INTRODUCTION: SCIENTIA DAEMONIS

Et s'il faut parler aux expers pour en sçavoir la verité, y en a il de plus expers que les Sorciers mesmes lesquels depuis trois mil ans ont rapporté leurs actions, leurs sacrifices, leurs danses, leurs transports la nuict, leurs homicides, charmes, liaisons, et Sorcelleries, qu'ils ont confessé et persisté jusques à la mort? On voit en celà que tous ceux qu'on a bruslé en Italie, en Allemaigne, et en France s'accordent de poinct en poinct.

– Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers*

On April 29, 1578, in a village called Ribemont, located in the northeastern province of Picardie, Jeanne Harvillier was executed for the crime of witchcraft. Tried in Ribemont, she was in fact a resident of the smaller, more obscure village of Verberie, located on the main road to Senlis, where her mother had been sentenced for practicing witchcraft and burned alive.[1] As the daughter of a known witch, residing in the eastern hinterlands of the kingdom, in a region known for its witch-hunting, Jeanne Harvillier's unfortunate path to witch-hood was already sketched out at birth. By the time of her arrest, she had acquired a reputation for witchcraft that followed her even when she changed her name and place of residence.[2] Among her neighbors, her spells were believed to be highly potent, although they did not always reach their intended target. In one tragic instance, she cast a spell meant for the man who had beaten her daughter (also suspected of witchcraft) by sprinkling a magical powder on a location he was supposed to pass through. Unfortunately, another man against whom she carried no grudge happened by first and, as a consequence, the spell fell upon him instead of her daughter's persecutor. This unfortunate man – the unintended victim of Jeanne's witchcraft – soon fell ill with a mysterious and painful sickness affecting his entire body. Despite her sincere attempts to undo the spell, Jeanne was powerless to help him and he died soon thereafter.[3] Exposed to

the wrath of her neighbors, who formed a lynch mob, she hid in a barn, but was soon found, arrested, and then formally tried for the crime of witchcraft in keeping with established procedures reserved for such difficult cases at the time.

What most preoccupied Jean Bodin – the source of the preceding account and indeed of all that is known about Jeanne Harvillier today – was not the spells she cast, but rather her *demonomania*: her allegiance to the devil, to whom she was bound body and soul. Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) begins with a summary of the events in Jeanne Harvillier's long-standing and intimate association with the devil, which began when she was only twelve and continued until the day of her arrest when she was around fifty years old.[4] Promised to the devil at birth, Jeanne was formally introduced to him by her own mother as soon as she reached puberty. "Here is my daughter whom I promised to you," her mother said to the devil. And to her daughter, she said "here is your friend who will make you very happy."[5] Bodin further relates this encounter in some detail. On this ill-fated day, he reports, the devil appeared at Jeanne's door in the form of a tall, dark man dressed all in black, wearing boots and spurs, and mounted on a dark horse. He promptly had sexual intercourse with Jeanne, who would later describe sex with the devil as identical to human intercourse, aside from the coldness of the devil's sperm.[6] From this day until the day of her arrest, her demon lover would appear on her doorstep whenever she wished. Their relationship was so well hidden that it continued undetected for many years beneath her husband's very nose – indeed, Jeanne sometimes had sexual intercourse with her demon lover in her own bed with her husband sound asleep beside her.[7]

If this relationship remained so well hidden, how did Jean Bodin know everything about it, down to the most intimate details? His knowledge of these events was based on one source: Jeanne's confession, given during the course of her trial.[8] Jeanne Harvillier appears regularly in the pages of the *Démonomanie* alongside a number of other witches, all confessing to similar crimes.[9] Bodin's treatise was in this respect entirely typical: the substantial body of early modern knowledge we loosely term "demonology" drew its truths from witches' confessions – first-person narratives detailing intimate commerce with demons, pacts with the devil, *maleficia* (acts of harmful magic), and of course the most spectacular chapter in early modern witchcraft: the nocturnal sabbat, replete with its elaborate satanic rituals and other horrific acts ranging from cannibalistic feasts to incest. In early modern Europe, the concept of the sabbat was not formulated as theological commentary, impersonal myth, or even terrifying stories of what happened

to others, but rather as *confession*: "*I* have been to the sabbat, *I* have signed a pact with the devil, *I* have had sex with demons." The subject of this book is the confessional regime of demonology, a science built on the extraction, dissemination, and interpretation of confession.

