Witchcraft and the Erotic Life

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Reprint from
THE JOURNAL OF NERVOUS AND MENTAL DISEASE
Vol. 72, pp. 640-651; Dec. 1930
Burnt alive unto his death. Such was the fate, in 1634, of Father D'Urbain Grandier, Roman Catholic curate of St. Peters in Loudun, and Canon of the Church of the Holy Cross. His alleged crime was that, in the diocese of Poitier, by means of magic he had carnally bedeviled the Ursuline nuns of Loudun, in France. The witnesses against him were the nuns upon whom he had worked his satanic art. It was only supernatural magic that made it possible for Father Grandier to project his body invisibly even through the walls of the convent, to accomplish the seduction of consecrated virgins who had never even seen him, except by such magic. So Father Grandier, by his disembodied spirit and the help of Satan, committed fornications and adulteries with many pious women, who would not have yielded their bodies to Grandier in the flesh. The judges were his fellow priests. The executioners were the civil authorities, who must act their subordinate rôle at the behest of the church, wherever its supremacy over the state is fully admitted.

As the proceedings of this trial unfold, it will become increasingly apparent that the witchcraft of the accused consisted wholly in the fact that nuns and other deprived women had quite ordinary erotic phantasies, in which Father Grandier officiated as would their physical lover, if they could ever have tolerated a physical lover. These dreams and visions are quite usual under the unusual conditions in which nuns live. Having first been infected with ecclesiastical erotophobia, these women were compelled to defend themselves strenuously against the possible imputation that their phantasmal eroticisms were the product of their own organic need. Accordingly their dreams of copulation with Father Grandier's ghost, or disembodied spirit, were given the certitude of his physical presence and of superhuman seductiveness. Hence his alleged alliance with the devil and his satanic magic, were fully proven.

Father Grandier is said to have been "a majestic and stately man, . . . endowed with some natural and acquired perfection." Again it is said that, "The curate of Loudun was a handsome, genteel man, and a fine speaker." Even his enemies credited him with
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“extraordinary talent.” Evidently he was the ideal man to engage the fancy of inhibited women, and those neglected of men. A popular priest of unusual ability, withal a little arrogant, he was just the man to excite also the envy and hatred of the less gifted priests. He seems to have been an independent thinker and showed this spirit in a manuscript he wrote in favor of marriage for priests. This was horrible, of course, and while envious priests thereupon could plausibly brand him as a lecherous heretical beast, some Protestants began to regard him as being secretly in sympathy with them. His zeal for independence may have enticed Father Grandier into another dangerous situation. He was credited with being the author of an anonymous libel entitled: “La Cordonnaire de Loudun” (the shoemaker’s wife of Loudun), a libel which “was very injurious to the person and birth of Cardinal Richelieu.” Influential enemies help to make witchcraft believable.¹

In Loudun was a convent of Ursuline nuns, most of whom were daughters of the nobility, and among them was Madame de Sazille, a relative of Cardinal Richelieu. At this time Prior Moussaut, who had charge of the spiritual welfare of these nuns, died and Father Grandier, who had never had any connection with the convent, offered himself as a candidate to succeed Prior Moussaut. This bore its natural fruit in the dreams of the nuns. Erotic dreams of women resulted in giving Father Grandier an unsavory reputation. Accordingly Father Grandier’s pious enemies reported that he offered himself as the spiritual guide for these nuns in order “to make a dishonest seraglio of their convent and as many filthy concubines as there were handsome virgins.” The credulous and superstitious enemies of Father Grandier afterwards said that he had resolved “to give plenty of work to the confessor and to his penitents.” Canon Mignon, a friend of the bishop and an enemy of Father Grandier, received the appointment of spiritual guide to these nuns. The continued erotic dreams of nuns, and Father Grandier’s temperament combined to prepare the way, so that his enemies made a feared and hated wizard of him. Naturally enough he became the center of heated controversy, and of whispered scandals. Thus was the human stage setting erected for Father Grandier’s undoing and death. It was such conditions that gave his envious priestly enemies their desired opportunity for a safe adventure, in desperate clerical politics.

