-Century Brittany: Perrin Hervé and the Nascent Cult of Vincent Ferrer," in *Voices from the Bench. The Narratives of Lesser Folk in Medieval Trials*, ed. Michael Goodich (Houndmills, 2006), pp. 149–76.

presence, medieval canonization processes can be roughly divided into three different categories. First, there are processes where the approach of the inquisitorial committee was rather strict – they required direct evidence of the presence and power of malign spirits to label a case a demonic possession and favoured medical explanations instead. The second category is from the opposite end of the spectrum: demonic possession seems to have been a label chosen by the inquisitorial committee. Demons were not necessarily mentioned by the witnesses; such a definition was a conscious choice, even a propagandistic tool for the inquisitorial committee. In the third category, the defining line between demonic possession and other mental disorders was a fluid one. Mental illnesses and demonic possession were a mixed category, and a clear separation was not required or important: the commissioners were not interested in drawing a definite line between these two states and the terms were occasionally used interchangeably in the depositions.[10] Inquisitorial committees within these groups had different approaches to emotional responses and sensorial elements regarding demonic presence – seeing, hearing and smelling had different roles in providing evidence, too.

2 Seeing the Invisible

The Middle Ages inherited the five-sense taxonomy from Antiquity, but interpretations of it were not unanimous. The senses were categorised into inner, or spiritual, senses and physical or external ones. The physical senses were also put into a hierarchy: sight was seen as a superior

[10] See Katajala-Peltomaa, "Madness, Demonic Possession and Methods of Categorization," in *Reading Medieval Sources: Miracle Collections*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Jenni Kuuliala, Iona McCleery (Leiden, 2021), pp. 206–25.

sense followed by hearing, smell, taste and touch.[11] Philosophical theories are, if at all, present only implicitly in canonization records, as the purpose of the records was to produce reliable information of the candidate and miracles for the papal curia to scrutinise. Yet the prevalence of sight is evident: eyewitness testimonies were favoured and testifying about hearsay was considered less trustworthy.[12] Obviously, being present at the miracle scene enabled the use of other senses in the scrutiny as well. The use of senses was the only way for participants to gain information of demonic presence and the miraculous – but this posed considerable challenges to both the interrogators and witnesses. Both saints and demons possessed superior powers and

[11] The spiritual senses were analogous to physical senses, but they were immaterial belonging to the spirit or soul and capable of apprehending the divine. The categorisations were, however, complex and variable. Inner senses could also mean mental faculty, the cognitive process of imagination, intellect and memory. Furthermore, a clear distinction between the physical and spiritual senses was not simple. Robin Macdonald, Emilie K.M. Murphy, Elizabeth L. Swann, "Introduction: sensing the sacred," in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Robin Macdonald, Emilie K. M. Murphy, Elizabeth L. Swann (London, 2018), pp. 1–15; Richard Newhauser, "'Virtus regens animam:' William Peraldus on guiding the pleasures of the senses," in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Robin Macdonald, Emilie K. M. Murphy, Elizabeth L. Swann (London, 2018), pp. 39–59; Júlia Domínguez, "The Internal Senses in 'Don Quixote' and the Anatomy of Memory," in *Beyond Sight. Engaging the Senses in Iberian Literatures and Cultures*, eds. Ryan D. Giles, Steven Wagschal (Toronto, 2018), pp. 47–65.

[12] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles and Daily Life: The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 37–48 with footnotes.

their deeds were not always perceptible by human senses or comprehended by their intellect. And could the senses even be trusted? After all, miracles could be performed *per malos* and the Devil could transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).[13] This diabolical strategy could remain hidden, and so signs of demonic presence remained indeterminate for Christians.

As troubling as the information gained by human senses may have been, the sensory elements, details of sight, hearing, smell and touch were recorded in the depositions. Thus, they were an integral part of the lay witnesses' comprehensions of the event. After these witness statements ended up in the official records, they needed to be approved and authorised by the inquisitorial committee as proof of divine intervention. The sensate was crucial in constructing and ascertaining the hierarchy of supernatural powers.

Emotions, in turn, were crucial elements of late-medieval religiosity where affective mediation of Christ's suffering was encouraged. The concept of "emotion" was, however, understood differently than today. Emotions were comprehended as "movements of the soul" and they were understood to include an important inner component and moral element. In the miracle context, they were central for the comprehension and experience of Divine grace. They were, however, more like a required practice, a committed performance, rather than mere passive or inner states.[14] The emotional stages during the miracle process began with desperation in a

[13] This posed a general judicial problem for miracles as a proof of sanctity. Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht*, pp. 246, 280.

[14] Damien Boquet, Piroska Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Âge: Une histoire des émotions dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 2015). On emotions as social practice, see: Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220.

situation beyond human help that progressed into humility while invoking the heavenly intercessor and finally ended with joy, gratitude and devotion once the prayers were answered.[15]

Demons were already concretely present in the Bible, but in the Christian tradition they, like the demon in Capernaum, were audible long before they became visible. In Late Antiquity, demons were typically invisible and manifested their presence only through speech. The earliest depictions of demons exist from the end of the sixth century, and these accounts portray demons as human-shaped figures exiting a victim.[16] Later, a black creature or object exiting from the mouth of a victim became an indicative feature in imagery of demonic possession.[17] By the time of the papal privilege of canonization, images of demons were commonplace in church murals and frescoes. Their monstrous appearance was corroborated by *exempla* where demons were not bound by corporeality. Demons, as former angels, were spiritual creatures. According to the theories of the era, their bodies were made of air. Therefore, they could take on any form they

[15] For emotional stages in miracles, see: Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, pp. 85–87.

