Haunting Matters: Demonic Infestation in Northern Europe, 1400-1600

By

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ABSTRACT

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A profound concern with demonic spirits was central to a large body of literature from the Latin Middle Ages and early modern period. This dissertation will show the ways in which learned writings about demons reveal insights into the cultural and intellectual history of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century western Europe. In particular, an interest in how and in what (visible or invisible) form demonic beings afflicted humanity emerged as larger issues of theological debate from approximately 1400-1600 CE. As I will demonstrate, orthodox theologians maintained that demons existed solely as fallen angels, and that they were the primary culprits of myriad haunting phenomena (e.g., visible apparitions, unsettling movements, and wayward sounds and feelings). In rebellion against the Christian divinity, these wicked spirits were consistently associated with sinful behavior, temptation, and illusory tricks. At the same time, vernacular and folk storytelling suggest that fallen angels were but one of many possible spiritual creatures inhabiting the cosmos. Rather than a strict binary between good and evil spirits, many instantiations of spiritual creatures resisted and survived alongside ecclesiastical teachings on the subject. Informed by multiple overlapping traditions, the premodern Christian imaginary perceived a world filled with invisible agents of both benevolent and malevolent intentions, as well as other ethereal forces with moral ambiguities.
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INTRODUCTION:

A profound concern with demonic spirits was central to a large body of literature from the Latin Middle Ages and early modern period. This dissertation will show the ways in which learned writings about demons reveal insights into the cultural and intellectual history of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century western Europe. In particular, an interest in how and in what (visible or invisible) form demonic beings afflicted humanity emerged as larger issues of theological debate from approximately 1400-1600 CE. As I will demonstrate, orthodox theologians maintained that demons existed solely as fallen angels, and that they were the primary culprits of myriad haunting phenomena (e.g., visible apparitions, unsettling movements, and wayward sounds and feelings). In rebellion against the Christian divinity, these wicked spirits were consistently associated with sinful behavior, temptation, and illusory tricks. At the same time, vernacular and folk storytelling suggest that fallen angels were but one of many possible spiritual creatures inhabiting the cosmos. Rather than a strict binary between good and evil spirits, many instantiations of spiritual creatures resisted and survived alongside ecclesiastical teachings on the subject. Informed by multiple overlapping traditions, the premodern Christian imaginary perceived a world filled with invisible agents of both benevolent and malevolent intentions, as well as other ethereal forces with moral ambiguities.

In exploring this historical imaginary, my thesis traces the significance of a particular type of infernal creature said to disturb human habitations, namely what churchmen called “lesser” or “minor” demonic spirits. Often described as morally ambivalent and producing minimal or trivial disturbances, these furtive beings appear in a variety of medieval and early modern sources, including demonological treatises, poetic compositions, exemplary moral tales, and popular lore. One thorough description of the kind of demon this dissertation is concerned with can be found in
a treatise on witchcraft written in the late sixteenth century by Johann Weyer, a physician and lay
demonologist from Brabant in the Low Countries; it provides insight into how theological authors
often conceptualized relatively innocuous demonic mischief. Looking back to antiquity, and then
squarely at early modern Europe, Weyer notes that

Latin speakers also distinguished evil spirits on the basis of their functions…Those who
possessed the home in comparative peacefulness were called *Lares*, or, if they caused terror
and disturbed households by their attacks, *Larvae*...The ancient Romans used to call these
last spirits *Lemures*, and the Italians call them *Folleti* and *Empedusae*. There also exist
spirits who belong to the family of the *Lares* and *Larvae* and are called “earth dwarfs” by
the people of our country. Now that some of the obvious impostures of demons have been
exposed, these creatures are less common than before. They are of two kinds. Some of the
them are gently and deserving of the title *Lares familiares*; they are active in households
especially at night during the first period of sleep, and, by the noises that they make, they
seem to be performing the duties of servants—descending the stairs, opening doors,
building a fire, drawing water, preparing food, and performing all the other customary
chores—when they are really doing nothing at all...The other dwarf-like spirits are
horrid—disturbing and terrifying the household in every way imaginable...Certain
philosophers call these and similar demons, who are harmful and wicked by nature,
“brutes” and “irrational.” But when these spirits are peaceful, some of the Germans (as also
the Greeks) call them *kobaloi* [rogues, or mischievous goblins] because they are imitators
of men.²

Although the distinction between *Lares* and *Larvae*—which could also be applied to benevolent
and malevolent spirits of the human dead—was not universally adopted in demonological
literature, Weyer rehearses a conventional understanding of minor household demons. He indicates
throughout the first book of his *De praestigiis daemonum* (*On the Illusions of Demons*) that
demonic disruptions in the premodern home could assume several different forms, including the
appearance of hostile spiritual forces and rather harmless domestic presences. In some instances,
as Weyer suggests later in the same chapter, minor spirits could interact with humanity on far more
familiar terms as guests of the home and helpful social companions.³

² Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De praestigiis
For our purposes, the above passage calls attention to a brand of demonic manifestation that “possessed the home in comparative peacefulness.” These spirits were widely reported to be of kinder disposition, “performing the duties of servants” and carrying out menial tasks within the household. Theologians also frequently contrasted these with other “similar demons, who are harmful and wicked by nature,” thereby intimating that while most fallen angels evidenced evil purposes, some spiritual creatures were not easily identifiable as demonic spirits. Several authors reiterated these perspectives as an opportunity to comment upon the duplicitous nature of the Devil. Weyer notably frames his discussion in terms of orthodox Christian theology: the seemingly gentle spirits of (pagan) Roman, just like the those of (modern) Italian homes, are labelled “evil spirits.” Connecting the distant past with the immediate present, the physician from Brabant argues that regardless of Latinate and vernacular designations, ostensibly benign household spirits have been revealed as the “obvious impostures of demons.” With this in mind, the notion that certain domestic demons existed in “comparative peacefulness” with humanity foregrounds a degree of alarm and admonishment. Where some fallen angels were said to evoke “gentle,” “familiar,” and “peaceful” attributes and personalities, Weyer cautions that such apparitions are all disguises or mere imitations of human behavior.

The official stance of Christian theologians held that the Devil and his fallen angels were uniformly antagonistic toward God’s creation. Akin to Weyer, Christian authorities warned that demons manufactured subtle deceits, imitating angels of light, terrifying monstrosities, and other morally ambiguous figures. Commenting on demonic apparitions, for example, the Swiss Reformed minister Ludwig Lavater remarked that “they appeare also in the fourme of brute beaastes, sometime fourefooted, as of a Dogge, a Swine, a Horse, a Goate, a Catte, or a Hare: and sometimes of foules, and creeping wormes, as of a Crow, a night Owle, a chritche Owle, a Snake,
or Dragon…Spirits have sometimes appeared in a pleasant fourme, and sometimes in a horrible shape.”

Noël Taillepied, a Capuchin friar and detractor of Lavater, likewise affirmed that “the bodies they [demons] assume are plastic, easy to mould and fashion, and can receive any form or likeness, colouring itself prismatically with as many hues as the chameleon…they can, with the utmost facility assume the image and fantastical likeness of any animal, or indeed of anything else just as serves their present purpose.”

For Weyer and his peers, one primary way in which fallen angels haunted household was by producing both familiar and disturbing apparitions.

Trained demonologists thus exhorted Christians to beware the potentially harmful nature of astonishing events in the home, wherein unexpected sights and sounds could arise without clear comprehension of how and why such things occurred. Intriguingly, anxieties over domestic disruptions of this sort were not exclusive to the late sixteenth-century. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century exempla, chronicles, courtly and imaginative literature reflect on helpful and penitent demons confusingly occupying Christian homes. In the fourteenth century, the prominent bishop and natural philosopher, Nicole Oresme, similarly attempted “to set people’s minds at rest” regarding “the causes of some effects which seem to be marvels and to show that the effects occur naturally.”

At the end of the fifteenth century and beginning of the sixteenth century, preachers

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4 Of ghostes and spirites, walking by night, edited by J. Dover Wilson and May Yardley (Oxford: Shakespeare Association at the University Press, 1929), 92.


7 Nicole Oresme and The Marvels of Nature: A study of his De causis mirabilium with Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary, trans. by B. Hansen (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies,
and theologians like Johannes Nider, Geiler von Keysersberg, and Johannes Trithemius would also call attention to those “demons, which wander the earth, completely disturb people where they live with noises by throwing and breaking things.” 8 Decades later, a young Martin Luther would also preach on the subject.9

In nearly all such accounts, the type of demon fomenting noisy distractions or befriending the inhabitants of the home is said to possess “less power from God.” Labeled deleterious in their commerce with humanity, these spirits differed markedly in their propensity for surreptitious mischief rather than, say, human possession or sexual relations and explicit pacts with women (and men) designated as witches. This is an important distinction because scholarship on Christian demonology has largely ignored accounts of “lesser demons.” A number of erudite studies have addressed themes of medieval and early modern possession, exorcism, ghosts and witchcraft.10 My

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analysis will converge only obliquely with these, highlighting instead descriptions of lesser
demonic hauntings in urban and rural settings. By exploring the complex relation between minor
demons and human communities, this study centers on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century responses
to the Devil’s presence in Christian homes. I will argue that orthodox theologians attempted to
explain household spirits as one facet of demonic evil by incorporating reported phenomena within
inherited patristic and scholastic teachings about the Devil. In so doing, extant literature on minor
demons also reveals that learned authors by no means spoke with one voice; rather, perspectives
on the nature and power of the Devil were multifaceted, often contradictory, and changed over
time.