His enemies say: “His iniquities had rendered him the scourge

of the town, whose principal curate and greatest scandal he was at one and the same time." Believing himself secure by virtue of a feeling of innocence and of a great popularity "he treated those from whom he differed with contempt, and in his preachings even dared to question the privileges of the Carmelites. He publicly ridiculed their sermons and he even encroached on Episcopal jurisdiction, by granting dispensations from the publication of marriage bans. This last caused a sensation, and was reported to Louis de la Roche-posay, Bishop of Poitiers, to whom at the same time were addressed numerous complaints of the irregular conduct of the curate, and of the scandal that he caused. The prelate had him arrested, and imprisoned till his trial which took place on June 2, 1630." At the trial were priests claiming to have been spying on him, who offered strong circumstantial evidence tending to prove that his fornications and adulteries by "magic" had objective physical reality. Some of these spiritual adulteries were alleged to have taken place even within his church. What else could be expected by the godly, from a priest who publicly ridiculed sermons of the Carmelites, who believed in a married clergy, who presumed to dispense with the publication of marriage bans, and who dared to libel Cardinal Richelieu? Obviously he must be a lecherous heretical beast, and presumably guilty of everything, at least until proven innocent.

As might be expected, the ecclesiastical authorities of Poitiers did find him guilty of magic or witchcraft (not plain, human fornication nor mere physical adultery) and they inflicted the severest penalties. He appealed to the Parliament of Paris, however, and by its decree was referred to the presidial of Loudun, which declared him innocent. The priestly witnesses who claimed to have been spying upon Father Grandier, had retracted their evidence. A case of priests having a conscience, Father Grandier's friends called it, but his enemies said that the priests were bribed to retract. Far from showing humility, Father Grandier now, so his enemies complained, "looked upon his acquittal as a triumph, and returned to Loudun with a laurel branch in his hands, for the mere purpose of insulting his opponents." How the obvious can be twisted to meet the needs of hatred. Yet who can now tell what was the truth? Such interpretation of his "laurel branch" brought its natural results.

"He was not satisfied with having obtained the full meed he was entitled to," says his enemy. Perhaps a guiltless conscience, made Father Grandier overconfident in judicial justice. "He resolved to carry his vengeance as far as law will allow him; and prepared to prosecute before the courts all those who had taken steps against
him. . . . God, who intended to cut off this gangrenous member from the body of His Church, and make of him an example memorable to all ages, abandoned him to his own wilful blindness.”

His fame for lechery and his vindication, together with his usual physical and intellectual allurements, made Father Grandier ever more important, as the ideal phantasmal lover for the unacknowledged erotic urges of all psychologically inhibited or physically isolated females, in the vicinity of Loudun. What is more natural therefore, than that he should appear ever more persistently in the erotic hallucinations, of nuns, and others, who were in need of a phantasmal realization of their unconscious cravings, or their merely unacknowledged and suppressed desires.

“Extraordinary symptoms began to declare themselves within the convent, but they were hushed up as far as possible, and not allowed to be known outside the walls. . . . It was therefore decided to work in the greatest secrecy, and to cure or at least mitigate the evil. It was hoped that God, touched by the patience with which the chastisement was born, would Himself, in His mercy, send a remedy. This was all that prudence could devise, but human prudence, always infinitely limited in its views; Divine prudence is quite another thing. God [or at least Father Grandier’s priestly enemies] has resolved that the mystery of iniquity should no longer lie buried. As the church at its birth, gained great credit through similar events, so again, in this case, did they serve to revive the faith of true believers, and so it will be again in future times. . . . As usually happens, the extraordinary phenomena displayed in the person of the nuns were taken for the effect of sexual disease. But soon suspicions arose that they proceeded from supernatural causes; and at last they perceived what God intended every one to see.”