[16] Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, "Visualizing the Demonic: The Gadarene Exorcisms in Early Christian Art and Literature," in *The Devil in Society in Premodern Europe*, eds. Richard Raiswell, Peter Dendle (Toronto, 2012), pp. 439–57.

[17] The black, burned, and coal-like appearance of demons was explained by the thirteenth-century Cistercian author Caesar of Heisterbach as an indication of their position and residence: they had just come from hell's fire. Caesar of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange (Ridgewood, 1966), p. 284 (chapter 5, capitulum 5). See also: Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories* (New York, 1997), p. 33.

wished to deceive Christians, and shapeshifting was an indicative feature of demonic nature. Following Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, for example, claimed that through demonic powers, humans could even be turned into animals. They did this, however, through illusions, not through altering physical reality.[18] On rare occasions, this kind of evidence was required from or given by the witnesses.[19]

[18] Francis Young, *A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity* (New York, 2016), pp. 72–73; Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers. Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago, 2002), p. 292.

[19] For example, in the canonization of Thomas Cantilupe (AD 1307), several witnesses estimated that a certain Editha was possessed but they had not seen her marvellously change from one place to another: "*non vidit quod portaretur nec mutaretur de loco ad locum nec quod fecerit aliquem actum ex potencia malignorum spirituum*" (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS. Vaticanus Latinus 4015, fol. 215v), while several witnesses testified in 1374 how they saw a demon in a shape of a snake exit a possessed boy and then transmute into a goat. This case was recorded in a local hearing conducted by local clergy in Sweden – not an official canonization inquiry even if it ended up in the final canonization dossier of Birgitta of Sweden. According to the account, the witnesses to the case were local clergy, noblemen and other trustworthy persons. *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, ed. Isak Collijn (Uppsala, 1942–1946), pp. 141–42. In the Cantilupe hearing the regulations of canon law were followed meticulously which likely explain the need for clarifying details. Birgitta's miracles in Sweden, in turn, were written down in a rather liberal mode and witnesses were not apparently interrogated separately and only a synthesis of testimonies was recorded.

During possession, the visual evidence was mainly obtained by gazing and analysing the demoniacs, not the demons. Their bodily signs and gesticulations and the trembling bodies and restlessness were read as an indication of a victim's state and potential for cure. Visual evidence of demons was usually acquired during their exit, if at all. Black things, like smoke, vomit, blood, coals or even a *scarabeus*, were recorded to have exited the victim at the delivery.[20] Demonic possession was a physical phenomenon; the demons dwelled within the victim's body, usually amidst the entrails.[21] Therefore, their exit was also concrete and often discernible. The exiting demon validated the case as a miracle, so it was important for all the participants to mention and record it. For the commissioners, it certified the miraculous nature of the incident.

[20] For examples, see: *I processi inediti per Francesca Bussa di Ponziani (S. Francesca Romana) 1450–1453*, ed. Placido Lugano (Rome, 1945), pp. 122–24; "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," in *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur vel a Catholicis Scriptoribus celebrantur*, ed. Société des Bollandistes, 68 vols (Brussels-Antwerp, 1863–1887), vol. Oct. IX: 799; "Ad processum de vita et miraculis B. Petri de Luxemburgo," in *Acta Sanctorum*, Jul. I: 576; *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, ed. Enrico Menestò (Spoleto, 1991), p. 500 (testis CCXXII); *Die Akten des Kanonisationsprozesses in dem Kodex zur Geschichte des Papstes Coelestin V*, ed. Fraz Xaver Seppelt (Paderborn, 1921), p. 249. See also: *Die Akten des Kanonisationsprozesses*, p. 235; "Processus pro canonizatione S. Rosæ," in *Acta Sanctorum*, Sept. II: 449–50.

[21] "*Non potest esse diabolus in anima humana.* […] *Cum diabolus dicitur esse in hominem, non intelligendum est de anima, sed de corpore, quia in concavitatibus eius et in visceribus ubi stercora continentur, et ipse esse potest*." Caesar of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, pp. 293–94 (chapter 5, capitulum 15).

For witnesses, it enhanced their trustworthiness and the value of their depositions, as well as signifying the end of the social upheaval caused by the demoniac. For the victims themselves, it was a sign of the end of personal torment offering potential for integration back into society.[22]

Despite its importance, the sight of an exiting demon was not a mandatory part of a reliable testimony. Quite often, witnesses of delivery miracles could not provide any visual evidence of demons. In many cases, the major sign of delivery could have been the regained senses and control of self – a return to the normal, rather than a spectacular scene of fleeing malign spirits burned into the minds of participants. Relief, nevertheless, was a crucial, even if often implicit, component of the narrative of delivery.

