
Hilaire Kallendorf offers a thorough examination of exorcism in Spanish and English literature in support of her argument that early modern individuals took their demons seriously. Even when exposing cases of feigned possession and fraudulent exorcists, she argues, the writers studied here inhabited a mental universe in which individuals were subject to the influence of malevolent supernatural powers. In this light, her analysis participates in the ongoing paradigm shift which might be described as the resacralization of the Renaissance. Reacting in particular against the New Historicist tendency to read for evidence of the exhaustion of belief, Kallendorf affirms that “God refuses to be removed entirely from the early modern world” (p. 184).

Demonic possession was a recurrent motif in a wide variety of Renaissance genres, including comic and tragic drama, picaresque narrative, satire, romance, hagiography, and the novel. Kallendorf attributes the fascination early modern peoples felt for this motif to the fact that possession represented a particularly alarming threat to a coherent sense of self; demons, after all, were believed to have the ability to take over a person’s body, mind, and soul. Possession also played upon anxieties provoked by religious controversies over the nature of free will and the power of the sacraments as aids to salvation. There was an attractive side to possession, to the extent that demoniacs could claim access to secret knowledge or enjoy poetic furor. Possession presented, additionally, an intriguing hermeneutical challenge. Attempts at diagnosis brought into play competing interpretive paradigms: was the individual possessed, suffering from melancholy, carried away by religious enthusiasm, or deceiving his public with a theatrical performance? A few individuals held that devils were no more than afflictions of the mind, but a much more common position among Catholics and Anglicans, whether erudite or uneducated, was belief tempered by scepticism regarding the particulars. The topos of exorcism, consequently, was adaptable to a broad range of authorial purposes and intended audiences.

The choices authors made in representing possession and exorcism, Kallendorf perceptively argues, were to a significant degree influenced by their choice of genre. Exorcism could provide a target for social criticism, a ruse for star-crossed lovers, or a metaphor for social purification and reintegration. Breaking down possession and exorcism motifs into eleven narrative functions or “theologemes” (the demon’s entrance into the body, the display of symptoms, the appearance of the exorcist, the mock exorcism, etc.), she finds that various genres display distinct preferences. For example, the mock exorcism appears more often in comedy and romance, whereas the symptoms of possessions and the successful exorcism are more often emphasized in hagiography and tragedy. Some theologemes, she allows, are ambiguous. Demonic polyglossia is a frequent comic motif, but it is deployed to awe-inspiring effect in satire and tragedy. This concern
with genre proves especially useful when considering authors like Cervantes or Lope de Vega, whose works display contradictory attitudes toward exorcism. Cervantes depicts exorcism as a comic ruse in his prose romance, *Persiles*, but as a saintly act in his hagiographical drama *El rufián dichoso*. Genre does not explain away all contradictions, Kallendorf recognizes, since inconsistencies may reflect an author’s genuine ambivalence between scepticism and credulity. Nevertheless, generic conventions did tend to tip the balance towards one pole or the other. Although this kind of narratological analysis has been neglected in recent years in favour of studies that concentrate on literature’s engagement with its specific political and cultural tensions, Kallendorf persuasively defends her thesis that structuralism offers an important complement to historicist approaches to literature.

Kallendorf’s close attention to exorcism tropes brings fresh insights to familiar texts. She points out, for example, parallels between the fifth chapter of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (in which the pícaro witnesses a fake exorcism) and Erasmus’s colloquy “Exorcism or the Spectre.” Previous criticism has focused on the episode’s attack on the sale of indulgences, passing over the critique of the credulity surrounding the rituals of exorcism. Kallendorf’s analysis thus lends further support to the thesis of the anonymous author’s affiliation with Erasmism. Kallendorf also explores in detail the linguistic registers that *Don Quijote* shares with contemporary vernacular demonological manuals. Although Cervantes at times parodies this discourse and pokes fun at popular superstition, he gives greater predominance to the darker side of demonic agency in Part II. Thus Cervantes complicates the physiological basis for Don Quijote’s madness by allowing that his protagonist may be, as Don Quijote himself believed, struggling with demons. Also intriguing is Kallendorf’s suggestion that Don Quijote performs a “self-exorcism” (she cites a rare seventeenth-century manual on this practice), an innovative and yet appropriate resolution for the novel that gave birth to the “autonomous” hero.

Kallendorf eloquently argues that critics should attend seriously to the religious beliefs of early modern men and women rather than foreground those moments of disbelief that seem to anticipate our own (dis)beliefs. She tends to paint New Historicists with a broad brush on this score, however, accusing them of a lack of basic respect for the religion of the past. This is surely an exaggeration. Stephen Greenblatt’s recent work, for example, is very much concerned with the psychic turmoil occasioned by religious ferment, and New Historicists are now paying heed to Shakespeare’s anguished engagement with his family’s Catholic past. In her insistence that structuralism should not be abandoned in favour of political and culture analysis, she sometimes gives short shrift to the historical dimensions of the polemics surrounding exorcism and possession. These motifs undoubtedly had synchronic “functions” in literature, but they were also hot topics of debate. Protestants attempted to “de-Catholicize” exorcism and Catholics tried to make exorcism dignified, respectable, and rare. Belief in demonic possession was strong and persistent throughout the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries in Protestant and Catholic Europe, but it does have a history, one in which popular credulity gradually gave way to the discrete “relative” scepticism of the elites. How these debates played out in literary works is worthy of consideration. Kallendorf’s book, with its impressive range of literary, theoretical, and historical texts consulted, its copious notes, and a rich list of works cited will certainly become an invaluable point of departure for any scholar interested in exploring these questions.

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For historians in the west, Czech church history is largely terra incognita. The narrative linking modern Western Europe to its medieval past is a well traveled path, mapped out by countless graduate seminars and undergraduate courses. But once the road leads into Bohemia, the signposts drop away. For early modern Czech history, there are really only two markers, separated by a gulf of more than two centuries: the perfidious burning of Jan Hus in 1415 and the equally disastrous Defenestration of Prague in 1618. Between these landmarks lies land illuminated by precious few guides. This book goes a long way towards redressing that deficit by sketching out the remarkably unheralded Bohemian “middle way” and its uneasy relationships with Rome on the right and the emerging Protestant confessions on the left. David’s volume is an astonishingly bright light, and should be read by all historians of early modern Europe.

David opens with a bibliographical essay detailing why the Utraquist church has suffered neglect or even misrepresentation at the hands of most historians, Czech and otherwise. His self-imposed brief, which functions as a sub-text to the main work of presenting the history of the Utraquist church, is twofold. First, he describes why the Utraquists have been ignored or misunderstood by nearly all historians—Czech and non-Czech—from the seventeenth century until the present, and second he charts the early beginnings of toleration in the modern church and the growth of a society with “liberal features.” The opening essay posits a convincing reading of how dominant ideologies inform historical understanding, and the volume closes with an assessment of the contribution of the Utraquist church to the creation of the modern Catholic church of the post-Vatican II era. Naturally, the links are indirect and non-linear, and certainly more work needs to be done, particularly in the analysis of popular rather than the more rarefied theological data, but David’s instinct here is both accurate and convincing.

Throughout the fifteenth and into the sixteenth centuries, the Utraquist church struggled successfully, David argues, to maintain its unique character against both the pressure of Rome (Martin V launched a crusade against Bohemia