“Thus the nuns, after having employed the physicians of the body, apothecaries and medical men [who knew not how to cure them of their erotic hallucinations] were obliged to have recourse to the physicians of the soul, and to call in both lay and clerical doctors, their confessor no longer being equal to the immensity of the labor. For they were seventeen in number; and every one was found to be either fully possessed, or partially under the influence of the Evil One.” The last resort must be tried. “True Christians must despise these grinning impostors. Exorcisms were then employed. The demon, forced to manifest himself yielded his name. He began by giving these girls the most horrible convulsions. He went so far as to raise from the earth the body of the Superior who was being exorcised, and to reply to secret thoughts, which were manifest
neither in words nor by any exterior signs. Questioned, according to
the form prescribed by the ritual, as to why he entered the body
of the nun, he replied, it was from hate. But when being questioned
as to the name of the magician, he answered that it was Urbain
Grandier. Profound astonishment seized Canon Mignon and his
assistants. They had indeed looked upon Grandier as a scandalous
priest, but never had they imagined that he was guilty of magic.
They were therefore not satisfied with one single questioning; they
repeated the interrogatory several times, and always received the
same reply." So the devil, wanting in ordinary loyalty to his faithful
servant, betrayed his "magician" (Grandier) into the hands of his
priestly enemies.

The canon informed the magistrates, and Father Grandier pre­
pared for his defense. But the magistrates are said to have been
"infected with heresy." That is to say, the magistrates were sus­
pected of having more confidence in Father Grandier, than they had
in the objective realities of the Satanic seduction of the nuns. At
this third trial of Father Grandier his enemies among the magis­
trates, finding themselves in a minority, withdrew. The remaining
magistrates acquitted Father Grandier. "Excitement rose in the
public mind, a thousand arguments on this or that side permeated
the town, and a thousand quarrels took place on all sides."

The next step of Grandier's enemies was to see to it that the
Queen was properly informed. She sent one of her chaplains to
investigate, personally, what was going on. Louis XIII also sent
a commissioner to Loudun but for another purpose. He too, saw
what a ferment the town was in . . . and the kind of man who
caused the commotion." Father Grandier must really be guilty. It
could not by any possibility be that "consecrated virgins" just
naturally had erotic dreams, and because of priestly instilled erotic
phobias, explained them in terms of Satanic possession. "The com­
plaints of those who were the victims of the [hallucinatory satanic]
debaucheries, of the pride, or of the vengeance of the curate, touched
him, and it seemed to him to be important to put an end to the
scandal." As is always the case in great excitement the essential
thing is to end the scandal, not to ascertain whether it had any basis
in objective facts. We always want order, without being troubled
to inquire as to who is most responsible for the disorder.

On his return, this commissioner "informed the King and the
Cardinal Minister [Richelieu, the enemy of Grandier] of the facts.
Louis XIII, from having been an extremely lecherous and erotic
child and youth had become fanatically pious and just as an over-
compensation,² perceived the greatness of the evil." He appointed M. de Laubardemont, the commissioner who had already accepted Father Grandier's guilt, to return and "investigate the matter without appeal; with orders to choose in the neighboring jurisdictions the most straightforward and learned judges." Of course, this meant "straightforward" from the point of view of Grandier's enemies. The "straightforward" ones at Loudun had already acquitted Father Grandier. Thus Cardinal Richelieu vindicated the reputation of his relative, the nun, promoted the spiritual welfare of the church and of its priests. With the former acquittals ignored, and with a hand-picked, packed court, complete vengeance was guaranteed in advance and without the right of an appeal. All this, and Father Grandier's arrest without prior formal accusation, were justified then, as such conduct is still justified whenever hysterical panic or collective personal interest runs high in "King Mob."

The two priests now retracted their former retraction. "The evidence of the nuns was also heard, and that of lay persons of both sexes, among others two women, the one of whom confessed having had criminal relations with Father Grandier [his ghostly double], and that he had offered to make her Princess of Magicians, while the second confirmed the evidence of the first. As regards the nuns, they deposed that Grandier had introduced himself [spiritually] into the convent by day and night for four months, without anyone knowing how he got in; that he presented himself to them ["spiritually"] whilst standing at divine service and tempted them to indecent actions both by word and deed; that they were often attacked by invisible persons; and that the marks of the blows were so visible that the doctors and surgeon had easily found them, and that the beginning of all these troubles was signalized by the apparition of Prior Mous­saut, their first confessor. The Mother Superior and seven or eight other nuns, when confronted with Grandier, identified him, although it was ascertained that they had never seen him save by magic, and that he had never had anything to do with their affairs. The two women formerly mentioned and the two priests maintained the truth of their evidence. In a word, besides the nuns and six lay women, "sixty witnesses deposed to [‘spiritual’—hallucinatory] adulteries, incests, sacrileges, and other crimes, committed by the accused, even in the most secret places of his church, as in the vestry, where the Holy Ghost was kept, on all days, and all hours."