Sometimes the demons were discernible in victims before the possession. These cases often involved repeated harassments which may or may not have ended in outright possession. In canonization proceedings, demons were not typically visible, but when they were, they often appeared in a form familiar to the victims, especially as animals: a snake, dog, horse and even a chicken were reported.[23] More variation can be found in the particularly well recorded case of Ermine of Reims, a widow aspiring to a religious life who suffered from longtime harassment and temptations by demons. Her experiences with demons were recorded by her confessor before the turn of the fifteenth century. They have been studied by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski who

[22] Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, pp. 93–98; 122–27.

[23] *Processus canonizacionis beati Nicolai Lincopensis*, ed. Tryggve Lundén (Stockholm, 1963), pp. 362–64; *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, pp. 120–23, 175–76; *Processus seu Negocium Canonizacionis Katerine de Vadstenis*, ed. Isak Collijn (Uppsala, 1942–1946). Even if cats, especially black cats, were associated with the Devil, in the depositions they are not offered as emblems of the Devil.

describes Ermine's *Visions* as a daily logbook of demonic assaults. Demons harassed her in a form of various animals – bats, bears, dogs, flies, to name a few – but also as humans, as handsome young men or beautiful couples making love.[24]

A vivid vision of harassing demons was also recorded in the deposition of domina Aldisia Iacobucii in Tolentino, in Central Italy. In July 1325, Aldisia entered an Augustinian convent with many other inhabitants of Tolentino accompanying her. With her hand on a Bible, she swore an oath to tell the truth and not to colour her sayings because of hate, love, monetary gain, fear, request, friendship or out of favour for someone. The issue at stake was the sanctity, life and miracles of Nicholas of Tolentino. Nicholas had been an Augustinian hermit and was well

[24] Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints* (Philadelphia, 2015). Ermine's case comes close to other female mystics of the Late Middle Ages. The discernment of their source of inspiration, whether they were inspired by a Divine spirit or possessed by a malign one, were heated theological questions of the era and have attracted a lot of scholarly interest. See, especially: Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*; Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2004); Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200–1500* (Philadelphia, 2012); Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*; Barbara Newman, "Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century," *Speculum* 73 (1998), 733–70.

known in his hometown because of his asceticism and humble way of life. He was also a patient and benevolent confessor, as Aldisia had personally experienced.[25]

Aldisia testified about several miraculous cures – that of her nephew, her sister and a neighbour – but also about her nightmarish encounters with demons. Aldisia called them vexations, suggesting that she had suffered for weeks, especially at night, but was not possessed herself. She repeatedly saw a demon climbing into her bed; the vision tormented her for five weeks without a break. She mentions seeing the demon but did not specify its appearance. One night, however, Aldisia sat upright in her bed because she was too afraid to sleep even though her daughter was sleeping next to her. But then she saw a demon, in the form of a kite, enter the house through a window and land on a bench at the foot of the bed. Terrified by the violent noise, Aldisia started to plead out loud to Saint Nicholas for help: 'O Saint Nicholas, ask the Virgin Mary whom you served so well, to defend me from this vexation' – desperation turned into humble prayers turned into relief. After her prayers, the kite-demon exited through the same widow, vanished and never came back.[26]

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[25] *Il processo per la canonizzazine di S. Nicola da Tolentino*, ed. Nicola Occhioni (Rome, 1963), pp. 26–28. The canonization hearing was carried out in Marches of Ancona and 371 depositions and 301 miracles were recorded. On the practicalities of this cult, see: Didier Lett, *Un procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge: Essai d'histoire sociale. Nicolas de Tolentino, 1325* (Paris, 2013); *San Nicola, Tolentino, le Marche*: *contributi e ricerche sul Processo (a. 1325) per la canonizzazione di San Nicola da Tolentino; convengo internazionale di studi, Tolentino 4.–7. Settembre 1985* (Tolentino, 1987).

[26] "*Et dum quadam nocte iaceret cum quadam eius filia in lecto et propter timorem dicta testis non dormiret sed sedebat supra lectum recta, et tunc fuit sibi visum quod per unam fenestram*

Birds carried a lot of symbolic weight in Christian tradition; after all, the Holy Ghost was typically depicted as a dove, and oftentimes in iconography birds signified souls. As airborne creatures they were particularly suited to symbolising spiritual things – both benevolent and malign.[27] A kite, *milvus*, is a general category, and its aspect remains unspecified in Aldisia's narrative. However, kites are birds of prey, some of them are carrion eaters and are quite large. They are fast flyers, which Aldisia may have meant with her estimation *cum impetu.* Their 'song' is more like a cry, potentially what Aldisia meant by *cum rumore*. All these features can be frightening and to see a predatory bird in the same room, without warning in the middle of the night, was undoubtedly terrifying. Aldisia's vision likely reflected her earlier experiences and she, like other people who had seen animal shaped demons, used a familiar mental image to concretise and describe her fear during a demonic attack. In the depositions of canonization processes, demons rarely, if ever, appear in a monstrous form familiar from church murals and didactic *exempla*. Their form could be described solely as a "black figure" or a shadow.[28]

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domus, ubi stabat, veniret unus milvus cum magno furore et impetu et rumore proiciendo se supra unam archam, que sedebat ad pedem lecti ipsius testis; et ipsa testis incepti fortiter clamare dictum fratrem Nicholaum dicendo: 'O sancte Nicholae, roga beatam virginem Mariam, cui tantum servivisti, quod defendat me a tali vexatione'." *Il processo per la canonizzazine di S. Nicola da Tolentino*, p. 265 (testis XCI).