**Historiography**

Study of demons and demonology has proven attractive subject matter. For medieval
portrayals of the Devil and fallen angels, Jeffrey Burton Russell, Norman Cohn, Robert
Muchembled and Alain Boureau have contributed seminal scholarly narratives. In different forms,
these authors address the question of how the Latin Middle Ages adapted delineations of the Devil
from antiquity. With broad strokes, Russell, Cohn and Muchembled argue that the twelfth through
fourteenth centuries produced forms of a “radical” demonology.11 Russell and Muchembled

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11 Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*
(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*
(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); Jeffrey Burton Russel, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*
demonology, see the excellent historiography in Fabián Alejandro Campagne, “Demonology at a
Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1996)
shares a very similar perspective.
examine scholastic systems of thought that engendered a unique break with past traditions. Cohn (and to some extent Russell) follows a line of argument based on the oppression of distinct non-Christian “others” (e.g., Cathars, Jews), akin to the famous anti-heresy theory espoused by R. I. Moore. From this perspective, invisible but palpable devilry existed at every level of medieval culture and reveals an “atmosphere of morbid fascination…[that] fills the medieval descriptions.” Boureau’s research represents something of an outlier, in that he views high medieval expatiations of Satan and demons as distinct from fifteenth-century and early modern demonologies. Where Thomist metaphysics (of the thirteenth century) produced long-lasting methods of natural-philosophical exegesis that could be applied to angels and fallen angels, Boureau locates the rise of “demonology” as a specific form of natural science in later texts like the *Malleus maleficarum*.

Other scholars, including Richard Kieckhefer, Nancy Caciola and Carl Watkins, have proffered sophisticated accounts of more ambiguous spiritual beings. In his exposition of a fifteenth-century necromancer's instructional book, for example, Kieckhefer admits that some conjured spirits were of unfallen and indeterminate provenance. According to Kieckhefer, the demons of the Munich handbook (and learned magical texts more generally) fit awkwardly with

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orthodox theological expectations. In her *Discerning Spirits*, Caciola includes an important chapter on the distinctions between erudite and “popular” conceptions of demonic possession.\textsuperscript{16} Where the former generally foregrounded the sinfulness of the possessed person, the latter tended to espouse portrayals of a spontaneously activated landscape or environment filled with elemental spirits near forests, streams, mountains, and so forth. Lacking any explicit mention of sinful behavior, these elemental beings possessed humans much more randomly for entrance into their domains. More recently, Watkins has contended that twelfth- and thirteenth-century depictions of demons were much more varied than has been assumed heretofore. Working almost exclusively with medieval English chronicles, Watkins shows how collected stories and testimonials often stressed that evil demons, as well as imaginative domestic and natural spirits, functioned as morally instructive examples for Christian communities.\textsuperscript{17}

Equally abundant is the copious amount of literature on the rise of witchcraft theories. My dissertation will not deal with witchcraft *per se*, although the second half of my research will work extensively with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century treatises that underscore the theological threats posed by witches and magical practices. I rely on this body of literature because witchcraft theorists engendered detailed accounts of demons and the ways in which fallen angels interacted with Christian communities. Though hardly a guiding motif in these works, several theologians concerned with *maleficium* include passages on the theme of minor demons to show the scope of demonic deceits.


The most influential book to ignite sustained critical inquiry into demonological discourses is Stuart Clark's *Thinking with Demons*. In this landmark examination of early modern demonological epistemologies, Clark covers a vast array of texts on witchcraft that suggest dyadic hierarchies of good/evil, God/human, man/woman, *inter alia* formed the systemic basis for persecuting witches.\(^{18}\) Hans Peter Broedel's study of the *Malleus maleficarum* and similar texts has more recently drawn from Russell, Cohn, Muchembled and Clark to produce a highly nuanced view of late medieval and early modern demonologies. Suggesting that the sixteenth-century science of demonology was a dynamic mixture of both traditional adoption and innovative adaptation of Patristic perspectives, Broedel highlights the multiple medieval views of demons (and witches) that depended on different geographical areas.\(^{19}\)

Three important studies also deserve mention that have taken a broader view of the above issues from the perspectives of popular magic, belief, and ritual. First, Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* constitutes a monumental investigation of religious assumptions, premodern cognition, and social interaction.\(^{20}\) Placing the normative cultural values of preindustrial England in the context of historical practices, Thomas handles the complex nexus of Christianity and magic. While specific to premodern English history, Thomas' analysis is particularly useful in its synthetic treatment of witchcraft, demonology, popular magic and related issues. Second, in *Enchanted Europe* Euan Cameron examines late medieval and early modern “superstition literature.” Akin to


Thomas' work in its analysis of overlapping practices and beliefs, but with emphasis on theological treatises that condemn “vain observances”, Cameron explores the shared and unique criticisms of late medieval theologians, pastors, Protestant Reformers, and early modern Catholics against magic, materialistic ritual practices, and unorthodox Christian cosmologies.\textsuperscript{21} Likewise, Michael Bailey’s \textit{Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies} probes debates over and representations of superstition, albeit primarily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{22} Bailey demonstrates just how mutable a category “superstitious” activities could be in the period and the complex ways in which such activities could be related to developments in theological doctrine, church reform, natural philosophy, and condemnations against witchcraft and illicit magic.

In view of this secondary literature, it is important to note how little has been written on the notion of premodern household spirits in anglophone scholarship. Thomas and Cameron both include important sections on fairies and morally neutral spirits, as does Carl Watkins, although these themes comprise only a small portion of their overall analyses. Richard Firth Green and James Wade have also recently explored rich fairy traditions in the later Middle Ages, while deliberately avoiding the subject of household spirits.\textsuperscript{23} Recent German scholarship, on the other hand, has produced sustained studies of “\textit{Hausgeister}” (house spirits/ghosts/demons), albeit with


sparse focus on premodern sources. My research builds on the works listed above so as to illustrate the nuances of demonological materials stemming from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century northern Europe. It demonstrates that demonological literature from this period perceived demonic influence, not just in terms of possession, witchcraft, and general cosmic evil, but also in the mundane happenings of quotidian life.

**Dissertation Outline**

The first half of my dissertation will survey orthodox demonological principles within the Latin Christian tradition (Chapter 1) and then high medieval accounts concerning morally neutral angels, helpful demons, and non-angelic spirits (Chapter 2). The first two chapters accordingly address questions and responses prompted by Weyer above: What kinds of spiritual creatures manifest in spaces proximate to Christian residence and activity? Do peaceful demons exist or are fallen angels all invariably malevolent? What roles do demons and domestic spirits play in the lives of human beings? How is one to interact with their kind and why do some demons exhibit redeeming characteristics?

Chapter 1 will thus outline theological descriptions of demons from which late medieval and early modern sources would repeatedly draw. Its purpose is to delineate a synoptic model of Christian demonology as presented by traditional auctores. While a vast corpus of inherited

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wisdom on angels and demons exists, discussion will be limited to key Christian figures—those most often cited in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century demonologies. The most influential early Christian thinker to produce a theory of demons was Saint Augustine. In several of his writings the bishop of Hippo expatiates on an image of the Devil as a trickster and catalyst for temptation to sin. Originally created good, demons were once angels that deliberately chose to turn from God. Augustine also equated pagan deities with demonic spirits—a product of infernal deception and the remarkable abilities of demons. In general terms, Augustinian demonology represents evil in moral or spiritual rather than physical terms. Encounter with a demon, from this perspective, is frequently governed by soteriological concerns—meaning demons were represented as obstacles to salvation. Yet, early commentaries on the Devil and demons did not exclusively restrict fallen angels to forms of temptation into sin. The writings of Gregory the Great, for example, express caution before material disasters, such as storms, plagues, and corporeal harm. Following Pseudo-Dionysius, many averred that a hierarchy of angels and demons existed, granting certain spirits more potential for physical injury than others. John of Damascus indicated that the Devil “had been entrusted by God with the custody of the earth,” emphasizing that fallen angels could never repent for their rebellion against the Christian divinity.


26 City of God (1998), XIV, 27.


Patristic and early medieval theories of the demonic qualify that any earthly calamities occurred by means of divine permission. Gregory the Great’s famous exegesis of the Book of Job repeatedly emphasizes this point, “that the will of Satan is always evil, but his power is never unjust, for his will he derives from himself, but his power he derives from God. For what he himself unrighteously desires to do, God does not allow to be done except with justice.”

The Devil, limited by God, was only as powerful and influential as permitted by divine allowance. Moreover, devils were culpable as the primary agents of evil, usually by means of inflaming human passions, as sermon stories and exempla would demonstrate. Thus, early imagery of the Devil and demons depicts such beings as agents of trial and subject to the judgment of God.

Alongside earlier authors, the thirteenth-century Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, features prominently as an authority on demons. Aquinas systematized—with all of creation—the hierarchical placement, abilities and general nature of angels. Described as “intellectual substances”, the Devil and angelic beings were limited to complete material disembodiment, able to perform marvels (or wonders) and their behavior became a sustained quarry of natural philosophical inquiry. As Hans Peter Broedel has remarked, “from this derived a belief in diabolic potency that was correspondingly greater and more threatening than Augustine’s.”

While lacking physical bodies, demons were able to manipulate human perception by means of their enhanced

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32 In a highly condensed form, see Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. by J. Oesterle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), question 16. Aquinas’ writings on angels and demons can be found scattered throughout his *Summa Theologica*, *Summa contra Gentiles*, and other works.

33 *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft* (2003), 44.
speed, intellect, and cunning. These general points of scholastic discussion would later become
demonological principles that most fifteenth- and sixteenth-century thinkers would take for
granted.

