



# The historical understanding of female premodern possessions. Problematizing some gender assumptions in the historiography on Teresa de Ávila and Jeanne des Anges

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to approach the history of female possessions today. By analyzing some recent contributions applied to two well-known historical figures: Teresa de Ávila (1515–1582) and Jeanne des Anges (1602–1665), I will problematize some of the ongoing history of female possessions. I intend a reflection on two of the current conceptual frameworks that feature the way history explains the subjective experience of these premodern possessed individuals. I focus on two kinds of interpretation: one I call the ‘neurotic’ interpretation, and the other the ‘subversive’ interpretation. Both constructions underpin explanations of women’s divine and demonic possessions, involving historiographical gender prejudices and ahistorical assumptions.

## KEYWORDS

Divine and demonic possession; historiography; gender history; ahistoricism; Teresa de Ávila; Jeanne des Anges

## Introduction

In this paper, I would like to share some historiographical reflections on the history of female premodern possessions. I would like to raise some questions about the way some historians address this topic, focusing on works that approach the issue eliciting questions on subjectivity. In particular, I would like to problematize two scholarly narratives that attempt to explain the subjective experience of possessed individuals by analyzing two well-known female cases in Early Modern Europe.

I have chosen two women who wrote about their possessions and spiritual encounters: ‘Teresa de Ávila’ (1515–1582), known in religion as ‘Teresa de Jesús’ and ‘Jeanne de Belcier’ (1602–1665), known as ‘Jeanne des Anges’. They both acquired a privilege status in Catholicism. While Teresa de Ávila had a great influence on mysticism that continues today, Jeanne des Anges gained fame as a charismatic religious figure for fighting against the devil.

Teresa de Ávila had a very rich contemplative and mystical life and wrote several spiritual treatises and meditation books for prayer. She was also a religious reformer, setting up the discalced Carmelite branch of the Carmelite order. Her fame of sanctity came during her lifetime, although she was also under suspect of heresy. In the midst of an increasing

ensorship in the second half of the sixteenth century, Spanish Inquisition inquired about her and her writings –withholding her autobiography. She had to defend the authenticity of her spiritual path and spiritual practices, that were under suspicion of illuminati.

Jeanne des Anges was the principal demoniac of a famous French mass possession in the Ursuline Convent at Loudun in the seventeenth century. She was the mother superior of the convent when the mass possession took place and her possession lasted longer. She was possessed for several years and claimed to be physically inhabited by seven different demons. Due to her spiritual battle against the demons and the dramatic rituals to expel them, which left her with several sacred stigmata, she gained veneration. A few years after she recovered, she wrote about her possession in a diary.

I chose them because I would like also to raise some historiographical gender questions. In recent years, many scholars have shown that early modern spirituality was gendered, like any other human social practice. There were gender-specific roles and competences and women and men related differently to the ‘supernatural’.<sup>1</sup> Following this premise, my reflections look into what we could call the history of women’s encounter-experiences with the supernatural. This definition would include divine and demonic spirit-encounters, visions and possessions, and that part of witchcraft that has to do with ‘interactions’ with the devil through possessions or apparitions.<sup>2</sup>

Current research has established that individuals’ inner supernatural experiences, either with good or demonic spirits, were constructed in similar ways within medieval culture.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the boundaries between witchcraft and possession were not at all clear.<sup>4</sup> Accusations of demonic possession were quite a common response to women claiming to be divinely possessed, and many mystics also claimed to have had encounters with the devil. Teresa de Ávila and Jeanne des Anges, both had divine and demonic spiritual encounters.

Possessions in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period are classic themes of historical research. They have been topics of interest for so long, that they have been serially subject to different historiographical approaches: as many, probably, as there have been trends in history. As Katharine Hodgkin suggests, regarding witchcraft studies, all these topics serve as a ‘place where history asks questions about itself’, where historians interrogate the nature and limits of historical understanding.<sup>5</sup>

Nowadays, these topics are enjoying a return to fashion, engaging with new historical perspectives that have emerged over recent decades.<sup>6</sup> Starting with the innovative approach of the 1970s and ‘80s, called ‘history from below’ –with its variations such as, ‘the history of everyday life’ or ‘microhistory’ (in Italy and France)– methodology had evolved, by the mid-1990s, along with social history, to produce the so-called ‘new cultural history’ inspired by the insights of postmodernist philosophy and the linguistic turn. These approaches shared a focus on the qualitative, ‘lived’ experiences of ordinary people, making history of the practices, beliefs and feelings of common people, and focusing on ‘quotidian’ meanings in everyday speech.<sup>7</sup> More recently, these developments have given rise to questions on subjectivity, power, agency, the body, emotions, sexuality and the like. The same shift has been happening in the history of spirituality in general, which is moving towards the same questions.

This increasing attention to questions about subjectivity, identity processes and personal experiences is displacing the political and religious dimensions of enquiry, in favor of psychological analysis. Even when the focus is not specifically examining the psychological ‘dimensions’ of an individual’s past, these current trends traverse theories

that are linked to the psychogenic context. When historical research is directed towards an individual or case study, in a microhistorical approach, we need, inescapably, to examine questions of how cultural and social surroundings interact with the individual concerned. So, in following these new approaches, we are putting psychological explanations at the forefront of historical studies, and sometimes forgetting that our own explanatory psychological theories are, themselves, culturally specific. My aim in this paper is to discuss two of these explanations used in historical research on female possessions in premodern times. Especially, they are used in historical research conducted by historians of medicine, historians of psychology and historians of human sciences in general.<sup>8</sup>

In the examination of the recent historiography of the two cases mentioned, despite many other approaches that can feature the explanations for their experiences of possession, two models of interpretation can be identified. I would not be able to encompass all the rich historiographical discussions that these cases have raised, but I just want to focus on two models that have been used to explain the subjective experiences of possession of these nuns. By two kinds of interpretation, I mean two ways of reasoning that underpin the way these female spirit-encounters are understood. These two general explanations condition historical interpretations of the phenomenon and are the result of past constructions in the history of possessions. I name the first the 'neurotic' interpretation, and the second, the 'subversive' interpretation.