² See Journal de Dr. Heroard; also Trenel, Louis XIII and His Epi­lepsy. Aesculape, 1929. Ed.
of the accused did not abandon him. They appealed to every possible authority. The details of these proceedings would be as wearisome, as useless, as the Commissioner, by the very terms of his Commission [which prohibited an appeal], was placed above all such applications in that direction. He then questioned the accused as to the facts and articles of accusation, and after having made him sign his confessions and denials, proceeded to Paris to inform the Court of what he had done."

"This precaution was necessary, for letters from the Bailly of Loudun, Grandier's chief supporter, to the Procurator-General of the Parliament, were intercepted, in which it was asserted that the possession was an imposture. The latter's reply was also seized. Monsieur de Laubardemont returned therefore to Loudun with a Decree of the Council dated May 31, 1634, confirming all his powers and prohibiting Parliament and all other judges from interfering in this business, and forbidding all parties concerned from appealing, under penalty of a fine of five hundred livres. He caused Grandier to be transferred from the prison of Augers to that of Loudun, so as to have him at hand to confront with witnesses, if need be."

"But, first of all, he considered it necessary to examine the nuns carefully; for this purpose, with the consent of the Bishop, he sequestered them in different convents, and interrogated them so severely that one might have thought that they themselves were the magicians. 'He saw them all, one after the other, for several days; and listened to their conversations, to observe their mode of thought. He enquired minutely into their lives, their morals, their behavior, not only secular but religious. His depositions, or notes, which represented the evidence of twenty girls, including not nuns, filled fifty rolls of official paper, and were the admiration of all judges, so great was the prudence and care they demonstrated.'"

"On the other hand the Bishop of Poitiers, after having sent several Doctors of Theology to examine the victims, came to Loudun in person, and exorcised them himself, or had them exorcised by others in his presence for two months and a half. Never was such work done with such care and attention."

"All precognitions over, the Commissioner began to confront the accused with the witnesses, and the latter maintained, face to face with Grandier, the evidence they had given against him." Obviously they were honest enough in reporting their erotic hallucinations as being objectively true. They were equally sincere in rationalizing their sexual phobias so as to convert their hallucinatory copulations into satanic rapes, adulteries, etc., etc.
"As regards the nuns, it was observed that they never con­tradicted themselves, whether questioned together or separately, though they were examined often by different persons, and as skilfully as possible. Now, criminals do not manage this, for thecleverest have the greatest difficulty in avoiding contradictory statements. Those writers, who have supported Grandier, have never discovered the least discrepancy in the evidence of the nuns. Nor did Grandier ever plead malice on their part as a defense, for they had never seen him, nor had he had anything to do with their affairs, as we have said." But how could he possibly persuade "spiritual" maniacs that the "satanic possession" of nuns were mere hallucinations?

"If, as calumny asserts, the only thing sought was the death of Grandier, here were sufficient proofs to burn him, if only for abusing the privileges of his ministry and of his Church, or for the sacrileges he had committed therein. But justice is not satisfied with punishing one kind of crime, when she finds traces of another still more serious. It was moreover a Christian duty to assist the views of God, who permitted so strange an event, to confound the calumnies of the Protestants, and to prove the demonstration the 'possession' of the nuns, and the magic exercised by the accused. To this the Commissioner and the other judges applied themselves." If Grandier's seductions had been real seductions, that would have been a lesser crime. However that they were not physical, enhanced the crime to that of satanic magic. That alone would justify the death penalty upon Father Grandier, without mentioning his real offenses to Cardinal Richelieu and to the celibate clergy.