In early modern France, witches were denounced by neighbors and scrutinized by specialists, but the singularity of the early modern French witch was that she confessed, self-identified as a witch, as the first-person agent of horrifically implausible deeds. What led her to this point? Despair, solitude, perhaps even physical pain, but most decisively, demonology's two-pronged prosecutorial and truth-seeking confessional apparatus. Set in motion over the course of centuries, this systematic and well-oiled machinery served to extract and then interpret confession – the raw material for the theories animating the early modern science of demons. On the strength of confession, French demonologists were able to counter objections by sceptics as well as authoritative works of philosophy, history, and even theology. On the strength of confession, for instance, one school of demonology displaced the long-standing authority of the Canon *Episcopi* (c. 906) that attributed the idea of witches' flight to demonic illusion.[10] Against the Canon *Episcopi*, early modern demonologists held up the confessions of contemporary witches: proof, they argued, that the sabbat was not hallucinatory, but *real*.[11] The "realist hypothesis" – to borrow Françoise Lavocat's term[12] – was essentially grounded in the authority of confession. How can one deny the reality of the sabbat, demands Jean Bodin in the passage given in this chapter's epigraph, when all witches confess the same things down to the smallest detail?

For confession to be granted such privileged epistemological status, however, unspoken preconditions – a kind of *cultural implicit* – had to be already in place. A broader cultural substratum was required to make this unusual choice intellectually acceptable – all the more since the first-person narratives produced largely by unlettered women in no way constituted orthodox source material. In order for confession to take root in the early modern science of demons, the ground had to have been prepared more broadly by other cultural systems. Witches would not have been called upon to confess in trials, for instance, without the thirteenth-century legal reforms that replaced medieval folklaw with the confession-based Roman-canon law of proof. And these confessions would not have carried as much significance without the sacrament of penance that made confession into a singularly important act of religious faith – indeed, most of the witch persecution in early modern France took place in a decidedly post-Tridentine era when sacramental confession was being vigorously promoted.[13] By the same token, witchcraft may never have mingled so intimately with subjectivity

if demonology hadn't flourished during the same period that witnessed the birth of the modern subject. All of these factors conspired to make early modern demonology not an impersonal, objective science based on neutral observation and strictly policed third-person explanations provided by specialists, but, rather, knowledge ostensibly drawn from the experience of witches crystallized in their first-person accounts.

This book begins with the legal history that placed confession at the center of an early modern trial for witchcraft. Chapter 1 examines the rules for using confession as evidence in trials for *crimina excepta* (heresy and later witchcraft) before probing the hermeneutic principles enlisted in the interpretation of witches' confessions in demonological literature, from the *Malleus maleficarum* (1487) to Pierre de Lancre's *Tableau de l'inconstance des démons et mauvais anges* (1612). Demonologists' practical agenda (prosecuting witches) dovetailed with their theoretical investments (understanding witchcraft). This interlocking structure goes some way toward explaining the singular direction that demonology took in early modern France, where witchcraft became synonymous with the sabbat: a secret anti-society accessible to demonologists only through the first-person accounts of participants.

For their disciplinary and epistemological operations, demonologists thus demanded the truth "from the witch's mouth," positioning themselves in turn as the aural recipients of this *confessio oris*. In so doing, they drew on a traditional understanding of the ear as the privileged portal for sacred truths. Some things, they believed, could be heard but not seen – and this was particularly true for the dark truth about witches and their nocturnal activities. And so they listened, straining to pierce the audible invisibility of the demonic world. Chapter 2 examines theories of the senses while considering three examples emblematic of demonology's reliance on sense of hearing: first, Pierre de Lancre's account of a witches' sabbat held in his chambers one night while he lay sleeping; second, the auditory substratum of demonic sounds at work beneath the surface in a trial for witchcraft in central France in the 1580s; and third, the signs Jean Bodin believed he was receiving from an invisible spirit via his ears. Each of these accounts hinged on sacred truths deemed unseen but not unintelligible: it was the demonologist's task to lend an ear to witches – a fundamentally ambiguous posture requiring an uncomfortable complicity between demonologist and witch.

Chapter 3 turns to the concurrent rise of vision in the early modern sciences and decline of confession in French jurisprudence – broad cultural shifts that contributed to the waning fortunes of French demonology. This chapter attends to the finer points in debate surrounding the legal exceptions granted to witchcraft prosecutions – exceptions increasingly under

attack by critics from Johann Weyer to Michel de Montaigne. In response to critics, demonologists attempted to provide visible and even tangible proof of their otherwise discursive notion of witchcraft: they set out looking for material artifacts of the sabbat and searched witches' bodies for visible signs of their allegiance to the devil. All of these attempts were in vain, however, as demonologists ultimately fell back on witches' confessions: the only tried and true proof they had of the sabbat.