The 'neurotic' interpretation, to use terminology borrowed from medicine, was strongly advocated around the end of the nineteenth century and understood possession as an expression of madness. Following the medical positivism of the nineteenth century, some historians assumed that mental disorders, hysteria first and foremost, were behind the behaviors that characterized these possessions. Today, this pathologization is not normally employed by historians, but a certain residual predisposition to this way of seeing the female possessed can be found in current historical researches: both in those that use psychoanalytical interpretations and, also, those that adopt what I call the 'subversive' interpretation.

What I call the 'subversive' interpretation of possessions, introduced by Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault, has become a significant point of departure for scholarly debate. This interpretation, borrowed from social sciences, postulates that possessed females were performing transgressive roles. It is a challenging postmodern view that can require historians to discuss the nature of power and its effects in past individuals, but that can also lead to the construction of ahistorical narratives.

In what follows, I will show that both types of explanation used in some current historical narratives feature overinterpretation of the original sources.<sup>9</sup> As I will argue, both interpretations are ways of constructing the history of female possessions that utilize ahistorical assumptions about women's 'nature', i.e. sexuality; thus reifying and naturalizing conceptions of gender.<sup>10</sup> A short history of the two narratives will be held to better problematize its assumptions.

### **The neurotic interpretations**

One of the interpretations in historical accounts of mystics and demonic possessions that still operates today considers the possessed woman as somebody with psychological problems. Stuart Clark points out that the most popular solution to the question of possessions has

been to superimpose categories of modern psychiatry onto the early modern diagnoses of insanity that these same possessions had. The result is what he calls a 'psycho-pathology' of possession, built on arguments offered by sceptics at the time. However, from a historical point of view, it is more accurate to state that demons were said to be the cause of madness and not madness the cause of demons.<sup>11</sup>

As is well known, through the nineteenth century, the mystic and ascetic modes of spirituality, as well as demonic possessions, moved into the realm of medical discourse. Mystic and possessed women became associated with neurosis. In fact, it has become an established myth in the history of psychiatry that needs revision.<sup>12</sup> As part of a very long and complex process, this development is often too easily dismissed under the general title of 'secularization'. In fact, confrontations between medical and theological interpretations began much earlier. In England, in the sixteenth century, some concepts of mental illness that attributed natural causes to witchcraft and possessions were used to combat the supernatural puritan explanations.<sup>13</sup> Like the diagnosis of 'suffocation of the mother' used by Edward Jorden in the famous case of Mary Glover.<sup>14</sup> Or the consideration of melancholy as the causation of witches' imaginations, by Reginald Scot in his *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1583). In any case, although there were medical attempts to offer natural explanations for possession long before, the myth of psychiatry's victory over demonology was created in the mid to late nineteenth century. Patrick Vandermeersch holds that this myth was constructed to solve –or rather to cover up– the problematic relationship between religion and medicine, which had not been so acute before.<sup>15</sup> As Jan Goldstein has studied in the context of the French Third Republic, the claims of the medical profession should be seen in relation to the politics of anticlericalism and the professionalization of psychiatry.<sup>16</sup>

Psychiatrists sought to reinterpret certain religious phenomena in terms of mental illness in order to legitimize their own medical discipline, research and practices, just as they were also seeking to turn their nosological categories into universal and natural distinctions. If we take the French physician Jean Martin Charcot (1825–1893) as an example, we know he had a keen interest in proving that hysteria was not a new scientific construction artificially created by him and his team.<sup>17</sup> Instead, he argued that hysteria was an illness that had always been present throughout history, manifesting itself in religious forms. One of Charcot's underlying agendas, which he shared with many intellectuals, including Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), was to debunk as 'unscientific' and irrational certain religious ideas and phenomena.<sup>18</sup> The century harbored a medicalizing and psychologizing drive through which diagnoses of hysteria provided the solution to bizarre episodes of spirit-possession, mysticism and so on. This retrospective diagnosis worked alongside a psychiatry that explained mental disorders as congenital and inheritable.<sup>19</sup>

On one hand, this 'psychiatrization' became cultural, surpassing the medical field and appearing in novels and among historians. On the other hand, positivism also took hold in history. Historians of the modern period were among those elites who tended to neglect the marvelous in their works. As Diane Purkiss points out, 'History' was one of the Enlightenment discourses which gradually displaced the supernatural in the following centuries.<sup>20</sup> Hence, although the kind of questions that history was asking back then were not whether the possessed was insane or not, assumptions of that kind surrounded historians' works at the beginning of the twentieth century. We can quote here the prominent anthropologist and historian, Margaret Alice Murray, who tried to change that view

in the twenties. In her famous, as well as debunk book, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), she denounced the scientific explanations of her contemporaries that labeled all possession and witchcraft phenomena as the imaginings of hysterical women. She criticized what she called the 'hallucination-theory' which stated that hysteria and hallucinations were the foundations of the witches' confessions.<sup>21</sup>

As Herman Westerink suggests, this reinterpretation of religious wonders not only supported the legitimization of the category 'hysteria', but also contributed to the invention and substantiation of its manifestations.<sup>22</sup> In turn, hysteria contributed, to some extent, to construct mystic and demonic possessions, which have not yet been historicized. Nineteenth-century hysteria's symptoms form the basis for the way we imagine ecstasies and devil manifestations today. This medicalization of the possessed's performativity, conditions the way history understands past female possessions. At the least, it influences the way we consider the embodiment and external signs of these premodern possessions.