[27] Martine Clouzot, *La musicalité des images au Moyen Âge. Instruments, voix, et corps sonores dans les manuscrits enluminés (XIIIe–XIVe siècles)* (Turnhout, 2021), pp. 124–26, 277–300.

[28] For example, a possessed girl tried to convince others of her delivery by asking whether the others saw the blackest of things exiting "*nonne videtis nigerrimum*?" "Summarium virtutum et

Possession often came as a rapid attack, and victims did not see demons before possession. Since the intention was to gain judicially reliable proof of the incident, it may well have been that commissioners did not trust the visual evidence, either because demons could have fooled their victims or because lay people were not expected to discern the vision of supernatural creatures in a sophisticated manner. Aldisia was given the opportunity to recount her vision, and it was recorded in the final dossier and counted as a miracle. In a later *relacio*, a summarised and categorised version of Nicholas' hearing, her case was sorted under the heading of demonic possession (*De demoniacis invasacis seu evanitis et adrabiacis liberatis*).[29]

3 Sounds Like a Demon?

Another victim of demonic vexations was Atleta who, in a dream, also saw a demon 'in a horrible form', according to Petrus Olavi. Dominus Petrus Olavi, a sub-prior of the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, Sweden, gave his deposition in the canonization process of Birgitta (AD 1374–80),[30] and was the sole witness in the case. Atleta was not interrogated. Petrus Olavi was

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miracula B. Ambrosii Sansedonii," in *Acta Sanctorum*, Mart. III: 236. For other examples of black things, see the references in footnote 20.

[29] Bib. Apostolica Vat., MS. Vaticanus Latinus 4027, fols. 27r–29r.

[30] Birgitta (Bridget) of Sweden (1303–73) was a member of a Swedish noble family. She is one of the best-known and most controversial medieval saints. Her canonization inquest was carried out in Sweden and Italy and it includes various parts: sworn testimonies, miracles recorded in local hearings by local clergy as well as letters of Swedish bishops. On the practicalities of Birgitta's canonization, see: Tore Nyberg, "The Canonization Process of St. Birgitta of Sweden," in *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge – Medieval Canonization Processes*, ed.

an important witness in the hearing as he possessed much first-hand information: he had been a confessor to Birgitta and had written down her revelations during her visionary years in Sweden. He was also particularly active in testifying to the exorcising powers of Birgitta: there are thirteen cases in his long deposition that could be labelled as possession or harassment by demons.[31] He testified how he heard and saw Atleta in the Abbey of Vadstena suffering from incontinency:

> One night a devil appeared to her in a dream saying: 'You do not think people leave their sins on this earth, do you? You are given to me and I will descend to the inferno with you'. The woman was, for obvious reasons, much troubled but then a wonderfully beautiful person appeared saying: 'Tell the devil that God's mercy is open to all and with the help of God I do not want to sin anymore. Therefore, you will have nothing to do with me.' Hearing this the devil cried: 'Woe unto me, I have lost my powers and now my jealousy and misery are starting to grow.[32]

Gábor Klaniczay (Rome, 2004), pp. 67–85; on her cult see: Cordelia Heβ, *Heilige machen im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum. Die Kanonisationsprozesse von Birgitta von Schweden, Nikolaus von Linköping und Dorothea von Montau* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 99–204.

[31] *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, pp. 472–562. The image of Birgitta as a thaumaturge was knowingly constructed as one fighting against demons and sinful people. Heβ, *Heilige machen*, pp. 201–4.

[32] "*Quadam nocte vidit in sompnijs diabolum in horribili figura dicentem: 'Numquid tu credis quod homo peccata in terra dimittit? Michi utique data es, et tecum descendam in infernum'. Domine itaque illi ultra modum de hoc turbate apparuit persona mire pulcritudinis dicens: 'Dic diabolo quod misericordia Dei est omnibus aperta, jdeo cum adiutorio Dei nolo*

Both Aldisia's and Atleta's encounters with demons took place at night and in modern vocabulary, they would likely be labelled as nightmares potentially originating from personal guilt or previous terrifying experiences. Fear and anxiety were central elements in them. In the context of medieval canonization processes, they were seen as demonic harassment and vexation which could take place during sleep as well. Both cases also illustrate the combat between supernatural powers and the ways in which demonic presence affirmed the powers of the holy and re-created the sacred. Aldisia's pious invocation drove away the malign spirit. In Atleta's dream, the opposing positions were more marked: the demon was an unspecified horrific figure contrasted to the shining and beautiful Saint Birgitta. The demon threatened and vexed his victim with his words while Birgitta's soothing words consoled Atleta and showed her the right path.