Thereafter, Chapter 2 transitions from Thomist theology of the High Middle Ages into
accounts of spirits according to courtly, poetic and exemplary literature. It analyzes a second body
of inheritance that tended to obfuscate the clarity of scholastic demonology. Formal ecclesiastical
teachings urged that encounter with a demon would always involve duplicity. Fallen angels could
assume countless forms and employ their subtle natures to deceive humans. Prescriptive
theological discourse on demons, however, did not cauterize creative descriptions of ambiguous
spirits. Fairies, kobolds and helpful “others” frequented folk tales and popular texts in a fashion
that was both symbiotic with and unconventional for orthodox theology.

One theme I explore in this chapter is that certain fallen angels chose to side neither with
Heaven nor Hell. The idea of neutral angels or harmless demons was unthinkable for scholastic
theologians; yet, high medieval literature and folklore could dwell in expressive ambiguity in ways
impossible for orthodoxy. Imaginative accounts, such as Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival,
Dante's Inferno, and the various forms of St. Brendan's voyage, represent neutral angels that are
encountered and said to inhabit earthly abodes.34 One also finds plentiful instances of morally

34 In Inferno, Dante and Virgil first encounter in Hell those “angels, who were not rebellious, nor were
faithful to God; but were for themselves. Heaven chased them forth to keep its beauty from impair; and the
deep Hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them.” The Divine Comedy, trans.
by Geoffrey L. Bickersteth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), Canto III. In the Navigatio
Sancti Brendani, the monastic voyagers encounter an isle of semi-fallen angels called Walserands that
explain “we are from the great ruin of the ancient enemy…our just and true God…sent us to this earthly
place where we endure no punishment, except that we cannot see the presence of God.” The Voyage of
Saint Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation, ed. and trans. by W. R. J.
Eschenbach describes “those who joined neither side when their great battle began [and] all the neutral
angels…had to come to earth.” Parzival, vol. 1, ed. by Karl Lachmann (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker
Verlag, 1994), 780.
ambivalent spirits in the “entertainment literature” of Gervase of Tilbury and Walter Map. In his book of marvels written for the emperor, Otto IV, Gervase describes spiritual creatures called follets, which are unaffected by exorcism or holy water and throw kitchen utensils at homeowners. Gervase admits how many folk consider them to “be helpful but do no real harm.” In his De nugis curialium, the cleric, Walter Map, also recorded a number of elaborate tales about “prodigious apparitions”, which included the capture of fairy brides that hide and speak under water, a centaur encountered by Saint Anthony and demonic infanticide. Map repeatedly interrupts his narratives in order to wonder at the positive results engendered by spiritual encounters. Finally, Caesarius von Heisterbach's Dialogus miraculorum and Thomas of Cantimpré's Bonum universale de apibus contain a number of exempla relating the behavior, tendencies, and often benevolent commerce between humans and explicitly penitent demons.

The inventive variety of high medieval literature and experiential accounts presented formidable challenges for later pastoral theologians. Any examples of neutral spirits required assimilation into models promoted by the church; ambiguities nevertheless flourished well through and beyond the Latin Middle Ages.

The final two chapters comprise an historical approach to how late medieval and early


37 Ibid., p. 677.


39 For an insightful study of both medieval authors, see Alexander Murray, “Demons as Psychological Abstractions” in Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance, ed. by I. Iribarren and M. Lenz (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), 171-84.
modern writers debated and represented minor haunting spirits. Discourses on and experiences with diverse apparitions were not held in a vacuum; they informed and were informed by sundry continuities and ruptures. While reports of demonic infestation exist in earlier centuries, from 1400 to 1600 western Europe witnessed considerable social and religious changes, especially heightened anxieties over maleficent magic and witchcraft (Chapter 3), as well as the Protestant Reformation (Chapter 4). In the second half of the dissertation, I thus identify the ways in which domestic demons came under intense and differentiated scrutiny in light of these developments. In particular, I investigate the prevalent association of minor, noisy demons with quotidian experience. In these chapters, my dissertation examines the various aspects attributed to household demons and why these wicked spirits garnered increasing attention in the later Middle Ages and early modern period.

Chapter 3 begins with pastoral accounts from Geiler von Keysersberg, Johannes Trithemius and a young Martin Luther. It treats late medieval and early sixteenth-century treatises that deal with household and poltergeist demons. Superficially similar in content to the exempla of Caesarius or the entertainment literature of Gervase, lay and clerical accounts of fallen angels were increasingly associated with magical practices and noxious sorcery, rather than solely marvelous occurrences. Texts, such as Johannes Nider's Formicarius, the Malleus maleficarum and others, engendered an archetypal (albeit variegated) view of maleficent magic. While “magic” was generally understood as deleterious throughout earlier Christian (and pre-Christian) history, the coupling of new elements of “heresy”, putative conspiratorial satanic covenants and Thomist natural philosophy gave this later conception a distinct form. At the same time, not all

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40 Bailey, Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies (2013); Battling Demons (2003).

critiques of magical arts were equated with *maleficium*; one could admonish against witchcraft or the conjuring of spirits while asserting, as later Protestants would, that misfortune and suffering stemmed from God’s providence.

A prominent concern in the treatises I examine is that Christians might unknowingly propitiate demons of the home by means of so-called superstitious beliefs and rituals. At a general level, “superstition” could translate into a host of varied practices. One prevalent concern was that Christians often erroneously sought to appease obscure spirits coinhabiting the household. As experiences with these beings were increasingly reported, the more important it was to account for their provenance from either God or the Devil. Chapter 3 therefore analyzes accounts that underscore the difficulties associated with discerning the implications of minor demonic spirits. The fifteenth-century French theologian, Petrus Mamoris, for instance, flatfootedly tells of a nobleman he knew personally. We are told that familiar spirit called “Dragon” constantly attended the nobleman until “it” was confronted and eventually imprisoned by a stronger, unnamed “*maior diabolus*.” Just over a decade later, Trithemius would recount how a certain spiritual creature

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42 An “implicit pact” refers to the performance of magic that involved occult communication (unintentionally) with demons. By the fifteenth-century, pastoral preachers and theologians sought to persuade laity that seemingly innocuous practices and beliefs were, in fact, a gateway to demonic commerce. An example of this can be seen in Jean Gerson, *De erroribus circa artem magicam*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Palémon Glorieux, vol. 10 (Paris: Declée, 1973), 77-90. For a concise explanation, see Cameron, *Enchanted Europe* (2010), 106-10.


44 “Et maior diabolus minorem alligare in lapide vel anullo vel alio corpore potest uti confessus est quidam vir nobilis qui habebat demonem familiarum nomine Dragon. Adveniente alio eo fortiori alligabat eum in modica cera vel anullo et ponebat illum retro hostium vel in aliquot foramine quo adus[?] alias forcior
named “Hutgin” appeared visibly and invisibly to the community of Hildesheim—helping cooks in the kitchen, wearing “rustic garb”, and hurting those humans that caused the spirit hardship. Alfonso de Spina includes reports (often from personal experience) of minor demons said to plague domestic spaces. Rather unconventional texts, such as *Dives and Pauper* or *The Distaff’s Gospel*, voice beliefs and practices that reflect certain concerns from more learned writers. The sixteenth-century *Zimmern Chronicle* similarly exhibits courtly fascination with hauntings and familiar spirits. Even in the illustrious Reformer Martin Luther’s “*Tischreden*”, one finds numerous accounts of poltergeist activities in which the Devil literally does nothing but make noise. My reading of these stories illuminates the circuitous maze of pastoral, theological and entertainment-

demon de illa domo exiret vel a camera.” *Flagellum maleficorum a magistro petro manoris editum cum alio tractatu de eadem material per magistru[m] he[n]ricu[m] de colonia co[m]pilatu[m]* (Lyon: 1498), 13.

45 *Opera historica*, 2 vols, edited by M. Freher (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1966), Vol. 2, 123-4. “Hutgin” can also be found translated in Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De praestigiis daemonum*, trans. by J. Shea (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991), 74-6. Another version of the tale is found in *Annalium Hirsaugiensium*, 2 vols. (St Gallen, 1690), 1: 395-97. The two versions provide varying degrees of detail as to the spirit’s activities. As this shows textual variation, I will need to do extra research on which versions Weyer and others read. A condensed portion of the tale of Hutgin would also be retold later by the German Jesuit, Petrus Thyraeus in his *Loca infesta: hoc est, De infestis, ob molestantes daemoniorum et defunctorum hominum spiritus, locis, liber unus* (Cologne: Cholinus, 1598), Ch. I, pp. 8-9.


48 The *Zimmern Chronicle* includes a number of tales about “erdenmendle” and “wichtelmendle” which suit the concept of household spirits; see, Christof Graf von Zimmern, *Zimmerische Chronik*, hrsg. von K. A. Barack (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1869), 227-44.

49 Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden*, 6 vols (Weimer: Böhlau Nachfolger, 1912-21), see indices under “Gespenst” and “Poltergeist”.

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literature on superstitious practices, beliefs and stories associated with domestic spirits. These narratives suggest that a vague ranking of demons existed and that some demonic spirits enacted comparatively minimal harm (e.g., make noise, collect misspoken words, incite confusion). My examination will demonstrate how the transition from scholastic demonology (in the university) to pastoral counsel (in public sermons) situates demonic affliction in the context of lived experiences, rather than learned debate. In this literature, the Christian home emerges as a locus of pastoral oversight in order to purge the household of competing systems of religious thought and practice.