A clear example of this transposition has occurred in the imaginings of Teresa de Ávila's ecstasies. The way she explained her performativity and feelings during her raptures is far from bodily agitation and contrary to the idea historiography has been constructing. From her writings, we infer that she had ecstasies while sitting or praying on her knees, in a quiet and motionless meditative pose.<sup>23</sup>

In her accounts of how ecstasies took place, she disregarded her body following her Christian mystical tradition as well as medical theories of the time. According to her tradition, the suspension of the senses aid religious awareness. Although there were different degrees of ecstasies and raptures, different intensities, all the spiritual books of her time held that mystics barely could attend their bodies, being concentrated on what the soul saw and learned at the very peak of ecstasy. Medical explanations of the time corroborated also the fact that, in ecstasy, the soul was more with God than 'animating' (enlivening) the body.

By contrast, the participation of her body in the ecstasies has been often constructed as a very corporeal and somehow violent phenomenon, involving the contortion of the body, spasms, convulsions, seizures, fits of paralysis, palpitations, sighs and so on. In her case, this construction went along with another one: her famous vision of an angel piercing her heart with an arrow, which it has been erroneously understood as a painful material experience. Named by the Church after her as the transverberation of the heart, this mental experience, described by Teresa de Ávila as a 'spiritual' or 'imaginative' vision (*visio spiritualis*), turned to be understood as a material encounter with the angel. She was very insistent on claiming that her vision of an angel piercing her heart was a mental image. An internal image that spirituals thought that was sent by God to make their experience more intense and understandable, helping them to symbolize the loving wound received in their souls. Yet, tradition after her took its materiality for granted. After her canonization, ecclesiastical authorities confirmed that Teresa's heart showed scars.

The famous white marble sculpture by Gianlorenzo Bernini at Santa Maria della Vittoria church, titled *The ecstasy* (1647–1652), contributed as well to the materialization of the phenomenon –the angel and her having the same corporality. The sculpture seems also to have been given rise to Charcot's interpretation of Teresa's ecstasies.<sup>24</sup>

Along the seventeenth century, these mystical phenomena became a more physical experience in Spain and Italy. By then, experiencing the divine was placed in the senses

as well as intensified. Developments of natural philosophy and medicine can explain the shift to this new physicality in experiencing the supernatural. Senses and passions were not any more a function of the soul in post Cartesian natural philosophy.<sup>25</sup> Jeanne des Anges' possessions, either with good or bad spirits, had more physical effects for her than for Teresa de Ávila. Yet, her fits and convulsions have been also misled by the Charcotian construction. In the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era, the convulsions or fits of the possessed were interpreted as them performing the torments of the hell.<sup>26</sup> Presumably, gestures and poses that cover up this performativity were different. By presupposing similarities between manifestations of hysteria and mystic or demonic possession, both phenomena have been reciprocally coproduced.

Furthermore, this medicalization of past possessions by nineteenth-century medical pundits introduced another, related problem to the history of these female possessions. Female hysteria became intimately bound up with sexuality. If not explicitly clear in Charcot's concept of hysteria, the role of sexuality in hysteria was fixed by Sigmund Freud. So, this connection, by extension, led to the association of possessions with sexuality. As hysteria was mainly a women's neurosis and carried with it feminine traits<sup>27</sup>—hysterical men were invested with womanly traits—, the gendered nature of the malady brought about the gendered sexualization of possessions. It is usually assumed that possessed female bodies were more sexualized or had more problems with their sexuality than possessed males; much in the same way that female hysterics were constructed.

Despite the abundance of literature on Teresa de Ávila's trances as sexual sublimation and with erotic signification, there is no reference to sexuality in her own descriptions of her contemplative experiences, which is coherent with her mystical tradition. Moreover, Teresa de Ávila had the same mystical experience of the transverberation of the heart as her colleague, also a Spanish mystic, Saint John of the Cross. They both had the same vision of an angel piercing their hearts and they narrated the experience pretty much in the same way. But while John's vision has not been interpreted as embodied, Teresa's vision is not only read as embodied but is described using erotic, or even explicitly sexual terms. The contrast—with the intellectual perspective of readings of John's vision—is based on a contemporary interpretative gender bias.<sup>28</sup>

As the medievalist Caroline Bynum points out, the history of piety has tended to associate female spirituality with erotic metaphors, even though they are not women's own most common metaphors for union with the divine nor a distinctively female pattern of expression.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to interpretations of these phenomena as highly sexualized, recent feminist historians have started to show that other comparisons and metaphors played a role in female spiritual states, such as, metaphors and visual images related to feeding and care issues or related to motherly fears and feelings.<sup>30</sup>

Even when sexuality is present in the possession accounts, we need to examine very carefully which meanings of sexuality are at stake in each context. In Jeanne des Anges' diary, sensuality plays its part as a bodily temptation that the devil tests her with, along with other temptations. But she did not construct the participation of her sexuality according to our modern meanings. Jeanne des Anges' autobiography was not published in print until 1886. The diary was edited for the first time by Gabriel Legué and Gilles de la Tourette, both physicians and disciples of Charcot.<sup>31</sup> This edition of the autobiographical account by the French possessed is very illustrative of the medicalization of a demoniac in the nineteenth century. Legué and de la Tourette reinterpreted every mode of behavior

and thought Jeanne des Anges recorded, as symptoms of hysteria. According to the way they interpreted female hysteria, they presumed her to be emotionally unbalanced, lustful, jealous, manipulative and presenting all sorts of nineteenth-century hysterical traits. Michel de Certeau, in his analysis of the possessions at Loudun, refers to one physician of the time who diagnosed the possessions as 'hysterotomia' or 'erotomania', asserting that the nuns were in fact 'tortured by the urges of the flesh' and that what they really needed was 'a carnal remedy in order to be perfectly cured'.<sup>32</sup> We tend to interpret this diagnosis with an anachronistic post-Freudian rationality, but no text of the time details anything like sexual frustration as the cause. In fact, at least fifty years earlier, treatments for hysteria, also known as 'suffocation of the mother/uterus', were physical, and if intercourse was prescribed, it was because physicians thought of it as having purgative effects. Within the humoral system, the cause was partially explained as the accumulation and corruption of the humors in the uterus, thus intercourse was thought of as a mechanical solution for the evacuation of these humors.<sup>33</sup> Presumably, early modern historical actors had a very different construction of the participation of their sexuality in possessions.