Visions of saints are fairly typical in depositions. A saint may console the suffering, take care of the physical distress of visionaries or encourage them to take a pilgrimage or make a vow. Typically, saintly visions were not accepted at face value; the inquisitorial committees regularly posed additional questions – they wanted to know how the petitioner had identified the intercessor. Details of the appearance, often linked to the saint's earthly status, were offered as

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peccare amplius. Propterea nichil tibi mecum est'. Quo dicto diabolus clamans dixit: 'Ve michi, quia vbique perdo jus meum etjam icipit augeri jnuidia mea et miseria mea'." *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, p. 558; The case was also recorded in a local hearing ordered by Bishop Nicholas of Linköping. The words of appearing supernatural figures were the same in this version as in the deposition of Petrus Olavi. *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*. p. 156.

proof.[33] In Atleta's case, the identification was clear: the figure introduced herself saying she was Birgitta who came from Rome.[34] Further explanation was undoubtedly needed, since Birgitta had spent her last years in Rome and people in Sweden were no longer necessarily familiar with her appearance. This kind of additional proof was not required for demons. People often just knew the demonic origin of the vision, or the emotional responses of the victims –fear and angst– served as a method of validation. Because the commissioners were regularly content with this identification, no further clarifying questions were posed. In Atleta's case, there was not much uncertainty, since, like Birgitta, the demon also introduced himself, and his status was further confirmed by Birgitta's words. Apparently, demonic presence was more easily discernible by auditory than visual means.

Not all demons admitted their defeat as quickly as in Atleta's case. The battle between saints and demons could also take the form of verbal abuse. As a counterforce for saints and virtue, demons defamed all things sacred. They could slander pious hymns as horrible noise and call saints mockingly by the diminutive variant of their name – thus, Clare (Chiara) of

[33] Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), pp. 67–68; Christian Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter (12.-15. Jahrhundert)* (Helsinki, 1994), pp. 235–38; Katajala-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles and Daily Life*, pp. 268–72. For earlier cases in hagiographic material, see: Pierre-André Sigal, *L'homme et le miracles dans la France médiévale (XIe–XIIe siècle)* (Paris, 1985), pp. 134–44.

[34] "*Ego sum Brigida, que de Roma veni*." *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, p. 558.

Montefalco could become Chiaruccia.[35] Mockery was a way to ascertain the battle between the supernatural powers and eventually the powers of the local intercessor, but even more clear indications were recorded. For example, in the process of canonising John Buoni (AD 1252),[36] Brother Jacobus, a lay member of the Augustinian hermits, recounted the case of the possessed Guerula. When she was taken to a church, a priest came and asked her: "Who should drive you out?" "John Buoni", the demon replied.[37]

Medieval demons followed the footsteps of their biblical predecessors in recognising and acclaiming the 'Holy Ones of God'. Demonic words were given a surprisingly high value – after

[35] *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, p. 500 (testis CCXXIII). Clare was an Augustinian nun, a mystic and ascetic. The proceedings of her canonization took place in 1318–19 and she was eventually canonized in 1881. See: Enrico Menestò, "The Apostolic Canonization Proceedings of Clare of Montefalco, 1318–1319," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. Daniel E. Bronstein, Roberto Rusconi (Chicago, 1996), pp. 104–29.

[36] John Buoni (Giovanni Bono) (d. 1249) was an Italian hermit known for his asceticism; he was the founder of the congregation of the "Zamboniti." He was never canonized. André Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge. D'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome, 1988), pp. 61–63.

[37] "*Quis debet te expellere*." "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," pp. 778–79. See also: "Pietro del Morrone debet me liberare," *Die Akten des Kanonisationsprozesses*, pp. 248–49; "Miracula Sancti Raymundi Palmarii confessoris," in *Acta Sanctorum*, Iul. VI: 658–59; "Summarium virtutum et miracula B. Ambrosii Sansedonii," p. 236.

all, the Devil was the Father of Lies (John 8:44) destined to deceive Christians.[38] Yet, their words were taken seriously as proof of demonic presence. They were often recorded verbatim while the words of the demoniacs themselves were often omitted or recorded drily as noise. It should be noted, however, that speaking demons were more numerous in didactic collections of miracles. In official judicial hearings, such proof was not regularly provided or anticipated.

In lay perceptions, demons' audible agency was comprehended differently; demons were verbose, but they, too, tended to be less learned. Demoniacs were often depicted as crying and making noises: uncontrollable crying, howling, loud laughing and shameful words were mentioned.[39] These activities were not undisputable proof of demonic presence, however, since the raving mad acted similarly. These symptoms could describe a demoniac as well as a madman or madwoman, and both aroused feelings of nuisance and sometimes fear. A changed voice was often a sign of demonic presence both in theological ponderings and cases recorded in the early modern era. As demonic possession was a physical phenomenon, the devil within could fool the senses and affect the voice by usurping the vocal cords. Thus, the demoniac presence was often

[38] According to the sensory theories, speech could be categorised as part of taste as it took place in the mouth. So, the Devil's voice was the Devil's mouth; when the demon was speaking, he was actually at the same time tasting, devouring the listeners. Armando Maggi, *Satan's Rhetoric: A Study of Renaissance Demonology* (Chicago, 2001), p. 23.