"Thus, as it was a matter rather of religion than of jurisprudence [of magic rather than of physical sensualism] they resolved to begin by a prayer to God, who is the father of all light, rightly considering that all France was watching the trial with eager eyes, that it was shrouded in a thick veil of obscurity, and that their verdict would entail important consequences. They, therefore, prepared to receive divine assistance and grace by frequent confessions, and by often receiving the Holy Sacrament. Then they decreed a general procession to implore celestial aid in so difficult a matter; and, to excite the devotion of the masses by their example, they went in a body, during the whole of the trial, to visit the churches of the city, set aside by the Bishop for forty-hour services, and reached each, in time for the elevation of the Host. Thence the Exorcists went to the Church fixed upon for the Exorcisms, and the judges proceeded to the tribunal to continue the case; in the evening all returned to the Church for evensong." By such strange mummerly the preju-
dices against Father Grandier were intensified and sanctified. Even now in these United States there are certain cases in which very similar tactics are used and go unrebuked by our “most worthy” judges.

“The examination lasted forty days, during which Demons gave them the clearest proofs of their presence in the bodies of the persons exercised, and every day added new evidence against Grandier, and yet never said anything against him, which did not turn out strictly true. These assertions merit distinct proof, which will be found interesting.”

“As regards the presence of Devils in the possessed, the Church teaches us in its ritual, that there are four principal signs, by which it can be undoubtedly recognized. These signs are the speaking or understanding of a language unknown to the person possessed, the revelation of the future, or of events happening far away; the exhibition of strength beyond the years and nature of the actor; and floating in the air for a few moments.”

Speaking in some language previously unknown to the speaker, or nonexistant, has always been a pious occupation for psychotic religious zealots. There is abundant reference to it in the Bible (tower of Babel), and every sect since then, down to our Mormon friends, have exhibited these symptoms. Of course, all of us are bedeviled if the making of lucky successful prophesies can prove it. Hallucinatory levitations appear to be a dramatic phantasmal portrayal of a feeling of “light-headedness,” such as may come as the psychologic consequence flowing from an erotically overcharged organism. It is a mere visualization of the feeling, as if of flying, floating, swimming, etc. This, too, has received some psychoanalytic attention.

It will be informing to reproduce a more detailed statement of the evidence of one of these nuns as reported by a defender of the whole proceedings against Father Grandier. M. de Morans, who had heard nothing, ordered Sister Clara, who was likewise ignorant of what had been said, to obey the intentions of M. Chiron. This


young girl then fell into strange convulsions, blaspheming, rolling on the ground, exposing her person in the most open manner, without a blush, and with foul and lascivious expressions and actions, till she caused all who looked on to hide their eyes in shame. *Though she had never seen the Prior*, she called him by his name, and said he should be her lover. It was only after some repeated commands, and an hour’s struggling, that she took up the missal, saying, ‘I will pray.’ Then turning her eyes in another direction, she placed her finger on the capital S at the beginning of the introit aforesaid, of which facts reports were drawn up.” 5 There was considerable other evidence of mental disease on the part of some of these nuns.

And such was the evidence that she was influenced by satanic magic, emanating from Father Grandier!

The great mass of people still believe in similar supernatural magic. It is now the habit to emphasize the more soothing aspects of it. That is to say, we think more in terms of the alleged benign influence of God than the malignant influence of Satan, or of the “malicious animal magnetism” of Christian Scientists. And yet the psychologic need and its subjective processes are all just the same now, as in the persecution of Father Grandier.

It remains to be seen if psychoanalytic theory can be read into the foregoing facts, so as to enlighten us about them. We may fairly suppose that all of the actors in this drama experienced a childhood, wherein the inevitable subjective conflicts of the preadolescent and prepubescent sexuality were more intense than usual. It is by this uncommon intensity of the earliest subjective conflicts over sex problems, that we explain the withdrawal of nuns and priests from the ordinary social contacts, sexual temptations and marital responsibility. The degree of emotional intensity, which is necessary for such a result, implies a rather unusual obsession over sex. By this we mean an obsessing conflict between irreconcilable tendencies toward a sexual mania and phobia. Of course, the unconscious function of the church is to accentuate just that conflict. After that the chief glory of the church is that it supplies delusional remedies for such ills of its own creation. If the delusional remedies do not cure the psychologic pathology of priestly creation, then the church supplies sadistic, pious, penalties, for the alleged unavoidable