### Psychoanalytical interpretations

Today, in general, historians avoid retrospective diagnoses and employing direct pathological explanations in relation to mystical or demonic possessions and witchcraft, but a new form of pathologization is currently at issue in history, with the use of explanatory models provided by psychoanalysis.<sup>34</sup>

Psychoanalysis is more than a psychiatric theory. It is also a way of understanding people and mental issues that we have incorporated, in a distorted way, into our common sense. It is present in our language and we use it as an everyday resource when we try to understand ourselves or others. It is a 'style of reasoning', to borrow Ian Hacking's term<sup>35</sup>, that we apply when trying to understand the cause of some human actions, desires, will, etc. without even knowing that it comes from a 'psychoanalytical' system of thought. It is part of our cultural background, so the language and the rationality we use to translate past personal narratives are also permeated by this view.<sup>36</sup> We use this rationality in the attribution of past behavioral motives or to understand past sexuality, as we have just seen. De Certeau claimed that we view the past as much easier to psychoanalyze than the present because we tend to see people from the past as more primitive or like children, as did Freud himself.<sup>37</sup> Besides, history as a discipline is also indebted to psychoanalysis because psychoanalysis has given us questions that history would otherwise never have framed.

Another issue is that some historians advocate for the explicit use of psychoanalysis to interpret female cases of possession and witchcraft. One of the first historians to attempt to address these issues employing psychoanalytical theory was John Putnam Demos in his famous book, *Entertaining Satan. Witchcraft and the culture of Early New England* (1982). He even used psychological/psychoanalytical explanations to derive conclusions about the entire American Early Modern society, in a manner that have been already very problematized.<sup>38</sup>

According to Katharine Hodgkin, gender re-entered the witchcraft topic by way of psychoanalysis and in a trend going back to Lyndal Roper's works, who I will take as my main interlocutor in what follows.<sup>39</sup>

Lyndal Roper, as well as Diane Purkiss or Deborah Willis, has argued that fantasy elements of devil encounter-narratives by witches were rooted in their life experiences, reflecting profound anxieties surrounding poverty, sickness, childbirth, parenting or housekeeping grounded on gender dynamics.<sup>40</sup> They understand devil's accounts as narratives that held unconscious wishes and fantasies, that expressed repressed emotions at the time. According to Roper, the character of the devil served those possessed with a means to dramatize their psychic conflicts. In her ground-breaking book, *Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, sexuality and religion in Early Modern Europe* (1994) she undertakes a symbolic reading of the narrative of a witch, which she connects with motherhood and parental conflicts in the witch's life. She also tries to locate this witch's fantasies historically. She is very attentive to the social organization of motherly practices in the historical context, thus escaping from a reductionist reading of her material.<sup>41</sup> But she makes connections with alleged deeply conflicted feelings about motherhood to explain the witchcraft accusations, which I think is an overinterpretation of the sources.

The obvious tension between history and psychoanalysis lies in the psychoanalytical claim that all humans share some universal preconditions. Even, if, as Peter Gay argues, the psychoanalytic view of human drives, defense mechanisms or the Oedipus complex, admits cultural variety, it presupposes a system with permanent mental structures and dynamics.<sup>42</sup> When psychoanalytical entities are applied to the past there is always the risk of anachronism.<sup>43</sup> As Stuart Clark says, such approaches do not help us to read the self-perceptions of actors with greater insight.<sup>44</sup> On the contrary, as the historian Emma Wilby points out, if we focus too closely on encounter-narratives as conduits for repressed emotion through which 'poor oppressed people' can 'fantasize about the reversal of their cases' then it is easy to close our minds to other possible interpretations.<sup>45</sup> To explain a fantasy only in terms of the emotional distress which lies behind it, can reduce rich historical context to a simplistic pathological explanation. The danger is that we fall into diagnosing character structure, forgetting the cultural and theological contents of the demoniacs' speeches.<sup>46</sup> We must wonder if Roper's historical narrative differs that much from the retrospective diagnosis applied by Legué, de la Tourette and Charcot to the Loudun affair. The two accounts are both more concerned with their own theories of interpretation than with the past.

Lyndal Roper is well aware that she is crossing a historical boundary when she gives these kinds of psychological explanations. Her position is that we are still making history even if we assume that certain human traits are immutable. Besides, she argues that any history of witchcraft or possession cannot be satisfactory unless we use such explanations. According to Roper, it is better to use a theory such as psychoanalysis than to use none and leave the readers alone to devise psychological explanations of their own. She also thinks that a rationalist account of subjectivity can only be partial, that the psyche is not merely a blank sheet written on by social processes. So, the unconscious mental processes of an individual must be dealt with as an issue in the historical formation of subjectivities.

The main problem is that in doing so, we tend to forget the 'psychological' explanations, so to speak, employed by the historical individuals themselves and the explanatory theories available at the time on the soul, the passions, the body-soul interaction and so on. Natural philosophy, medicine and theology of that time can offer us better clues in



the task of reconstructing the external signs as well as the internal experiences of this past possessions.

### The subversive interpretations

I would like to examine another set of interpretations that are also at issue in historical research into possessions and are related to the rationality of the neurotic interpretations. I call them the 'subversive' interpretations, based on ideas which can be attributed to Michel de Certeau (1925–1986) and Michel Foucault (1926–1984). Both employed critical approaches to psychoanalysis but were also indebted to it and influenced each other.