[39] "*die noctuque clamaret*". Vatican City, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, MS Armorium XVIII, 3328, fol. 4r; "*mulier extraneta vexata malo spirito clamans,*" *Die Akten des Kanonisationsprozesses*, p. 230; "*non faciebat nisi cacchinari* […] *clamabat demones sepe sepius*," *Il processo per la canonizzazine di S. Nicola da Tolentino,* p. 325 (testis CXXIII).

recognisable by a hoarse voice and sometimes animal-like sounds and utterances, since the demon deprived the victim the use of his or her own voice.[40]

Sound and hearing were important elements of religious experience. Sound was a medium of both devotion and impiety; it could serve as an expression of the harmony of God's creation–for example, when former demoniacs were glorifying God after their recovery– or devilish cacophony when demoniacs sang immodest songs or said shameful and idiotic words.[41] Because of its importance in devotional practices and its ubiquitous nature, hearing cannot be turned off, and so it is likely that sounds and voices were crucial in confirming both the sacred and the demonic presence. It seems, however, that auditory elements played a different role in lay perceptions from those found in philosophical and theological ponderings. While lay

[40] Elliott, *Proving woman*, p. 253; Brian Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven, 2013), pp. 12–13.

[41] For example, when Bonaventura was cured by the merits of John Boni and interrogated in his canonization process (AD 1251–4) and interrogated about her symptoms, among them was her coarse words; yet after her cure she returned home praising and glorifying God: "*Interrogata dicta Bonaventura, quomodo sciret, quod a dæmonio vexaretur, et non esset alia infirmitas, respondit quod gentes dicebant eidem postea: Quid fecisti, quare dixisti tantam rusticitatem, quid est illud quod tu facis?* […] *et rediit domum suam, laudans et glorificans Deum*." "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," p. 876. For indecent songs and shameful words, see: "*cantabat cantillenas ad moniales non spectantes, verba vituperosa et obprobriosa dicebat*." *Il processo per la canonizzazione di S. Nicola da Tolentino*, p. 136 (testis XXI); "*dicebat* […] *verba vituperosa et meretriculosa*." *Il processo per la canonizzazione di S. Nicola da Tolentino*, pp. 141–42 (testis XXII).

witnesses acknowledged that demons may have used the demoniacs as their mouthpieces, they rarely repeated their words verbatim. For them, it was the disturbing noise that irritated and constituted the aural evidence of demonic presence; the disquiet and disorder of the soundscape signified the need for a miraculous intervention. Since such elements were not direct evidence of a miracle or the saintly powers of the candidate, the inquisitorial committee did not care to document them verbatim. But for the lay community, regained harmony, proper order and the stopping of the devilish uproar was evidence of a miracle and proof of the saintly powers of the local intercessor – there was no need for demons to proclaim their defeat verbally.[42]

4 A Taste of the Devil?

The "inferior" senses, touch, taste and smell, were also crucial components of lived religion. Smelling incense and tasting the Eucharist or saint by kissing the relics were part of the interaction with the sacred. A well-known indication of sanctity was also the sweet odour of relics.[43] Comprehending demonic presence also required the use of these senses. Demons took hold of their victims' bodies and dwelled inside them, but sight or hearing did not necessarily play a role in sensing or comprehending this kind of inner feeling. Touch, taste or smell would

[42] For more on negotiations of communal coherence and proper order: Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, pp. 90–100.

[43] Martin Roch, "Il miracolo nell'alto medioevo. Il caso dell'odore soave dei santi, tra testi e contesti," in *Miracolo! Emozione, spettacolo e potere nella storia dei secoli XIII–XVII*, eds. Laura Andreani, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Florence, 2019), pp. 99–116.

have been more proficient at gaining a sense of demonic presence.[44] Eye-witness accounts occasionally refer to physical pain – demonic presence was seen as a vexation, torment, or

[44] Swelling of the body could also be a symptom of demonic presence within the body, but this kind of sign is rarely provided by eyewitnesses and even less by victims themselves. See however, the case of Petrus Gedde before the afore-mentioned snake-demon's exit: "*Huius stomacus aliquociens intantum intumuit, quod supra pectus usque ad mentum se videbatur erigere, ac si magnum quid corporeum curreret in visceribus eius*." *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, p. 142. On the symptoms of a two-year-old girl: "*pedes et totum corpus quasi in circulum retro ad dorsum girabantur pectusque et venter vehementer inflabant et tumuerunt.*" *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, p. 176; see also: *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, p. 130; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, p. 218 for swelling as a sign of demonic possession and its links to pregnancy.

affliction,[45] and sometimes victims' testimonies corroborate this after they have been cured.[46] It was the bodily signs of the demoniacs, not demons that were discernible for the people present. The miserable condition of the victim was noted, but physical pain or agony caused by the demons is not emphasised in the lay depositions. Pain is an inner sensation; it is hard to explicate it to others, and even more so to prove its existence convincingly.[47] As loss of control and sense of self were crucial components of demonic possession, it is hardly surprising that detailed accounts of feeling the demon inside one's body are not found in the depositions. The victims

[45] "*crudeliter afflicta*." *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, p. 118, 121, 124, 130; "*miserabiliter fuit vexata*." "Ad processum de vita et miraculis B. Petri de Luxemburgo," p. 506; "*vidit et interfuit quando torquebatur et affligebatur ab ispo demone*." "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," pp. 778–79; "*A daemone graviter molestabatur*." "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," pp. 780. The phenomenon was understood in violent terms which is reflected in the vocabulary used for possession: *obsessio* or *raptus*/*rapta*. Obsessio implied besieging, trapping, or imprisoning, and rapere was also a word for rape. Dyan Elliott, "The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, eds. Peter Biller, A. J. Minnis (New York, 1997), pp. 141–73. According to Brian Levack (*The Devil Within*, pp. 6–8), pain was a telling sign of demonic possession in the early modern period.