Probing sixteenth-century confessional debates on demonic spirits, the fourth and final chapter further situates haunting spirits within the realm of experiential knowledge. This chapter looks primarily at Ludwig Lavater’s seminal treatise called *Das Gespensterbuch* (“The Book of Spirits”). This Reformed Protestant work enjoyed considerable influence in sixteenth-century Western Europe, prompting numerous vernacular and Latin translations. It also provoked rebuke from influential Roman Catholic authors. For the purposes of this dissertation, I rely on Lavater to show that perspectives on spiritual apparitions could evince radically different religious assumptions, depending on one’s confessional identity. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, accounts of ethereal beings often served polemical purposes in demonstrating the validity of Protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs about ghosts and demons.50 Lavater reminds us that stories about spiritual creatures could be employed to condition Christian sensibilities concerning demonic interventions and illusions. Drawing on a vast array of ancient, medieval, and

contemporary sources as evidence, the Swiss minister evinces a perspective of noisy demonic distractions that places readers within demonological narratives themselves, while demonstrating the inefficacy of Roman Catholic rituals against spectral apparitions.

In many ways, this dissertation covers what learned theologians wrote about fallen angels, how they explained haunting phenomena, and what they perceived to be pious and erroneous perspectives concerning demonic spirits. More importantly, I hope to exhibit how the authors examined above proffer competing views of evil and struggled to explain unseen movements, misplaced objects, and general misfortune in the home. In this, Christian demonology often foregrounds the importance of appropriately sensing or feeling spiritual interferences in daily Christian life. This could be expressed in terms of didactic instruction. Ludwig Lavater, for example, admonishes that “God dothe also suffer them [Christians] to be exercised with haunting of spirites, for this cause, that they shold be the more humble and lowely.”51 Beyond didacticism as a form of social disciplining, however, I will also interpret the emotionally laden language of demonic infestations.52 Indeed, accounts of domestic demons carry affective elements of fear, anticipation, and wonder. In many instances, they exhibit expectations of controlled responsiveness, as well as unexpected bodily reactions, when encountering household spirits. When Noël Taillepied warns that spirits tend to “appear in places where in times past there have been horrid deeds, assassinations, riot and rape,” he seems to suggest that certain locations retain a presence or evocative environment replete with emotional and spiritual nuances.53 Quoting

51 Of ghostes and spirites, walking by night (1929), 176.


Augustine via Aquinas, Johann Weyer would caution that the evil of demons “creeps through all avenues of sense: it lends itself to shapes, adapts itself to colors, adheres to sounds, incorporates itself into odors, and infuses tastes.”

The Devil exemplified the manipulator *par excellence* of the human sensorium. In what follows, the analysis will exhibit the implications of this influence on humankind and how demonological authors described encounters with demons in domestic settings.

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CHAPTER 1: Orthodox Demonology and the Metaphysics of Demonic Affliction

In Book 22 of his *City of God*, Augustine of Hippo recounts how an ex-tribune named Hesperius owned an estate (*fundus*) plagued by demonic spirits. According to the bishop, a group of demons attacked the servants and animals belonging to this area of land called Zubedi (in Fussala North Africa). No details are given on what form of specific suffering the people and wildlife endured, although we are told that the spiritual beings did not directly harm the man Hesperius, for he kept a relic of “sacred earth taken from Jerusalem where Christ was buried and rose again on the third day” to protect against their assaults. His own personal wellbeing notwithstanding, Hesperius pleaded with Augustine for a Christian presbyter to come and purge the residence of the malign presence. Shortly thereafter, a priest arrived and “offered there the sacrifice of Christ, praying with all his might that the molestation should cease. God straightway took pity, and the trouble came to an end.” Once the infestation was successfully removed, the former Roman officer no longer wished to keep the “sacred earth” (*terra sancta*) for himself. With Augustine’s consent, he buried it at a site for Christians to utilize as a place of worship. The anecdote concludes that a paralytic rustic promptly visited the newly blessed location and was miraculously healed in this “sacred place” (*locus sanctus*).

In the context of Augustine’s fifth-century life and writings, the recorded experience was exemplary of the spiritual power manifest in God’s mercy and victorious intervention. Hesperius’ status as a converted Roman legionary, for example, informs at least part of the story’s triumphalism. Presumably now a Christian, the actions of Hesperius demonstrated the inspired

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efficacy of Christian practices by means of hallowed ground and priestly intercession. Similarly, the narrative substantiated the miraculous nature of hallowed soil taken from Christ’s tomb for effectively establishing a Christian religious shrine. Most importantly, however, it was the proliferation of such accounts which sustained their significance. As Augustine later remarks in the same book: “these modern miracles are not so widely known” although “at Hippo we have started the practice of reading to people the accounts of those who receive such blessings.”

According to Brouria Britton-Ashkelony, “Augustine’s description of healing miracles and other forms of personal salvation in book 22 of the *City of God* can therefore be seen as a fundamental weapon used to rebut the pagan claim that Christians have no miracles.” The tale—like many others included in the final book of the *City of God*—required telling and retelling because it attested to the authority and validity of the Christian religion.

Interestingly, sixteenth-century demonologists retold the miraculous story albeit with differentiated emphases. Rather than illustrative of God’s blessings and the institution of a *locus sanctus*, the travails of Hesperius affirmed the presence of evil spiritual forces tormenting humanity for over a millennium. For instance, the Jesuit theologian Petrus Thyraeus (1546-1601) began his influential work on demonic and spectral afflictions, entitled *Loca infesta* (1598), with reference to the African farm called Zubedi. As Thyraeus repeatedly describes the incident, the haunted estate of Hesperius revealed a physical territory harrowed by demonic spirits in and of

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itself (\textit{infesta per se}), rather than according to human activity (\textit{infesta propter homines}). Instead of the traditional theological position that human sinfulness provoked demonic invasion, the Jesuit theologian argued that some fallen angels attached themselves to human habitations of their own volition. For Thyraeus, the environment of Zubedi illustrated a landscape spontaneously and intimately animated by unclean spirits.

Contemporaries of Thyraeus noted other facets of Augustine’s report. The French Capuchin Noël Taillepied (1540-1589) cited Hesperius’ encounter (twice) and clarified that “spirits appear in order to frighten men, especially the evil ones.” In comparison with the “good angels” who appeared to humans for “consolation,” Taillepied didactically insisted that demons emerged in material places “in order to plunge men into despair.” Closer to Augustine’s intentions, the Spanish Jesuit Martin Delrio (1551-1608) averred that the story confirmed the sacral potency of the Christian religion. However, Delrio framed this potency—alongside the proper ecclesiastical use of baptism, confession, prayer, a guardian angel, lustral water, \textit{inter alia}—in terms of a demonstrable Roman Catholic means for alleviating demonic vexation and

\textit{Loca infesta: hoc est, De infestis, ob molestantes daemoniorum et defunctorum hominum spiritus, locis, liber unus} (Cologne: Cholinus, 1598), ch 1, p.12.


\textit{Ibid.}, 305. Like Delrio, Taillepied also related Hesperius’ experience to the efficacy of celebrating the holy Mass.
maleficium. With quasi-Protestant leanings, Johann Weyer (1515-1588) stressed that Hesperius had benefited from communal prayer as a “goodly shield to repel all the adversary’s flaming missiles.” Yet another position can be seen in the writing of the Swiss Reformed theologian Ludwig Lavater (1527-1586). In contrast to the establishment of a sacred place at the story’s end, Lavater wagered that Hesperius inadvertently introduced pernicious superstition (aberglaub) into the Christian history. Lavater lauded Hesperius’ prayer to God, but likened so-called remedies against wicked spirits to snow falling in the Swiss mountains (im hochgebirg). On this view, the actions of Hesperius precariously snowballed into pagan custom, thereby implying the continued influence of demons in human affairs.

As these examples indicate, sixteenth-century theologians invested the early account (among numerous others) with variegated meaning. They drew from Augustine’s report in order to corroborate and address diverse concerns of demonic infestation occurring in their own historical context. That theologians would cite Augustine’s vignette a millennium later is unsurprising. As one of the church fathers, Augustine was remembered and referenced in nearly every aspect Western European theology. To turn to his authority for adducing the nature, expected behavior, and ultimate fate of the Devil and his fallen angels was usual among those who wrote

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63 Ludwig Lavater, Von Gespäntern, unghüren, faeln, und anderen wunderbaren dingen, so merteils wenn die menschen sterben soellend, oder wenn sunst grosse sachennd enderungen vorhanden sind, beschaaehend, kurzer und einfaltiger bericht (Zurich, 1569), part 3, bk 10, p. 117: “Uß[?] welchem wol abzunehmen ist wie der aberglaub zytlich angefangen unnd wie gern ß[?]schicht ye lenger ye grosser worden ist als so man ein schneeballen wyter meltzet oder ein loeuiwin im hochgebirg angadt und alles [?] und breit mit schnee überdeckt.”
about demons. In addition to Augustine’s thought and example, late premodern thinkers would gather precepts from myriad authors ranging from antiquity to the later Middle Ages—a point addressed in detail below. Yet, as we have seen, this did not mean that all premodern thinkers shared the same emphases as their forebears. Theological writers and preachers of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries reported striking concerns over how and why demonic hauntings occurred, adopting ancient examples to address contemporary systems of religious thought and practice. Where earlier Christian sources elicit conceptually similar anxieties, late medieval and early modern authors wrote about and theorized demonic encounters in far more obsessive terms than their predecessors.  