Michel de Certeau analyzed the French case of demonic possessions at the Ursuline convent in his magnificent book, *The Possession of Loudun* (orig. 1970).<sup>47</sup> In it, he talked about the possessions as a 'rebellion of women' and held that the possessed nuns were victims with benefits, in a Freudian sense.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, in *The Writing of History* he considered the demoniac as the 'Other', excluded from the spiritual realm. He held that the behavior of the possessed was not 'evil' but 'subversive' in spiritual matters. The possessed were the 'anti-spirituals' and behaved in the opposite way to that expected of a holy person, i.e. they blasphemed, felt sensual temptations, made a mockery of the sacraments and religious symbols, etc.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, Foucault examined the phenomenon of diabolic possessions on several occasions and particularly, in one of his lectures at the Collège de France.<sup>50</sup> With a different reading than that of de Certeau, Foucault also looked at the case of the possessions at Loudun, but as a lesson in how bodies resist the incursions of power.<sup>51</sup> Foucault understood the external manifestations of the possessions as subversive acts of those bodies.<sup>52</sup> For Foucault, the body is a limit of signification: when a discomfort cannot be put into words, cannot be expressed otherwise, the body rises up against itself without the consent or control of the person involved. According to Foucault, when the word fails, the body finds its way of speaking. Disorders in general are understood by Foucault as rebellions against some limit of discourse.

Foucault's consideration of the bodily manifestations of demonic possessions in the seventeenth-century was linked to what he called the 'convulsive flesh'. For him, the body of the possessed is a body convulsed by agitations and involuntary shaking that are the effect of resistance to a new technique of power, due to the Christianization that takes place during the Counter-Reformation.<sup>53</sup> He discusses this technique in the larger context of the post-Tridentine apparatus of spiritual direction supposedly focused on the domain of the flesh, with a whole set of procedures, techniques and practices of examination to control the body.<sup>54</sup> Hence, the body expresses a conflict that arises from the very use of a set of technologies to exercise power over it.

Foucault himself saw a continuity between that religious birth of the convulsing body and its medical appropriation from the eighteenth century on. His explanation was that these bodily resistances became uncomfortable for the Church, in such a way that it needed new discourses to deal with these resistances and found them in medicine.<sup>55</sup> From then on, these paroxysms of the flesh would belong to another system of power: medicine. Convulsions became medicalized, eventually being subsumed into a new specialization, that of nervous disorders.<sup>56</sup> This story is not completely accurate from the point of view of the history of medicine, given the fact that convulsions and fits

were already part of the medical field long before this period. But he gained popularity with his suggestion that the power/knowledge system over the bodies transferred from Church to medicine in western society.

What interests us here is that this construction of convulsions as the body's reaction to power has become a significant discussion point for subsequent scholars. Contemporary anthropologists and historians alike interpret the phenomenon of possession as a form of resistance or transgression that is expected to be more common among subordinate groups, like women. Many postmodern historical investigations understand not only the fits of the convulsed but the whole phenomenon of possession as a historical mode of subversive subjectivity, even if they do not endorse this explicitly. From this point of view, possessions have been interpreted as the expression of a social discomfort that sometimes carried with it the potential for performing transgressive roles.

Demonic possessions especially, have been interpreted as reactions against ongoing religious, spiritual, social and political tensions and struggles in religious contexts – rivalry among religious orders, between secular institutions of power and the Church, etc. They have also been interpreted as reactions to the male-led imposition of new rules, such as the strict observance and enclosure enforced in the counter-reformation or the introduction of severe spiritual regimes of discipline and mortification in convents.<sup>57</sup>

At a more individual explanatory level, possession by the devil is also seen as relieving the tensions, anxieties or responsibilities of those involved, mostly in an unconscious manner. By being possessed, the nuns could project their panic outside themselves, as the historian Moshe Sluhovsky, among others, suggests.<sup>58</sup> No need to say that this is not exactly the kind of explanation that Teresa de Jesús and Jeanne des Anges gave to themselves for understanding their experiences of possession.<sup>59</sup> They thought that the devil affected their feelings and behaviors but as a real entity. The devil was also sometimes part of the explanation they gave for the conflicts, competitions and quarrels in the convent's life, but they took devil's role also as a real being meddling in it.

Possessions have also been interpreted as ways of mitigating or excusing certain activities or behaviors that were forbidden at the time. Michelle Marshman, for example, discusses the case of two Ursuline novices at a convent in Marseilles who, in an obscure episode in which they lost their virginity to priests of the same order, relied on 'possession' to avoid punishment. She interprets their possession as enabling these nuns to accuse the clerics of sexual abuse, when it may have been they who had solicited sexual relations. By accusing them of devilish seduction, the nuns gained even higher status within the Catholic community.<sup>60</sup>

Again, if we focus on explaining the devil as a psychological projection, we overlook other 'mental' theories used by premodern individuals to understand supernatural inner influence upon them. Moreover, with this thesis that disturbances in the religious realm were expressed somatically, we are again in danger of falling into a sort of psychopathological explanation. That is the case, for instance, with one of the works by Moshe Sluhovsky, in which he expounds what he seems to debunk in a later academic work. Assuming that early modern women found common means to transgress their religious barriers in order to speak out on religious matters, e.g. confession and gossip, he holds that those who became possessed by demons had additional psychopathological problems. According to the author, these problems had to do, unsurprisingly, with sexual anxieties.