5 This narrative is mainly taken from: The history of the Devils of Loudun, the alleged possession of the Ursuline Nuns, and the trial and execution of Urbain Grandier, told by an eye-witness. Translated from the original French and edited by Edmund Goldsmith. Privately printed, Edinburgh, 1887. Also, under Grandier in: Dictionary, historical and critical of Mr. Peter Bayle, second edition, J. J. and P. Knapton [et al.], 1736, Vol. 3, pp. 210 et seq.
"magic" of its enemies. The church also claims to supply restraints upon the extravagance of passions which it unconsciously fosters. These alleged restraints must be also regarded as delusional because they appear to work only where the church has failed to create a sufficiently morbid impulse to induce overt criminal acts. When its unconscious destructive work has failed, then the church delusionally claims to have restrained antisocial impulses. The church receives credit, chiefly from those whom it has first deluded with a theory of inborn sinfulness.

Frustrated erotic impulses naturally find some kind of expression, at least in the phantasy life. In the condition of these nuns of Loudun, erotic dreams in which they phantasied sexual relations with an attractive priest was quite inevitable. However natural such dreams may be, where the physical expression of the sexual drive is piously inhibited or prevented, such dreams tend to be unusually vivid. This vividness in turn supplies a convincing certainty of their being exact transcripts of an objective reality. The church's artificial associated fear and shame prevents the acknowledgment, or even a recognition of the fact, that these erotic dreams are a wish fulfillment, founded in an organic sexual need and the resultant psychologic imperative. The witch's sabbath was little more than an imaginative sexual orgie, again a wish fulfilling phantasy. Upon such a foundation it is variously estimated that from 4,000,000 to 9,000,000 humans perished under condemnation made under the "infallible moral theology" of a pathologically "infallible" priesthood. If one dare not admit sexual desire or phantasies, because the church has taught us that all such are terribly sinful, then the only righteous explanation for such lewdness of the imagination consists in ascribing the dreams to superhuman (satanic) agency outside the self, and imposed through one's enemy. (Projection mechanism.)

Since Father Grandier appeared in the erotic dreams of frustrated nuns, nothing seemed more reasonable to those sexual phobics than to accuse him, the object of their envy and hatred, of being an instrument of Satan, who seduced consecrated nuns by means of supernatural power. It was all the devil's magic power exercised through Father Grandier. Nothing could be more logical for such pious sexual psychopaths. The record shows that some laymen held the common sense estimate of the morbid condition of these nuns. This was probably the real determinant behind both acquittals. However, such a conclusion about the morbid sexuality of these nuns was

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necessarily offensive to many, if not to most clericals. It seemed to
ignore or even to discredit the supernatural virtue of sexual phobia.
By arguing for a married clergy, Father Grandier was repudiating
the glorified mask, provided by Holy Church “moral theology” for
all the sexual morbidity of its devotees. Accordingly the priests and
nuns must hate Father Grandier with a degree of intensity that was
exactly equal to the intensity of the sexual phobia which he had
discredited. So far as his local enemies were concerned, Father
Grandier was conclusively prejudged as guilty of spiritual seduction,
by means of satanic magic. Cardinal Richelieu had much motive
for seeing to it that no third acquittal should occur. He also had
enough influence with Louis XIII, to prevent any appeal that might
again upset the foreordained verdict of “guilty.” Father Grandier’s
personal enemies now had the backing of all the superstitious and
fearful ones, of all the infallible moral theology of the one and only
infallible, unchangeable and irreforable Holy Church. Institutional-
ized Christianity has adopted and glorified the “infallible” moral
theology of its sexual psychopaths. These latter visited upon Father
Grandier, and innumerable others, the divine wrath for the magical
seduction of His consecrated women. A delightful, glorified and
sanctified sadistic orgie was enjoyed by the piously qualified ones,
when Father Grandier was burnt to ashes, in the year of our
Lord 1634.