In order to better comprehend historical accounts of demonic encounter, the current chapter considers what orthodox theologians understood demons to be and how fallen angels were said to afflict humanity by means of their immaterial presence. To this end, the chapter is divided into three related sections. The first two survey theological descriptions of demons from which figures like Thyraeus, Delrio, Taillepied, Weyer, and Lavater would repeatedly draw. The first section, in particular, examines the some of the most influential writings on demons from Saint Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville, among others. The second section then turns to scholastic medieval perspectives of the demonic and the ways in which Thomist metaphysics subtly alters learned discourses on fallen angels. Thus, one of the chapter’s primary purposes is to delineate a synoptic model of orthodox Christian demonology as presented by traditional auctores (e.g., Augustine, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and others). Complementing this broad theological synopsis, the third and last section investigates the issue of demonic encounter through

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the modern analytic rubric of “affective space.” Here, I briefly outline how contemporary scholarship defines “affective space” and apply the category to premodern exemplary narratives involving demonic spirits. It is in this last part that we move to descriptive analyses of how malevolent spiritual forces were reported to invade Christian lives and the ways in which demons were diagnosed in widespread accounts of demonic infestation.

**Augustinian Demonology in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages**

Modern scholarship tends to divide the history of Western Christian demonology into two chronological and interpretive camps. The first exhibits the predominant influence of Augustine’s thought on demons in the fourth and fifth centuries up until around the twelfth century. The second of these groupings generally moves to the thirteenth-century scholastic writings of Thomas Aquinas, which carry forward into the seventeenth century.65 To be sure, the jump from Augustine to Aquinas is monumental. My intent is not to reduce conceptions of “the demonic” to ahistorical maxims or to obscure historical nuance. Rather, the first two sections of this chapter aim to provide workable ideal types, as it were, of Christian demonology that diversely informed later medieval and early modern worldviews. In this sense, the “chronological” framework given below is only superficially helpful, for later demonologists did not divide theological approaches to the Devil into first- and second-millennium schools of thought. Instead, they argued from varied

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perspectives informed by the very continuities and discontinuities modern historians seek to understand and explain. This approach, therefore, imposes discursive boundaries that were likely not apparent to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century thinkers themselves. Nevertheless, historians use the distinction (between Augustinian and Thomist demonologies) in order to highlight important differences that emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and which later authors diversely accepted or sought to repudiate. The advantage of such an approach lies in considering how understandings of the Devil and demons changed in subtle measure over time and in different contexts.

In this first section, I will elucidate notions of Christian demons in the first millennium. It must be stressed at the start, however, that no single author was considered most authoritative on the subject. This was not only true in antiquity but in the Latin Middle Ages and early modern period as well: authors selected examples that would serve their own pastoral and theological agendas. Where, say, one fifteenth-century preacher or theologian might rehearse particular passages from Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville, for example, another could refer to other patristic, contemporary, or even pagan sources according to preference. For instance, Johann Weyer qualified his enormous sixteenth-century tome concerning demonic illusions with introductory remarks on Plato, Proclus, and Plotinus, among others. In Weyer’s

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67 Michael Bailey wryly notes that “late medieval writers addressing superstition were, in fact, so circumscribed in their acknowledged influences that to restrict ourselves exclusively to the sources they regularly cited would have us jumping from Augustine in the fifth century to Isidore of Seville in the seventh to William of Auvergne and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth.” See, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 36.
estimation, these prominent thinkers wrote copiously about demons, although their depictions were largely “imaginary.” He would nevertheless include their testimonies but explicitly favored biblical and Augustinian interpretations as a conventional starting point of Christian demonology. Weyer was neither the first nor the last to do so. To a considerable degree, premodern demonologists followed in established traditions of theological analysis, often leveraging accepted Christian theology against pagan accounts.

Furthermore, the corpus of patristic and early medieval sources on demons is enormous, and some texts proffer more details than others. In most cases, the Devil was discussed as a universal problem relating broadly to the existence of evil in a world governed by an omnipotent and just God. Hence, malevolent spirits feature in the works examined below in order to address this specific issue. Above all else, the Christian bible was regarded as a reliable, if at times opaque, channel through which perspectives and interpretations were voiced—commonly via trained theologians and ecclesiastics of the church. Biblical episodes, like the Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28), the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39), the suffering of Job, and several others, provided premodern demonologists with a stock of authoritative narratives from which to draw. To this end, later Christian thinkers lauded the exegesis of biblical and contemporary sources by figures like Augustine, Gregory, Isidore, and others. This is not to say they did not also rely on experiential or reported accounts for proof of the existence of demons. They most certainly did, as seen in the example of Hesperius. However, such accounts had to be explicated through biblical precedents and the teachings of received tradition. With these qualifications in mind, we now turn to early orthodox sources that describe the characteristics of the devil and demons.

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The church fathers provided late medieval and early modern demonologists with foundational perspectives on demonic spirits. Among patristic sources, Saint Augustine is a towering authority, and his *City of God* was a typical point of entry. In this seminal work, Augustine introduced demons by referencing the purported existence of both good and evil gods. These spiritual entities, he states, are often referred to as “*daemones.*”69 Indeed, depending on author and audience, the designation “demon” carried a number of valences in antiquity. The broad Greco-Roman understanding of a *daimon* or *daimonion,* for instance, could be conflated with the term *theos,* such that pagan spirits and gods were synonymously representative of divine or semi-divine powers.70 Homer, to take but one example, had employed the appellations as equivalences. Augustine, however, aligned the wicked *daemones* of Christian scripture with all extra-Christian gods and spirits (good or evil). The bishop argues that the so-called deities of the Romans were “not real gods…but abominable evil spirits, eager to deceive mankind.”71

For Augustine, as with later demonologists, demons indulgently reveled in the obscene shows and fantasies of pagan poets and lore, eager to be regarded as gods. How they achieved the illusion of godliness related to their spiritual abilities; namely, they simulated omnipotence and omniscience:

> The demons do not behold the eternal causes of temporal events, the cardinal causes, so to speak, in the Wisdom of God, but they have much more knowledge of the future than men can have, by their greater acquaintance with certain signs which are hidden from us...to conjecture temporal matters from temporal evidence, mutable things from mutable evidence, and then to interfere in events in a temporal and mutable fashion by the exercise of will and power; this is, in a restricted sense, permitted to the demons.72

72 *Ibid.,* bk. 9, ch. 22, p. 368.
Dressed in the ruse of divine power, Augustine averred, demons were always and forever subject to the temporal order and unchanging laws of the Christian God, no matter how much they might claim to the contrary. On this view, the remarkable dexterity, primeval knowledge, and general adaptability of evil spirits afforded fallen angels extraordinary expertise in matters relating to the vagaries of human life but never the city of God.

In affirming this point, the Bishop of Hippo polemically reiterated a discussion of intermediate divinities (demons) tendered by Apuleius of Madaura (c. 123-170) in his Latin philosophical writing entitled *On the God of Socrates*. Bewailing the confusing nature of the treatise, Augustine suggests, first, that the author would have benefited from renaming the treatise *On the Demon of Socrates*. Thereafter, Augustine employs the core descriptive language of Apuleius, noting that despite his reverence for Socrates and the Greek philosopher’s *daimon*, Apuleius never has anything redeeming to say about such spirits. In the words of Augustine, Apuleius perceived demons as “situated between gods and men, belonging to the ‘animal’ species, with a rational mind, a soul subject to passions, and a body made of air, a life-span of eternity.”

Though critical of Apuleius’ conclusions, Augustine notably abides these descriptive characteristics, accepting that demons are located above earth but below the heavens; they are endowed with aerial bodies, akin to the element they inhabit; and where the Romans maintain that humans are susceptible to unstable passions and the pagan gods immortal, balance is found in demons sharing both parts. Broadly speaking, the *City of God* stresses that the “middle situation” of all fallen angels governs their defining attributes and location.

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To the mind of Apuleius, these descriptions exhibited sublime and lofty characteristics worthy of praise for those inspired by their spiritual companions (as in the example of Socrates). Augustine, however, counters that people should never give reverence to demons for their elevated position (above the earth), nor for their superior bodies. While ancient in age, adept in advanced knowledge of nature, and inhumanly strong, demons were always inferior to humans for their inability to cultivate moral goodness. Most importantly, Augustine remarks that there is no biblical warrant or mention of so-called good demons. Hence, any examples of purportedly helpful demons were considered a remnant of pagan belief systems and ought to be absolutely repudiated.

Within orthodox Christian theology, moral commerce with demons was thus an impossibility and most often occurred as the feigned result of reprehensible magical arts. While humans and demons were said to share in their capacity as rational beings, the former used the passions for training in pious virtues, whereas the latter were defined by contagious emotional

75 The City of God (1998) bk. 8, ch. 15, p. 320: “divine providence has bestowed certain physical advantages on beings which are unquestionably our inferiors, the purpose of this is to encourage us to be more careful to cultivate the faculties in which we surpass the beasts than to develop the body, and to teach us to take no account of the physical superiority which, as we realize, the demons enjoy, in comparison with moral goodness, which gives us pre-eminence over the demons.”