[46] "*vix poterat se aliquo modo erigere propter ossium dolorem quem sentiebat.*" "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni", p. 876; "*Licet multum doleret sibi ossa et caro*," pp. 882–83.

[47] The difficulty, if not impossibility, of verbally expressing physical pain, one's own or others', even in the modern world is one of the main arguments of Elaine Scarry: Elain Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, 1988).

may have lacked a suitable vocabulary to describe the pain the demons caused. Moreover, it did not necessarily offer any evidence testifying to the miracle, and inquisitorial committees may have not recorded such details.[48]

Devils within may have carried more symbolic weight for learned members of society, but for lay witnesses – the victims and their close ones – demonic possession was comprehended by tangible means. Occasionally, the entrance path for demons was via the mouth, as they could be swallowed accidentally. What did demons taste like? Not too good, one may suppose. Often demons were swallowed in a sip of water; cases can be found in Italian urban areas where rapid population growth put pressure on water supplies.[49] Direct aroma is not indicated in the

[48] However, relics were to torment the malign spirits before their exit, it emphasised the sanctity of the shrine and holiness of the patron. Ester Cohen, "Sacred, Secular, and Impure: The Contextuality of Sensations," in *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: New Essays*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York, 2006), pp. 126. On pain in depositions of other types of miracles: Jenni Kuuliala, *Childhood Disability and Social Integration in the Middle Ages: Construction of Impairments in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout, 2016), pp. 60–3, 264–73.

[49] "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," pp. 778–79, 882–83. On water supply, see: Paolo Squatriti, *Water and Society in Early Medieval Italy, 400–1000* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998); Angela Montfort, *Health, Sickness, Medicine and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot, 1988), pp. 23–27; 47–51; Roberta Magnusson, Paolo Squatriti, "The Technologies of Water in Medieval Italy," in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe. Technology and Resource-Use*, ed. Paolo Squatriti (Leiden, 2000), pp. 241–44.

depositions, but demons' links to malediction and concerns about pure drinking water imply a flavour of impurity, dirt and pollution – even disgust.[50] Accidentally swallowed demons are also found in didactic material and exempla. In these cases, the focus is not on the taste of impurity but rather on the unmeritorious acts that had led to the situation, classifying the demonic possession as a result of vice.[51] Even if the sensory experience is not graphically described, the very idea of eating demons is repulsive –convincing rhetoric for an educational tale about avoiding sin.

Odours were highly intimate and sensed "inside", yet not necessarily individualised. Olfactory sensations, like auditory ones, could be shared by everyone present. Smell was significant to religious thought, practice and experience. Sensory evidence was deliberately used in literary models in constructing the sacred and diabolical; a sweet smell was a typical sign of a person's sanctity and a foul stink marked demonic presence. A heightened spiritual nose could

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[50] "*Bibe de aqua, quod intrent mille demones corpus tuum*." "Processus canonizationis B. Ambrosii Massani," pp. 594–95. See also: Florence Chave-Mahir, *L'exorcisme des possédes dans l'Église d'Occident (XE–XIVE siècle)* (Turnhout, 2011), p. 255 for cases connecting malediction and eating or drinking. See: Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, p. 121 for swallowing a fly equating swallowing a demon.

[51] Caesar of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange (Ridgewood, 1966), p. 309 (chapter 5, capitulum 26); "Summarium virtutum et miracula B. Ambrosii Sansedonii," pp. 211–41; Gerardus de Fracheto O.P., *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum, necnon Chronica ordinis ab anno MCCIII usque ad MCCLIV*, ed. Benedictus Maria Reichert O.P. (Rome, 1897), pp. 81, 198–99.

even smell sin.[52] It is clear that olfactory sensations were part of discerning malign spirits in the medieval context and remarks can be found in miracle narratives as well – rarely, however, in the depositions given by laity.[53] Typically when lay witnesses were interrogated, a demon's exit was not explicitly described as having a stench. It may have been indicated, nonetheless, by mentioning simultaneous vomiting implying disgust and loathing.[54]

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[52] Katelynn Robinson, *The Sense of Smell in the Middle Ages: A Source of Certainty* (Abingdon, 2020), especially pp. 167–73 and passim for medically aware theology of smell of the Late Middle Ages that was communicated to popular audiences in sermons alongside traditional olfactory theory inherited from Antiquity. Stench linked with impurity was also linked to religious otherness within the religious polemic of Christians, Pagans, Jews, and Muslims from late antiquity on. Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, 2007).

[53] "Inquisitio de miraculis Roberti archiepiscopus Canturensis," in *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, A Synodo Verolamiensi A.D. CCCXLVI ad Londinensem A.D. [MDCCXVII]. Accedunt constitutiones et alia ad historiam Ecclesiae Anglicanae spectantia*, ed. A. David Wilkins (London, 1737), 2: 486–90); "Ad processum de vita et miraculis B. Petri de Luxemburgo," pp. 525–607.