The fourth chapter leaves behind the demonologist-confessor, with his elaborate interpretive schemes and professional baggage, to take the point of view of the accused – someone denounced by neighbors and interpellated to speak as a witch in the course of an early modern trial for witchcraft. This final chapter tracks the process of becoming a witch through close study of the trial records from a 1582–83 trial for witchcraft in central France.[14] *Witchcraft, Demonology, and Confession* concludes by defending the witch's right to take her place within the history of the subject.

The four chapters of this study probe the demonologist's deployment of confession as part of his will to truth/power bridging early modern demonology's theoretical pursuits (understanding witchcraft) and practical operations (prosecuting the crime of witchcraft). Although recent scholarship tends to divorce these two operational modes, demonology's theoretical and practical agendas were in fact intimately connected.[15] Some of the most influential French demonological treatises by Bodin and Boguet included a practical "how-to" manual intended to facilitate the task of prosecutors just as anecdotal evidence suggests that judges in witchcraft trials were well versed in the lessons of demonological literature.[16] My programme consists of close study of the major works of early modern French demonology, where its theory was elaborated, as well as analysis of the records from a contemporary trial for witchcraft where we can observe demonology's confessional machinery at work. But before we can begin, we must introduce the authors examined in the first three chapters, present the methodology used in examining their works, and, finally, address the terminology employed here and throughout.

★★★

The corpus of demonological literature examined in the first three chapters is drawn primarily from the work of a group of men writing in French and occasionally Latin between 1580 and 1640: Jean Bodin, Pierre Le Loyer, Nicolas Rémy, Henri Boguet, Pierre de Lancre, and Michel de Montaigne. All members of the highly professionalized French judiciary, these men took part in the polemic surrounding the witches' sabbat. Their positions covered

the spectrum, from those embracing the *realist* hypothesis that the sabbat was, in most instances, a very real occurrence (Bodin, Rémy, Le Loyer, de Lancre, Boguet) to those who believed that the sabbat was only a dream or hallucination (most notably, Montaigne, influenced by the positions of Johann Weyer). The first two chapters examine the realist hypothesis, while the third chapter explores some of the reasons for its decline. My choice to privilege realist demonology over and above sceptics is motivated in the first place by the fact that the realist hypothesis was highly dependent on confession. For those eager to defend the reality of the sabbat, confession was their greatest resource – and ultimately their greatest weakness, as I suggest in Chapter 3. The realist hypothesis had the additional effect of making witchcraft into a real and present danger. In a sense, advocates of stepped-up prosecution of witchcraft *needed* the realist hypothesis: if the sabbat (and its elaborate satanic rituals) were only a dream, why should the crime of witchcraft be prosecuted with such urgency and harshness? Indeed, this was Johann Weyer's primary argument in favor of decriminalization. Even Jean Bodin, who defined witchcraft as a crime of intention rather than action,[17] felt compelled to devote a substantial part of his treatise to detailing what actually took place at the sabbat. Finally, my choice to bring demonologists convinced of the reality of satanic witchcraft into the spotlight is intended to counteract the tendency to focus instead on sceptics – closer to us and often cast in a heroic role.[18]

The writers in my corpus share a highly specialized legal training. In many cases, they reached the top echelons of their profession by becoming magistrates in early modern France's high courts of appeal, the *Parlements* (Le Loyer, de Lancre, Montaigne, and Boguet[19]). Some had considerable experience prosecuting witchcraft. Nicolas Rémy's *Demonolâtria* (1595) vaunts his experience trying approximately 900 people accused of witchcraft in Lorraine over the course of roughly fifteen years.[20] Henri Boguet also had a distinguished career trying witches in Franche-Comté.[21] His *Discours execrable des sorciers* (1602) is the fruit of these labors, as are his pedagogically minded *Instruction pour un juge en fait de sorcellerie*, appended at the end of his *Discours*. A conseiller in the Parlement of Bordeaux, Pierre de Lancre was appointed by Henri IV to be part of a royal commission charged with investigating witchcraft in the Basque-speaking Labourd region in 1609.[22] De Lancre had already published on the subject of witchcraft with his *Tableau de l'inconstance de toutes choses* from 1607, but from his experience in the Labourd he drew a substantial opus: his *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons* (1612) and a later work titled *L'Incrédulité et mescréance du sortilège* (1622). As for Bodin, Le Loyer, and Montaigne, they seem to have had

no direct professional experience either trying witchcraft cases or hearing appeals. In the trial of Jeanne Harvillier mentioned earlier, Bodin was invited to serve as a consultant to the prosecution, but he did not personally try this "witch" – or, indeed, anyone else accused of witchcraft. Montaigne also refers to an informal opinion he was asked to deliver regarding the case of a woman accused of witchcraft. He relates his findings in "Des boyteux" (III, 11), a chapter of the *Essais* critical of contemporary demonology. As for Le Loyer, author of the magisterial *Discours des spectres* (1608), he makes no reference to any firsthand experience with witchcraft trials in his erudite reflections.