76 Ibid., bk. 9, ch. 19, p. 365: “we read of good and bad angels, but never of good demons.”

77 In The Literal Meaning of Genesis, trans. by J. H. Taylor, S.J., (New York: Newman Press, 1982), bk. 2, ch. 17, p. 72, Augustine would explicitly note that “we must admit that when astrologers speak the truth, they are speaking by a mysterious instinct that moves a man’s mind without his knowing it. When this happens for the purpose of deceiving men, it is the work of evil spirits.” Thereafter, Augustine clarifies that this is possible because “to these spirits some knowledge of the truth about the temporal order has been granted, partly by reason of their keen and subtle senses, since they possess bodies of a much more subtle nature than ours, partly because of their shrewdness due to the experience they have had over the long ages they have lived, partly because the good angels reveal to them what they themselves have learnt from Almighty God, at the command of His hidden justice. But sometimes these wicked spirits also feign the power of divination and foretell what they themselves intend to do.” For these reasons, Augustine admonishes Christians to avoid any such men who dabble in magic.
disruptions. Forever and constantly disturbed by anger, fear, and hatred, Augustine comments that
demons definitively lack “a centre of resistance against turbulent and degraded passions.”\footnote{The City of God (1998) bk. 9, ch. 3, p. 345.} Impassioned and utterly unstable, the “degraded passions” of demons were consistently associated
with their status as divine intermediaries. Where the Christian God (in Christ) embodied love,
charity and humility, demons no longer shared in divine affects. Once blessed angels, early
Christian (and later) theologians reasoned that demons fell from grace—at some (speculative)
point after creation—through the sin of pride (superbia). This first choice determined their
everlasting displacement from God’s presence.\footnote{Ibid., (1998) bk. 11, ch. 13, p. 445.} For these reasons, Augustine and later
demonologists admonished that to court a demon in order to achieve a greater degree of piety,
righteousness, or any favor from God was tantamount to demonic enslavement. From this
perspective, demons were never helpful mediators seeking to aid humanity; to the contrary, they
consistently rejoiced in the hardship, demise, and suffering of humanity, obstructing humanity
from (rather than binding them to) the glory of God.\footnote{Ibid., (1998) bk. 9, ch. 18, p. 365.}

It is often said that Augustinian demonology is principally concerned with an image of the
Devil as a master illusionist. The most blatant example of the Devil’s power of illusion was
observed in how wicked spirits cunningly tricked humans into believing demons were proper
deities. Isidore of Seville echoes such concerns two centuries after Augustine, equating pagan
demon-worship with idolatry. Citing a host of conventional examples (e.g., the specific names of
Greek, Roman, and Egyptian deities), Isidore also demonizes a number of “fabulous fictions of
the pagans.” These included fauns, nymphs, incubi, inter alia, which he claimed “the common

\footnote{The City of God (1998) bk. 9, ch. 3, p. 345.}
\footnote{Ibid., (1998) bk. 11, ch. 13, p. 445.}
\footnote{Ibid., (1998) bk. 9, ch. 18, p. 365.}
people” impiously worshipped and feared. For similar reasons, Isidore’s younger contemporary, Pope Gregory the Great (540-604), states that the Devil exercises a “dominion of wickedness” over humans. Small wonder that the language of demonic dominance often conveyed a failure to demonstrate pious Christian practices and beliefs. These ethical considerations would have long-lasting and often political applications. In the eleventh-century, Pope Gregory VII famously defended his unprecedented condemnation of King Henry IV by stating:

over all kings and princes of the earth who do not live in a religious way and who in their deeds do not fear God as they should, demons (it is grievous to say) have dominion, and they confound them by wretched slavery.

After describing the distinctions between pious Christians and evil princes, the pope concluded: “These are the body of Christ the true king, but those are that of the devil.” For most, if not all premodern Christians, demons represented a sort of “virus with which the whole sinful world was infected.”

In addition to Augustine, Isidore, and Gregory, late medieval and early modern demonologists also cited other early authors on the moral attributes and station of angels and demons. Writing in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, for example, furnished later authors with speculative details on angelic hierarchies. Having


82 Pope Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. J. H. Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1844-50), bk. 4, sect. 71, p. 238: “For it is written, *Every one that sinneth is the servant of sin*. For whosoever yields himself up to bad desire, submits the neck of his mind, till now free, to the dominion of wickedness.”


systematized angels into three hierarchies containing three orders (first: seraphim, cherubim, thrones; second: dominions, virtues, powers; third: principalities, archangels, angels), later figures like Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure drew heavily from these foundations in modeling the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the church. Lombard, in particular, noted that degrees of rule existed among benevolent angels, humankind, and demons alike: “among good angels some preside over others, and thus among the wicked ones, some have been given preference over others, and some are subject to others. For as long as the world endures, angels preside over angels, and humans preside over humans, and demons preside over demons.” For the most part, however, premodern demonologists rarely delineated a systematized organization of demons. More often, they considered where demonic spirits typically dwelled. Orthodox Christianity tended to place demons in hell or the atmosphere above earth, where they enticed humans into wicked action. The Desert Fathers located devils in their immediate and isolated environs. John Cassian, for example, qualified that certain demons called Plani “have taken possession of certain places or roads [where] they delight themselves not indeed with tormenting the passers by whom they can deceive, but contenting themselves merely with laughing at them and mocking them try to tire them out rather than injure them.” Later, in the eighth century, John of Damascus reasoned the Devil was of a terrestrial angelic order and then equated the heavenly fall of certain angels with the finality of

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human passing: “for, just as there is no repentance for men after death, so there is none for the
angels after their fall.”

Such perspectives stress that demonic affliction existed as a form of “soul-building”
theodicy, wherein demonic evil served to cultivate human wisdom through experience. Having
committed their first sin before humanity’s creation, demons were frequently used as an
explanatory device for testing Christians and the suffering they endured. Even before Augustine,
orthodox writers emphasized the moral wickedness of demons over any pervasive physical
destruction they might wreak. The archetypal example of the Devil as tempter is commonly
referenced from the Life of Antony, recorded by Athanasius in the fourth century. While in pious
contemplation in the desert, demons repeatedly attack Anthony. Isolated in a remote desert cave,
the demons besiege the hermit again and again, making “such a racket that the whole place seemed
to be shaken apart. The demons acted as though they had torn down the four walls of the little
room and seemed to be entering through them, having taken on the fantastical appearance of wild
beasts and reptiles.” His physical suffering notwithstanding, Antony remains steadfast in prayer
and ascetic contemplation, ultimately spurning the demonic assault from within. Antony’s travails
are invoked in later treatises to illustrate the wicked temptations endured by pious Christians in
the ancient world.

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90 Jeffrey Burton Russell, The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History (Ithaca:

91 Athanasius, Life of St. Antony, trans. Tim Vivian et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2003),
81.

92 For an excellent study of early monastic demonic battles, see David Brakke, Demons and the Making of
At the same time, the Devil was also culpable for tangible harm in the material world. Fomenting tempests, waves of pestilence, minor and extreme forms of human injury, demons assumed the capacity to achieve more than disruptive lies. In the late sixth century, Gregory the Great recapitulated Augustinian teachings on demons while also espousing prominent ascetic concerns reminiscent of the Desert Fathers. The demonic afflictions recounted by Gregory portray the Devil as an ancient enemy intimately intertwined in material human affairs. In one famous example from the Dialogues of Gregory that was quoted by later theologians, a nun found and ate a piece of lettuce without the requisite blessing, and “immediately the Devil threw her to the ground in a fit of pain.” Thereafter, the convent’s abbot entered to aid the religious woman with prayer. At this point, however, the spirit complained: “‘I haven’t done anything! I was sitting here on the lettuce when she came and ate me!’.” In another account, Gregory rehearses how an unclean spirit, masquerading as a stranger, bemoaned the lack of a night’s shelter within the city. A young boy heard the spirit’s pleading voice and invited the demon into his house. In turn, “the evil spirit suddenly took hold of the little boy and cast him into the hearth where the flames quickly caused his death.” In both examples, Gregory teaches that the Devil’s wickedness lay potentially everywhere in the world and often in seemingly benign or asinine forms. Despite innocuous appearances, he admonished that “an act which results from an evil intention becomes bad in itself, though outwardly it may still appear good.”


94 Ibid., 43.

95 Ibid., 44.
For each of the authors listed above, the physical irruption of malevolent spiritual beings into the human world always occurred within the limits set by divine providence. In the examples proffered by Gregory especially, the pontiff admonishes his audience that the servants of God must constantly be “aware of the hidden designs of Providence.”96 The lessons of Augustine and Isidore also repeatedly affirm that demonic vexation was never autonomous from God’s will. To the contrary, the omnipotence of God and unity of divine dispensation would always maintain this universal truth. For this reason, diabolical influence held two main functions in Augustinian demonology. First, demons acted to uncover the sinful deeds of wicked humans, while demonstrating the pious resolve of holy Christians.97 Second, wicked spirits emboldened those who might encounter the Devil’s snares. First-millennium demons, therefore, represented a form of divine justice with the Devil himself was an unlikely minister of God. On this perspective, early Christians never need to completely fear the Devil, because he always “flees in terror before the virtues of holy souls.”98 Rather than an unrestrained force of evil operating within a precarious world, Augustinian demonology perceived the Devil as serving God’s loving purpose. In effect, fallen angels were unwittingly defeated the moment they rebelled against the Christian divinity, existing as providential instruments that didactically revealed sin and inspired the pious.

96 Ibid., 82.
97 Ibid., 136: “the ancient Enemy invariably drags evil men to their shame through the very good deeds that make men shine with glory.”
98 Ibid., 152.
**Scholastic Demonology of the High Middle Ages**

In its original setting, the *City of God* was written within the larger framework of validating an authoritative Christian religion. After relinquishing Manicheism and a brief career teaching rhetoric, Augustine famously converted to orthodox Christianity as witnessed in his text *The Confessions*. That Augustine once entertained Manichean teachings informs his rejection of “evil” as the antithesis of “good.” Rather than a cosmic struggle between forces of good and evil, light and dark, material and immaterial, Augustine presents an understanding of evil as the deprivation or lack of good. In general terms, evil is considered defective from rather than ontologically opposite to God. With episcopal experience in north Africa, Augustine set out in *The City of God* to confront rival philosophical and religious systems of thought (including competing Christian ones) in an empire on the brink of collapse.\(^9^9\)

In the context of sixteenth-century western Europe, Augustine’s account of Hesperius and the subject of demons carry considerably different cultural weight. True, demons are still the defective “wicked spirits” of scripture, just as the language of “pagan” rites and beliefs is also present. However, as Michael Bailey has argued, other cultural reasons inspire the use of these designations in later texts. Bailey notes that late medieval demonologists, in particular, relied heavily on the great names of the past (i.e., Augustine, Gregory, Isidore, and others) in order to create “a self-perpetuating rhetoric,” a “literary tradition” that was structured and restructured with great subtlety in later periods.\(^1^0^0\) Jan Machielsen has recently shown that this was true of early

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\(^1^0^0\) Bailey, “A Late-Medieval Crisis of Superstition?,” *Speculum* 84 (2009): 638-9.
modern authors as well. Indeed, we find interesting rhetorical strategies for debating—often demonizing and exorcizing—the sixteenth-century religious landscape of premodern Europe.