So, in conclusion, he understands that the possessed were expressing sexual, as well as religious concerns via a pathological path. He even uses terms such as 'deviant behavior' and 'syndrome' to talk about the demoniacs.<sup>61</sup>

This set of subversive interpretations has paid more attention to the agency of past women. De Certeau suggested that being possessed by divine or demonic spirits enabled women to participate in a discourse on topics from which they were normally excluded.<sup>62</sup> After him, many historical works have analyzed the advantages and possibilities of employing the social power that these identities carried with them, in different contexts and periods. Adopting roles like mystic, possessed, visionary, stigmatic or prophetic were some of the few ways in which women could socially stand out; the only way to have a voice on public matters. Even if, as the American medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, the bodies of women, as distinct from men, had to be literally 'the locus of the sacred'.<sup>63</sup>

Interpreting these roles as possibilities for women's empowerment offers a very challenging analysis but also some dangers. Interpreting their behaviors as a defiance of God or the priest, or as if they were revolting against early modern patriarchal societies, often encompasses a presentist approach. Diane Purkiss gives us a good example when she criticizes the assumption that women's knowledge of other women's bodies, as in midwifery, automatically subverted gender hierarchies or the power of the Church at the time. As she holds, the power of the early modern midwives could be part of the power of the Church and the State to regulate women's bodies.<sup>64</sup> As Katherine Hodgkin holds for witchcraft, patriarchy is the context, not the reason. It is not a historical reason that could explain why somebody was possessed.<sup>65</sup>

Without neglecting gender analysis and its fruitful readings, we need to place gender ideology within history. We should not forget to contextualize the ideas and ideals of womanhood and manhood that were available at the time. Otherwise we run the risk of turning past actors into heroines or martyrs, proto-feminists or the systematically oppressed.

In short, as challenging as these analyses are, they can, again, give way to psychoanalytical interpretations and to what I have identified as neurotic interpretations, raising gender prejudices because this type of interpretation is commonly only applied to women.

## Conclusions

Stuart Clark, in his influential work *Thinking with demons*, claims that we cannot separate the description of the physical phenomena of possessions from their cultural meaning and the readings of the time that make them intelligible. I agree with him that signs, behaviors and physical gestures should always be read through the meanings of the time, but not only through the 'symbolic' meanings that he uses. It is true, as he shows masterfully, that for many contemporaries, being possessed, both as a state of mind and as a set of bodily movements, had meaning in terms of the eschatological expectations of the period.<sup>66</sup> But not only in those terms. In my view, one of the (few) limits of Stuart Clark's brilliant analysis is that his reading of possessions is limited to the demonology of the time. Clark focuses on the eschatological senses of possessed people in the seventeenth century and he considers demoniacs as the battleground between God and the devil. But past individuals are not less significant than the culture they exist within and

demoniacs were not only emblems. They were human beings manifesting connections with supernatural realities and we can also make history of that. We can ask questions to the sources about how the possessed experienced their own possessions, beyond the symbolic readings that were given at the time. I agree with Clark when he argues that the starting point of historical analysis must be the meanings that the age attributes to the phenomena. But we can also search these meanings in relation to the medical and anthropological explanations given at the time. For instance, we can look for the correspondence between the physical gestures and the physiological theories elaborated in Medieval and Early Modern scientific texts.<sup>67</sup> At the same time we can look for descriptions and explanations of their inner mental states and feelings in the historical records of personal narratives of the possessed. The aim would be to develop a history of the body participation and the mental inner aspects of these spirit-encounters trying to reconstruct the 'psychological' explanations used at that time. That means, without imposing our present-day psychological categories of analysis, as we discussed above. Of course, we could never be sure that these descriptions could match the experience as it was felt by the historical individuals. But this is another philosophical problem.

As historians, when we work on these texts our aim should be to find historical explanations. This means not only that in the past family structures were not the same and, therefore, people did not experience family relationships in ways that could generate similar mental conflicts as today; nor just that sexuality in the past did not play a crucial role in the configuration of personalities –a cornerstone of Freudian psychoanalysis; nor that we need only recognize that rather than 'minds' and an unconscious, they had 'souls' –quite a very different thing. It is a matter of what history can provide specifically as a discipline. In the same way, it is not historical if we explain past possessions by using current biological explanations, or cognitive or neuropsychological theories. Not because all these theories would be incorrect, but rather because these readings do not contribute to the discipline of history. History should only address the explanations that operate in the particular historical setting. That is the specific contribution of the discipline to the Human and Social Sciences. As David Hartley claimed, the historian must focus on the explanatory systems available to the participants to explain the dynamics of witchcraft or possessions.<sup>68</sup> At least, it is necessary to distinguish between the psychological explanations employed by the historical individuals and those used by the historian.

The discourses generated by the possessed don't necessarily have to tell us about demonological theories of the time (Clark's analysis) nor about the genealogy of magical beliefs (one of Ginzburg's approaches), as Lyndal Roper says to support her approach.<sup>69</sup> I agree with her that they can tell us things about Medieval and Early Modern subjectivities. We can address questions of subjective experience, make inquiries about the body, the emotions and the sexuality involved in these possession processes, but within the confines of a historical understanding, that is, by focusing on the contextual explanations that were circulating in the historical actors' own time.

If we understand that the beatific visions or the demons known to these women were projections of their own desires and anxieties, the product of their sexual needs or unconscious rebellions against their environment, we are ascribing postmodern psychological views to Early Modern experiences without asking how these concepts operated in their own time.