The corpus of early modern demonological works is of course much broader than the authors I have chosen to study here.[23] However, my more restrictive corpus has the virtue of bringing together writers who belonged to the same professional milieu, who lived during roughly the same period, and who chose to write mostly in French. Among these works, there are numerous intertextual references that suggest the extent to which the vogue of demonological literature in early modern France was fueled by polemic. Bodin's treatise appeared first and elicited strong response, from Boguet's praise to Montaigne's rebuttal and Le Loyer's scorn. He was, however, easily the most influential of the French demonologists. His *De la démonomanie des sorciers* had no fewer than thirteen French editions between 1580 and 1616, not to mention translations into Italian, German, and Latin, which appeared soon after the *princeps*.[24] So popular was Bodin's treatise that scholars credit it with supplanting the *Malleus maleficarum* – long the standard reference in such matters – thereby bringing witchcraft prosecution into the modern era of secular justice.[25]

★★★

Confession, this book argues, lay at the heart of the epistemological project of French demonology. Its reliance on confession set *scientia daemonis* apart from other early modern sciences devoted to singularities and deviations from the norm – sciences such as teratology or even cosmography, which privileged firsthand observation in tandem with more bookish methods of truth-seeking. No other early modern science drew its raw data from confession. And no other early modern category of aberrant beings – from monsters to cannibals – was called upon to confess, to testify to a reality that was subsequently discussed and disputed by specialists. French demonologists themselves acknowledged the singularity of their methodology. Without exception, they drew attention to their unusual vocation to scrutinize witches' confessions. In their prefaces and preliminary discourse, they

comment on the originality of this methodological principle, emphasizing its virtues as a fresh new alternative to bookish knowledge. Thus, demonological treatises by Jean Bodin, Pierre de Lancre, Henri Boguet, and others do not obfuscate the source of their material in witches' confessions in order to present a seamless third-person narrative. Instead, their treatises tend to preserve the markers of indirect discourse and even the individual source ("X said that ... "; "Y confessed that ...").

As an example, consider that great Renaissance polymath, Jean Bodin – jurist, political theorist, historiographer, religious thinker, natural philosopher, and demonologist. His demonology had much in common with natural philosophy insofar as it was concerned with understanding the place of demons within nature and at its outer limits. However, comparing his work of natural philosophy, the *Theater of Nature* (*Universae naturae theatrum*, 1590), to the *Démonomanie* (1580) reveals that he did not see these two works as employing the same methodologies or even relying on the same senses. His *Démonomanie* posits confession as the only way to find out about contemporary witches' secret activities and defends *hearing* as the most reliable sense for reaching certain knowledge. In contrast, his *Theatrum* identifies direct observation as the best method of discovery in natural philosophy.[26] Direct observation based primarily on vision – the natural philosopher's basic mode of operation – would be of no use to the demonologist, who can only *know* what happens at the sabbat through the accounts of participants: "on ne peut *sçavoir* que par leur confession ou de leurs complices."[27] In short, Bodin and other authors of demonological literature remained acutely aware that their privileged knowledge could come from no other source but the first-person accounts of witches themselves. The only way to find out about the strange and terrifying world of the sabbat, they insisted, was through confession.

How and why did the sabbat narrative emerge in early modern Europe, and not merely as an eccentricity, but as the defining feature of witchcraft belief? Brian Levack's model of the "cumulative concept" of witchcraft in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* remains the most comprehensive and authoritative account explaining the development and transmission of the notion of the sabbat: this process occurred over the course of several centuries and through on-going interactions among judicial process, literary tradition, and oral culture.[28] Since Levack's work first appeared, other scholars have examined the microdramas involved in a witchcraft accusation brought by members of a community against one of their neighbors.[29] Others have instead focused on the intellectual vogue of demonological literature and the cultural, religious, or political stakes of these works.[30] Still

others have pursued the folkloric roots of the sabbat narrative.[31] Yet, aside from passing mention of the use of torture for its extraction, the singular *form* of the sabbat narrative has largely passed beneath the critical radar. In the field of witchcraft studies, confession currently suffers the same fate as Poe's purloined letter: too obvious to be noticed.