As seen from the examples of Noël Taillepied, Martin Delrio, and Ludwig Lavater in the introduction above, arguments in favor of rituals for dispelling wicked spirits could reveal confessional and inter-confessional points of reference orbiting Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies. To suggest, as Taillepied and Delrio do, that the Tridentine Church possessed efficacious remedies against demonic infestation functioned (at least in part) as evidence of Catholicism’s historical and contemporary effectiveness. The rhetorical use of Hesperius’ liberation from demonic torment can thus be seen as a polemical rejection of Protestant critiques against the Catholic sacraments and sacramentals. On the other hand, Ludwig Lavater denied that the story of Hesperius involved priestly intercession. Instead, he cited Augustine’s vignette, along with several other accounts, in order to carefully demonstrate how the Devil had since then become “seated deeper in the hearts of humanity on account of superstitions.” This is a marked Protestant perspective on spiritual beings in particular, and an aspect of premodern cosmology in general. Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation will provide detailed examination of late medieval and early modern developments which were formative for these and other discourses on demons.

More to the point, if we view these later references to Augustine and Hesperius as mere rhetorical strategies, we risk reducing the import of the narrative’s diverse usages. On a more

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103 Lavater, Von Gespaenstern (1569), part 3, bk. 10, p. 121: “so sitzt er [der teufel] doch dester tieffer durch aberglauben in die hertzen der menschen.”
nuanced view, we may suggest that the significance of Zubedi was invested with continuous and
discontinuous forms of religious significance in different periods and places. A key component in
this exchange are the very demons premodern thinkers described at length in subsequent centuries.
Especially striking is how later demonologists tend to foreground a far more autonomous role for
diabolical potency and presence than their forbears. In the thousand years between the writing of
*City of God* and the texts produced by sixteenth-century demonologists, specialists produced
countless, often contradictory, expositions of diabolical activity in the material world. An historical
perspective on infernal spirits thus reveals how definitions of the demonic can be understood in
different contexts. Here, we turn to the adoption and adaptation of so-called Augustinian
demonology within prominent threads of scholastic theological analyses.

By the twelfth century, innovations within the Christian imaginary manifested alongside
new interpretive methods, practices, and assumptions. These were reflected in broader changes
within western intellectual culture. M.-D. Chenu has eloquently described how,

> the realization which laid hold upon these men of the twelfth century when they thought of
themselves as confronting an external, present, intelligible, and active reality…[was] that
they were themselves caught up within the framework of nature, were themselves also bits
of the cosmos they were ready to master.104

As “nature” became a legitimate instrument for explaining reality, medieval theories of causation
intersected with novel conceptions of reason, law, and theology. Aristotelian philosophy and
Arabic learning were integrated with Christian doctrine, while human intellection and the sensible
world gained renewed primacy in the nascent universities of Latin Europe.

Learned interest in reason’s synthetic power, in particular, had significant impact on
descriptions of the Devil and fallen angels. This is not to say that medieval demons were utterly

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divorced from earlier espousals. With broad strokes, Latin Europe inherited the early church’s readings of angels and demons and maintained remarkable points of continuity. Akin to patristic and early medieval sources, malevolent spirits remained the tempters and tricksters of celestial provenance, who through their audacious pride were irrevocably fallen for all time. From the atmosphere and within monasteries, demons regularly tormented impious and ascetic Christians alike. In many cases, demonic interference was attributed to divine providence, as it had been with Augustine and Gregory, although the influence of the Devil could also be attributed to hatred of God and humanity. Any suspicious or potentially “superstitious” beliefs and practices might be labelled diabolical; the same general designation suited claims against heretical sects for different reasons.105

Theologically, we may recall that the Augustinian demon was a created and intellectually corrupted being with somewhat ambiguous ethereality—“a body made of air.”106 Moreover, this fallen angel was ethically inferior to humanity. As scripture was silent on the precise nature of demons, Augustine remained reluctant to speculate too far into demonic being. For the Bishop of Hippo, “nature” held explanatory value—“God works in whatever is natural and he is not apart from the wonders of nature”—but this valuation always paled in comparison to the revealed truths of God from Christian scripture.107 Without abandoning Augustinian precepts, scholastic authors developed a synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian faith. Led by the examples of


106 City of God (1998), bk. 9, ch. 12, p. 356.

figures like Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Gratian, and others, scholastic authors increasingly examined and wrote about sensory experiences and natural phenomena (including demons). Where Augustine stressed certain fallibilities in human reason, many twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians asserted that the truths of faith and reason were not contradictory. Relative to the Book of Scripture, the Book of Nature was used in later centuries to helpfully clarify (not prove) Christian articles of faith.

As objects of natural philosophical inquiry, high and late medieval devils emerged as more pronounced, autonomous beings in scholastic writings. The most influential scholastic theologian to spearhead second-millennium demonology was the Dominican, Thomas Aquinas. Of course, other notable scholars, such as William of Auvergne, Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventure, also gave impetus to an orthodox demonic tradition. Moreover, Aquinas was by no means immediately accepted as a theological authority; it would take more than a century after his passing for his thought to gain predominance. Yet Thomist theology, especially the systematic study of spiritual creatures, carried forward into the late Middle Ages and early modern period in an unrivaled manner. When Petrus Thyraeus, for example, remarks at the close of the sixteenth century that...
century that the “Order [of Spirits] follows nature, and Spirits always retain this same nature,” he invokes the theological framework exemplified in the writings of Aquinas, which would become a staple of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century demonology.

Thomas’ thought on fallen angels is spread throughout specific sections in his Summa Theologiae and Summa contra Gentiles. In a highly condensed version, the quodlibetal discussion of demons in his De malo features quintessential elements of Thomist demonology and will serve as a heuristic model for the following examination. De malo utilizes the format of stating a topic (e.g., evil), discussing authoritative assumptions on said theme (articulus), enumerating common or generally accepted counter-arguments (sed contra), and proffering the author’s own dialogic resolution (responsio). The treatise is organized around sixteen questions, each containing numerous metaphysical and theological articles building upon one another. These questions approach the interconnected themes of evil, sin, human choice, and in the final question, demons. In the sixteenth quaestio, Aquinas proffers twelve articles that consider the nature of demons and the devil, their potentialities, and their relation to humankind within creation. Before looking at Aquinas’ naturalization of demons, two discursive assumptions in Thomist writings warrant attention.

First, within the framework of Aristotelian metaphysics, Aquinas adheres to a distinction between potency and act: “power [potency/potential] and act divide being and every kind of being.” In scholastic natural philosophy, potency communicates the capacity of an object or

111 Loca infesta (1598), ch. 6, p. 24: “Naturam sequitur Ordo: naturam eandem semper retinent Spiritus.”

112 On these contexts, see Cameron, Enchanted Europe (2010), 92.


114 Summa Theologiae, pt. 1, qu. 77, art. 1.
being to become or do something, whereas an act constitutes the natural state of an object’s potential for becoming or doing something. Thus, for example, water has the potency or power to become hot or cold, a rock has the potency to fall, and humans have the seminal potential to produce offspring. The acts of being water, a rock, or human are distinguished by their relative and collective potentialities. The contrast between potential and act allowed Aquinas to address conceptions of spiritual creatures along several avenues of inquiry, discussed below. Second, Aquinas’ thought is axiomatically governed by a unified organization of being “arranged hierarchically and ordered in degrees.” This great chain of existence extends from pure spirit to corporeal being, and is constituted by order and proportionality. At its apex, God as creator and manager of the universe is eternal, perfect, and absolutely spiritual; all of creation is sustained by and subject to the Christian divinity alone. In turn, angels and fallen angels exist as spiritual creatures with natural potentialities greater than those of humans but still limited in relation to God. Akin to Augustine’s description, angels in Aquinas’ writing were correspondingly positioned between the divine and human.

To the specific nature of angels and demons, Aquinas avers that spirits are strictly incorporeal beings. From Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus, the Dominican Master inherited the designation of angelic creatures as “separate intellectual substances.” Preferring Aristotle’s distinction in De anima—that the activity of intellection did not require a bodily organ—Aquinas reasoned that pure immateriality existed within God’s perfect creation. Where Saint Augustine had voiced reservations about the complete disembodiment of spirits (as would Aquinas’ contemporary Bonaventure), Aquinas and many later demonologists argued that spiritual

115 Ibid., pt. 1, qu. 47, art. 2.
116 On Evil, qu. 16, art. 1, p. 443.
creatures were entirely immaterial. Scholastic theologians accepted Augustine’s assertion that demons sometimes occupied regions of the air whence they might torment humanity. However, Augustine’s vaporous ethereality was deemed an unsuitable category for demons, because it suggested that the formless atmosphere itself might contain vitality. Worse still, Aquinas feared that such an argument might lead to a notion of the ubiquity of spiritual creatures—an attribute fitting only to God’s omnipresence. Instead, the Angelic Doctor argues that devils could unite themselves with aerial matter in order to move it locally.