[54] "Emissa spuma ore suo," "Processus apostolici B. Joannis Boni," pp. 799–800; "*vidit unum scardabonem nigrum in terra, qui dicebatur exivisse de hore eorum.*" *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, p. 500 (testis CCXXIII); "*vomendo quasi carbones.*" *Die Akten des Kanonisationsprozesses*, p. 249. See also: *Die Akten des Kanonisationsprozesses*, p. 235; "*cecidit in terram quasi mortuus, vomendo & expuendo certum quid nigrum, quod multum clare & aperte videri non potuit, quid esset propter*

More than anything else, the lack of details reflects the problematic nature of touch, taste and smell as judicial evidence. In the medieval categorisations, they were, as noted, inferior senses and information gained by them was considered to be less reliable. Demons could fool the senses and make their victims go out of their minds. Furthermore, sensing the devil inside or detailing its taste may also have been impossible to describe to others, and since such sensations were not observable by others, they did not offer proof with judicial reliability.

5 The Sensate, Demonic Presence and the Sacred

In clerical rhetoric, demonic possession and subsequent delivery were vivid occurrences filled with sensory elements. Demons could prey on their victims in various forms, threaten them with horrendous words, or be made to proclaim the truth of God – through the superior powers of local intercessors. The battle between supernatural forces was evident and finally, in their defeat, the malign spirits left behind a foul stench for everyone to recognise. Hearing, seeing, and smelling them rendered demons more concrete, more comprehensible, and hence potentially more controllable. Such narratives from outside – and above – lack the chaos the lay depositions often describe. While cases of demonic possession in depositions in canonization processes share many of the same characteristics as more didactic miracle narratives, the phenomenon does not stand out as a clear-cut category, and the dramatic turning points are not stressed. Like emotional stages of a miracle, sensory elements were part of the process, giving meaning to both the affliction and subsequent cure. However, visual, aural or olfactory elements of demons as proof

multitudinem ibidem astantium; quod postea disparuit." "Processus pro canonizatione S. Rosæ," pp. 449–50.

of a miracle were not a requisite and they were mentioned and recorded with varying intensity. They were, however, inseparably linked with emotions to give meaning to the experience.

The evidence given in depositions was not consistent. Instead, the scattered details point to synaesthesia and a holistic understanding of the occurrence. The whole sensorium was simultaneously utilised to comprehend the situation. Demons, like diseases, were external forces that could attack their victims suddenly.[55] Under attack it may have been difficult to calmly investigate and segregate the information gained by separate senses. Indeed, the words of three-year-old Guillamecta may have covered the experiences of many. She had a sudden night-time seizure and was crying to her mother: 'Madam, I do not know what is trying to capture me.'[56] Sensory stimuli and feelings were intertwined and affected one another. Together, they formed an experience of being under attack. An encounter with a malevolent supernatural spirit may have been hard to rationalise and explicate or put into a language that was comprehensible. It may well be that the lay witnesses were not even willing to externalise their inner sensations and feelings to the inquisitorial committee conducting the hearing. More plausible, however, is the reluctance of the inquisitorial committee to interrogate and especially, to record details of this sort. Demonic presence and the exit of malign spirits could have been authenticated by means

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[55] David Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester, 1998), p. 182.

[56] "*Et statim dicta filia ingenti apprehensa dolore quasi magno timore perterrita, incepit clamare fortiter, et intelligibiliori sermone quam conseverat, dicens: 'Domina mea, domina mea nescio quis vult me capere,' galice 'Madame, madame ne say qui me veult prendre' et gemebat grossiorem anelitum et velociorem emittens*." Bib. Apostolica Vat. MS Vaticanus Latinus 4025, fols. 99r–100v, her case was titled by the inquisitorial committee as "*de demoniaco reducto ad sanitatem*."

other than by recording the emotions and inner sensations of the victims. Guillamecta's words of the capturing entity were not recorded to describe her sensations, but because they not only served as a proof of the miracle but were part of it. In addition to explaining her sensations, she also urged her parents to invoke Saint Charles. This was noteworthy as she was a child of three and could hardly speak, but now she was proclaiming words of wisdom.

Construction of the sacred was a multifaceted process. In addition to judicial regulations and behavioural expectations, emotional and sensory levels were involved as well. The miracle process was encapsulated in emotional stages and sensory elements were used in creating and comprehending the sacred. Chiming bells marked out the canonical hours or announced important events like miracles. The visual and aural elements, such as shrines, statues, images, hymns and recitation of the psalms marked the difference to the profane world. The burning of incense set the smells of the sacred space apart from the smells of the profane.[57]

Demonic presence and the sensorial stimuli linked to it indicated a disruption of the proper order – they were a stress test for the relics and local intercessor. The lay depositions may have not emphasised the clearly recognisable sensory elements in dramatic turning points as the more didactic narratives did. Yet, the anxiety of hearing the demonic cacophony and especially the sweet silence and harmony after their exit, or sensing the nauseating smell (if not of the sulphur of sin then of the vomit), and the relief at the sight of exiting demons, certified the recovery and the victim's position as a former demoniac. These very mundane corporeal

[57] Hamilton, Spicer, "Defining the Holy: Delineation of Sacred Space," pp. 7–10. See also: Erika Lauren Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters: Monastic Women and Spirituality in Medieval Germany* (New York, 2009).

functions confirmed the cosmological hierarchies and, by giving testimony to them, the lay witnesses took part in the negotiations of the sacred.