If we look at this substantial body of scholarship as a whole, we can identify two defining critical sensitivities, dividing witchcraft studies into those who study the demonologist (mostly intellectual historians) and those whose primary object is instead the witch (primarily social historians). The former – represented by scholars such as Norman Cohn, Sophie Houdard, Stuart Clark, Walter Stephens, and Rebecca Wilkin – examine the construction of witchcraft theory through close study of demonological works.[32] The most systematic account to date, Stuart Clark's monumental *Thinking with Demons* situates demonology in a finely drawn cultural landscape to show that it was not an intellectual aberration, but rather deeply enmeshed in early modern Europe's ways of conceptualizing the world. *Thinking with Demons* is an inspired work of intellectual history, and now an indispensable work of scholarship in the field of witchcraft studies. Yet one perhaps unintended consequence of Clark's will to bring demonology into the fold of consecrated early modern disciplines is that its singularities are largely passed over in silence. This may well be a practical necessity, given his wish to offer a corrective to the scholarly tendency to focus on what we perceive to be demonology's "strangeness" or to present witchcraft belief as "the dark side" of early modern European culture.[33] Nonetheless, among the singularities glossed over in the process is the demonologist's reliance on confession. In fact, none of the scholars previously mentioned gives confession's role anything beyond passing mention or anecdotal treatment, as though confession were a mere accident of history rather than the demonologist's primary means of investigating contemporary witchcraft.

On the opposite pole, scholars interested in the "witch" rather than the demonologist excavate archival documents in search of ways into the lives of the persecuted who belonged to a mostly rural and uneducated population. This sensitivity is perhaps best represented by the work of Carlo Ginzburg, Robin Briggs, and Lyndal Roper.[34] For these scholars, confessions made in the course of witchcraft trials offer a privileged source for understanding the lives of those who otherwise would have left no written trace, those who were precisely not the elites whose history has been told and retold. Far from glossing over confession, these scholars rely heavily on trial confessions, alongside depositions, for insight into the belief systems of non-elites. Confession is for them a vehicle for the life stories, worldviews,

fears, and desires of those called upon to speak in the course of a witchcraft trial. The recorded confessions from early modern witchcraft trials are precious artifacts, though imperfect, for they are not transparent windows into the world of the confessant, but rather shaped by the deforming perspective of the trial itself. The confessant's recorded words were inevitably formatted by the judge's agenda, not to mention the processes by which a confession was secured (involving either actual torture or the threat of torture) and then recorded (and edited) by the court clerk. Such are the pitfalls of using trial confessions as source material – pitfalls the aforementioned scholars are all acutely aware of. The methods they use to correct the distorting influence of these factors will be discussed in Chapter 1, but what I wish to emphasize here is that their object is not the demonologist's investment in confession – or the cultural baggage and internal logic of confession itself. They do not purport to tell the history of confession in witchcraft trials or in witchcraft theory, but rather to use confession to tell the witch's story.

This book charts a course between these two scholarly poles, giving confession its due both for the demonologist's project and the witch's story (or rather the story of her coming into being). Confession, this book argues, was a powerful tool in the making of witchcraft theory and, indeed, in the making of the "witch." Without confession, neither the concept of the sabbat nor the stereotypical figure of the early modern witch – basic fixtures of early modern European demonological discourse – would have taken root. It should come as no surprise that demonology's methodology should be so closely tied to its objects of study insofar as the gaze inevitably constitutes its object. This essentially Foucauldian lesson has become a fundamental tenet in the history of science – and a lesson this book takes to heart. The study that is about to unfold should be taken in continuity with Foucault's programme for what we could term a political history of science. This inquiry was pursued throughout his life and in particular in *La Naissance de la clinique*, in *L'Histoire de la folie à l'Age Classique*, and in *L'Histoire de la sexualité* – all part of Foucault's genealogy of medicine, psychiatry, and related disciplines.[35] Foucault's political histories of the sciences do not chronicle a series of inventions and discoveries in a given discipline. Instead, his primary object is a dynamic regime of truth underlying the discipline, its objects, its hypotheses, and its methods. Indeed, he expended significant energy explaining his "archeological" and "genealogical" projects, which ran up against more traditional approaches to history. After the publication of the first volume of *L'Histoire de la sexualité*, for instance, Foucault found himself having to explain that his object was not sexuality itself (repressed or constructed), but rather its place in the production of knowledge: "I don't want to write