## Notes

1. Caroline W. Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body. Part 1*, eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone Books, 1889), 181–238.
2. Witchcraft studies comprise a subfield that fosters its own controversies as well as its particular historiography. Sometimes, this historiography is more akin to anthropology and folk studies than to the discipline of history, which can lead to an ahistorical presentation of the subject. See, for instance, Ronald Hutton, 'Anthropological and Historical Approaches to Witchcraft: Potential for a New Collaboration?', *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 2 (2004): 413–34.
3. See Nancy Caciola Mystics, 'Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 268–306.
4. For instance, some cases of possession were considered witchcraft in the second half of the seventeenth century in New England. John Putman Demos, *Entertaining Satan. Witchcraft and the culture of Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
5. Katharine Hodgkin, 'Historians and Witches', *History Workshop Journal* 45, no. 1 (1998): 272.
6. Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); James S. Amelang, 'Invitación al Aquelarre: ¿hacia dónde va la historia de la brujería?', *Edad de Oro* 27 (2008): 29–45; and Stuart Clark, 'Brujería e imaginación histórica. Nuevas interpretaciones de la demonología en la Edad Moderna', in *El Diablo en la Edad Moderna*, eds. María Tusiet and James S. Amelang (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2004), 21–45.
7. Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2004).
8. I will omit the works that do not intend explicitly to be historical. Although this demarcation is not always clear, I mean that I am not taken into consideration the ones that use historical cases to illustrate or demonstrate some sort of psychological aspect of the human nature. For instance, a work such as: Simon R. Jones, 'Re-expanding the Phenomenology of Hallucinations: Lessons from Sixteenth-century Spain', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 13, no. 2 (2010): 187–208, aims to understand the phenomenology of hearing internal voices by examining experiences from the past. Even if the research itself is sensitive to the historical context, its aim is not to contribute to the discipline of history.
9. For a very interesting discussion of 'overinterpretation' in the reading of texts and historical texts, see Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
10. See also, Mònica Balltandre, 'Che Diavolo di Genere! Oltre la Malattia Mentale e la Ribellione', *Zapruder* 41 (2016): 8–25.
11. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 391. See also, Hans Christian Erik Midelfort, 'Madness and the Problems of Psychological History in the Sixteenth Century', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12, no. 1 (1981): 5–12.
12. See Patrick Vandermeersch, 'The Victory of Psychiatry over Demonology: The Origin of the Nineteenth Century myth', *History of Psychiatry* 2 (1991): 351–363; Angus Gowland, 'The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy', *Past and Present* 191 (2006): 77–120; Peter Elmer, 'Science, Medicine and Witchcraft', in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2007), 33–51.
13. David Hartley, 'Mental Illness, Magical Medicine and the Devil in Northern England, 1650–1700', in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Roger French and Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114–44.
14. Tsu-Chung Su, 'Hysteria, the Medical Hypothesis, and the 'Polymorphous Techniques of Power': A Foucauldian Reading of Edward Jorden's 'A Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother'', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 30, no 1 (2004): 65–91.

15. Vandermeersch, *The Victory of Psychiatry over Demonology*. For a problematization of this confrontation between religion and psychiatry, see also Maria Heidegger, 'The Devil in the Madhouse. On the Treatment of Religious Pathologies in Early Psychiatry, Tyrol, 1830–1850', in *Sign or Symptom? Exceptional Corporeal Phenomena in Religion and Medicine in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, eds. Tine Van Osselaer, Henk de Smaele and Kaat Wil (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 23–42.
16. Jan Goldstein, 'The Hysteria Diagnosis and the Politics of Anticlericalism in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *The Journal of Modern History* 54, no. 2 (1982): 209–39. Similar processes took place in Germany during Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. Roy Porter, 'Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic, and Liberal Thought', in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. 5, eds. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 193–274.
17. Herman Westerink, 'Demonic Possession and the Historical Construction of Melancholy and Hysteria', *History of Psychiatry*, 25, no. 3 (2014): 335–49; Jean Martin Charcot and Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'Art* (Paris: Adrien Delahaye & Émile Lecrosnier, 1887).
18. Elmer, *Science, Medicine and Witchcraft*. For a comparison between Charcot and Freud on this topic, see Nicole Edelman, 'Gustave Boissaire, Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud. Three Doctors' Responses to some Unusual Bodily Phenomena: Convergences and Divergencies (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries)', in *Sign or Symptom? Exceptional Corporeal Phenomena in Religion and Medicine in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, eds. Tine Van Osselaer, Henk de Smaele and Kaat Wil (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), 43–54.
19. Porter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment*.
20. Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
21. Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921). See also, Canon J. A. MacCulloch, 'The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland', *Folklore* 32, no. 4 (1921): 227–44.
22. Westerink, *Demonic Possession*.
23. Mònica Balltandre, *Éxtasis y Visiones. La experiencia contemplativa de Teresa de Ávila* (Barcelona: Erasmus Ediciones, 2012). See also, Balltandre, 'Extases et Visions Incarnées. La construction de la Transverbération de Thérèse d'Avila au 17e siècle', in *Le Récit de Soi et la Narrativité dans la Construction de l'Identité Religieuse*, eds. Pierre Brandt and Paulo Jesus (Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporaines. Vrin, 2017), 139–60.
24. Bernini's creation of a tall and dominant angel with an arrow about to stick into Teresa's heart has given rise to all sorts of erotic readings in the twentieth century. See, for example, Catherine Swietlicki, 'Writing "Femystic" Space: In the Margins of Saint Teresa's Castillo Interior', *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 13, no. 3 (1989): 273–93. However, it seems that in Bernini's lifetime, the sculpture was not considered erotic. The sculpture had contemporary approval from both ecclesiastic and lay circles alike. As Jessica Peyton points out, it is hard to assert that Bernini would have taken any risks in decorum in the depiction of St. Teresa. Jessica Peyton, 'Brides of Christ: Vision, Ecstasy, and Death in the Holy Women of Gianlorenzo Bernini' (master's thesis, University of Florida, 2008), 22.
25. As part of the same change during the seventeenth century, medicine shifted towards a mechanistic understanding of the human body and the heart while Roman Church promoted the physical role of the heart in the spiritual phenomena. Catrien Santing, 'De affectibus cordis et palpitatione: secrets of the heart in Counter-Reformation Italy', in *Cultural Approaches to the History of Medicine. Mediating Medicine in Early Modern and Modern Europe*, eds. Willem de Blécourt and Cornelia Osborne (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11–35.
26. Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan*. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*.
27. See Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2008); Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); and Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint*

- Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1996).
28. Balltandre, *Éxtasis y visiones*.
  29. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
  30. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994); Debora Willis, *Malevolent Nurture, Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Claudia Opitz-Belakhal, 'Witchcraft Studies from the Perspective of Women's and Gender History. A Report on Recent Research', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 4, no. 1 (2009): 90–99.
  31. Gabriel Legué and Georges Gilles de la Tourette, Sœur Jeanne des Anges. Autobiographie (Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 1990). For more information on how this edition has affected the approach to the historical figure, see Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Publishing Women's Life Stories in France, 1647–1720. From Voice to Print* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2001), chap. 2.
  32. Cf. de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun*, 135.
  33. For a very good discussion of this interpretation in Ancient Greek medicine, see Helen King, 'Once upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates', in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, eds. Sander L. Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G. S. Rousseau and Elaine Showalter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3–91.
  34. A famous exception in the field is the book of Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987). As the title of the book shows, he treats some spiritual women from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries as anorexic. For another analysis that treats them as anorexic without understanding anorexia as a disorder but as a way of being in the world, see Jacques Maître, *Mystique et féminité. Essai de psychanalyse sociohistorique* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997), chap. 5–6.
  35. Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).
  36. Hodgkin, *Historians and Witches*. Furthermore, the boundary between folk psychology and psychoanalysis is blurred. See also, Nick Tosh, 'Possession, Exorcism and Psychoanalysis', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Science* 33 (2002): 583–596.
  37. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1988).
  38. He was part of the movement called 'psychohistory'. For a recent critique on psychohistory see Joan W. Scott, 'The Incommensurability of Psychoanalysis and History', *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 63–83.
  39. Hodgkin, *Historians and Witches*. See also, Katharine Hodgkin, 'Gender, Mind and Body: Feminism and Psychoanalysis', in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007), 182–202.
  40. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*; Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*; Purkiss, *The Witch in History*.
  41. In this sense, as Garthine Walker points out, Roper offers interpretations that remain valid even if the psychoanalysis is removed. Garthine Walker *Witchcraft and History*, *Women's History Review* 7, no. 3, (1998): 425–32.
  42. Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 88. Roper thinks that psychoanalysis, in the future, will be able to answer the question of how the psyche varies over time and in different cultures. See Lyndal Roper, 'Witchcraft and Fantasy', *History Workshop Journal*, 45 (1998): 265–71. For further discussion on the problems of the use of psychoanalysis as well as its contribution to witchcraft, see also: Hodgkin, *Gender, Mind and Body*.
  43. Tosh, *Possession, Exorcism and Psychoanalysis*. I don't share the conclusions of his paper, which are that psychoanalysis understood as a flexible explanatory template can be very useful to history. He claims that there are 'structural homologies' between possessions, exorcisms and psychoanalytic encounters (therapy).
  44. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*.
  45. Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 189.

46. Also, for the dangers of using psychoanalysis too simply, see Gay, *Freud for Historians*. More problems arise when psychoanalysis comes to be applied to dead people or to more than the life of an individual. Although for me, it is not a question of whether we can or cannot psychoanalyze the dead, it is a matter of preserving what history can provide specifically as a discipline; as a specialized knowledge that conceptualizes things with a sense of time and place.
47. Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).
48. It is called the 'gain from illness'. Tosh, *Possession, Exorcism and Psychoanalysis*.
49. De Certeau, *The Writing of History*.
50. Michel Foucault (1999) *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975* (New York: Picador).
51. Mark D. Jordan (2015) *Convulsing Bodies. Religion and Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
52. It is not my intention to discuss Foucault's philosophy in depth, I am not expert enough to do so, I just take his assertions on this specific topic.
53. It seems that Foucault thought that there was no agency in this act of 'convulsion', that it was a mere involuntary bodily reaction to (pastoral) power. He talks about a 'convulsive flesh' that 'is the effect of resistance.' It is an effect of material resistance, not a choice. For this interpretation see also, Jordan, *Convulsing Bodies*, 87.
54. Westerink, *Demonic Possession and the Historical Construction of Melancholy*.
55. See also Foucault, 'Religious Deviations and Medical Knowledge', in *Michel Foucault. Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 50–71.
56. Foucault, *Abnormal*.
57. See several examples of such connections in different catholic countries in Moshe Sluhovsky, 'The Devil in the Convent', *American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (2002): 1379–1411. The same arguments also appear in Lorenzo Polizzotto, 'When Saints Fall out: Woman and the Savonarolan Reform in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1993): 486–525.
58. Sluhovsky, *The Devil in the Convent*.
59. For the role of the devil in the life of Teresa de Ávila, see Alison Weber, 'Saint Teresa, Demonomist', in *Control in Counter-Reformation Spain*, eds. Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 171–95; and Stina Busman Jost, 'The Devil in the Details: How Teresa of Avila's Description of the Work of the Devil Assured and Liberated Women', *Medieval Mystical Theology* 26, no. 1 (2017): 6–19.
60. Michelle Marshman, 'Exorcism as Empowerment: A New Idiom', *The Journal of Religious History* 23, no. 3 (1999): 265–81.
61. Moshe Sluhovsky, 'A Divine Apparition or Demonic Possession? Female Agency and Church Authority in Demonic Possession in Sixteenth-Century France', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 4, (1996): 1039–55.
62. Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique. XVIe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).
63. Based on the idea that women could only acquire theological and political authority if they could demonstrate that they had received messages directly from God or the devil, she argues that para-mystical phenomena were more frequent in them. Caroline W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991); Bynum, *The Female Body and Religious Practice*; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.
64. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 21.
65. Hodgkin, *Gender, Mind and Body*.
66. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 411.
67. Caciola, *Mystics, Demoniacs and the Physiology of Spirit Possession*, 294.
68. David Hartley, 'Explaining Salem: Calvinist Psychology and the Diagnosis of Possession', *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (1997): 307–30.
69. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 202.



## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work was supported by the 'Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad' (MINECO) of the Spanish government, under grant HAR2014-58699-P.

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