On the specific theme of angelic locomotion, Aquinas proffered an entire articulus: “Whether the demons can move bodies locally?” In De malo, the question relates directly to ancient and contemporary concerns over whether demons could steal human semen for furtive procreative purposes. Assimilating Augustine’s interpretation in On the Trinity, Aquinas asserts that spirits could manage this feat and many others. Despite the absence of physical bodies, spirits can move “some material substances simply at the command of their will,” as when the human mind or soul wills the body to move. Aquinas opines that spiritual substances held the sole powers of intellect and will; in turn, the potency of their intellect engendered causal interactions by virtual (from the Latin virtus) rather than corporeal contact. Again here, the unity of creation and the inspired hierarchy of angels (including fallen) are important, for the order of creation included an order of movements. Since the passive, target object (e.g., human semen or a human body) was not inherently changed in the process of angelic locomotion, Aquinas concludes that spiritual creatures were capable of moving bodies and objects of proportional size. The notion of exceptional spiritual movements makes logical sense, because, in Aquinas’ view, angels constituted a distinct, even privileged, ontological category.

\[117\] Ibid.
We noted earlier that, according to Saint Augustine, demons were always inferior to humans because they could not generate virtuous moral character. Even with superior bodies and acuity, the Bishop of Hippo resolutely denigrated wicked spirits for this universal ineptitude. Aquinas, too, admits that in their inordinate pride demons “sin regarding everything they choose, since the force of their first choice abides in their every choice.”118 For Aquinas, God would never recall the fallen angels to divine glory by infusing them with grace. The binary division of blessed and wicked spirits remains forever immutable as a result of the latter’s perverted will. In addition to Augustine’s opprobrium of malevolent spirits, however, Aquinas restricts demonic influences in novel ways while allowing greater freedom in others. Within a hierarchical schema inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas argues that angels and demons are unequal in their respective knowledge and power, for higher intellects (intellectual substances) command greater potentialities respective to their hierarchical placement. It followed that blessed angels possessed higher intellects because they remained with God rather than having rebelled. In some (later) instances, this logic was applied to an opaque ranking of demons. For example, the fifteenth-century demonologist, Petrus Mamoris, commented on a minor demon held captive by a superior malicious spirit. According to Mamoris, the captured spirit was forced to witness a series of household disruptions enacted by the senior devil. In the story reported to Mamoris, the lesser spiritual creature had been imprisoned in a ring and subjected to the superior will of a maior diabolus. The anecdote not only demonstrated the relative ordering of spiritual powers, but also exhibited the greater demon’s ability to employ local motion.119

118 Ibid., qu. 16, art. 5, p. 472.

119 Hans Peter Broedel found this account of the minor devil called “Dragon” in Mamoris. See, The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft (2003), 46-7.
For Aquinas, demons never shared in the “supernatural light” of divine grace; only benevolent angels enjoyed this distinction. Where the seraphim (the highest order of angels), sometimes performed miracles by acting as divine instruments, according to Aquinas, demons were definitively excluded from miraculous performances of their own volition. This is an important point, because Aquinas divided spiritual potency along natural and supernatural (or miraculous) lines. Augustine had been hesitant to distinguish the natural from the miraculous: “For how can an event be contrary to nature when it happens by the will of God, since the will of the great Creator assuredly is the nature of every created thing?” Aquinas adopts Augustine’s language, but adds clarity to the division of nature and miracles: for Thomas, God alone works supernaturally (literally above nature), whereas all created beings never transcended the order of nature. The Devil, in particular, was restricted from enacting miraculous works. Knowledge of the future, for example, is explicitly limited to God’s infinite perfection, as demons (and all creatures) were finite beings created within time. Aquinas emphasizes how God “sees as present all things that are related to one another by the relationship of present, past, and future, which none of those whose view falls within the succession of time can.” Similarly, God alone knows the movement of the human will. Demons could encourage sin but could not change the human heart nor a human’s intellectual capacity to understand God through reason. Aquinas also denies that demons can transform human bodies into other substantial forms.

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120 The City of God (1998) bk 21, ch 8, p. 980.
121 Cameron, Enchanted Europe (2010), 95. I will further develop this theme in the next section below.
123 Ibid., see qu. 16, articles 7, 8, 11, and 12.
Particularly striking in all this is how Aquinas nevertheless grants demons a much higher premium for “natural” action and knowledge than Augustine ever allowed. In Aquinas’ evaluation, demons at no point lost “what belongs to their nature, and their natural gifts abide intact and most splendid.” Both benevolent and malevolent angels were an approximate manifestation of metaphysical perfection in their disembodied intellects and individuation (i.e., as separate substances). By the end of the sixteenth century, Johann Weyer would echo that “since his [the Devil’s] angelic essence has not perished (although it has degenerated because of the disposition of his own will)...his extraordinary observance and remarkable experience has increased.” As exceptional creatures, later demonologists generally agreed that good and bad angels could use their “higher order of nature” in astonishing, albeit natural, ways. Within the order of creation, for instance, the elements and celestial bodies were subject to angelic and demonic influence. They also employed advanced processes of conjectural knowledge to determine what effects might be produced from natural causes. With increased speed and knowledge of nature, they possessed a heightened capacity for discerning causes and effects invisible to the human eye. In Aquinas’ words, demons cannot tell the future, but they can “foreknow effects in the effects’ natural causes” by experiential knowledge—say, when and where a tree might fall naturally or the precise rate at which organic generation and decay take place. Similarly, Aquinas remarks that beings of pure intellection can intuit bodily signs and habits in order to know human actions before they occurred.


126 *On Evil*, qu. 16, art. 6, p. 500.

More troubling was that they do so “much more than any human being can.”128 In other words, spirits could anticipate human gestures and proclivities more accurately than humans conventionally did themselves. This presumably made suggestive advocacy for sinful behavior easier to accomplish.

That spiritual creatures engendered effects by means of their advanced nature raised questions about the location of spiritual substances. In attempting to explain why demonic influence was so pervasive in the physical world, Aquinas invoked John of Damascus, suggesting that, because demons were originally among higher angels, they held considerable authority over the terrestrial order.129 Following Augustine, however, Aquinas clearly denied the physical locality of spirits—the notion that spiritual creatures were tied to one material location.130 Scholastic ideas about space convey the specific principle that space was “an interval or the distance between two determinate points or places.”131 Defined by their perpetual movement and incorporeality, spirits were never subject to the restraints of the material world. Imprisonment was futile, for example, with the notable exception of when a greater spiritual being (including God) might choose to confine a lower demon. This did not mean, however, that angels and demons were incapable of inhabiting physical spaces. Elsewhere Aquinas contends that “an angel is said to be in a corporeal place through the application of its angelic power to some place.”132 Spiritual substances moved

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128 Ibid., qu. 16, art. 8, p. 493.
129 Ibid., qu. 16, art. 1, p. 444. See above n. 51.
130 Ibid.
131 Tiziana Suárez-Nani, “Angels, Space and Place: The Location of Separate Substances according to John Duns Scotus,” in Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance, ed. Isabel Iribarren and Martin Lenz (Burlington VT: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2008), 89.
132 Summa Theologiae, pt. 1, qu. 52, art. 1.
unencumbered through locations according to the operations of their will and intellect. Interestingly, this freedom of movement allowed angels and demons a certain mastery of space: “as air, since it is a material substance, cannot be in the same place with another material substance, nor even confined by locks or doors, since it can escape through the thinnest cracks, so also can we speak of the bodies of devils.” The difference was observed in the fact that demons were not “material substances.” They could occupy impossible spaces, even with legions of devils, as they had done in the Bible (Mark 5:9). For this reason, Aquinas chided magicians that believed they could control or capture spiritual creatures; this feigned servitude would always end in the spirit’s favor rather than actual human dominance. Demons were absolutely free to enter and exit physical places, including the human body by means of possession.

In Thomist theology, then, the most significant innovations can be perceived in terms of emphases rather than theological content. For Augustine, wicked spirits were important because their angelic origins and downfall at the world’s end were relevant to Christian salvation—demonic evil was a perversion of divine goodness but also a useful ministerial tool. Encounter with a demon, on this view, was a divinely controlled, providential event. As such, devils were connected to human history insofar as they cosmically performed illusions, tempted humans, and caused limited disorder by means of divine permission. This final idea intimates that the Devil was an agent of God’s loving oversight. Thomist metaphysics accepted the reality of demons from this

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133 On Evil., qu. 16, art. 1, p. 444.

134 Ibid., qu. 16, art. 1, 438.

135 Thomas has surprisingly little to say about possession; he makes only one remark at the conclusion of De malo, qu. 16, art. 12, p. 513. On demonic possession see, Moshe Sluhovsky, Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Nancy Caciola, Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
tradition but foregrounded previously uncharted aspects of demonic influence. Demons were not solely auspicious sources of moral, Christian instruction; they were also finite creatures imbued with natural operations and permitted to move within the created world without altering divine principles regulating the cosmos. In this, Aquinas examines fallen angels as part of both divine order and the natural world. He perceives demonic spirits as perverted and completely incorporeal beings whose cunning intellect and natural abilities were superior to those of humankind. Most importantly, Thomist theology asserts that, as created beings, demons can be objects of natural philosophical inquiry; like animals, plants, and minerals, they evince fixed properties that the trained observer can record and interpret.

**Demonic Contagion, Sensory Disorder, and Marvels**

Where the previous two sections surveyed the basic tenets of Western Christian demonology as recounted by theological authorities, this final section examines the theoretical problems associated with how demons afflicted humanity. Specifically, this section charts the affective mechanisms by which demonic encounters were said to be felt among premodern communities. In so doing, my analysis relies loosely on modern insights and approaches from the burgeoning field of affect theory, detailed briefly below. My intent is not to discount historicist analyses of the subject but to demonstrate that this field can complement and help elucidate the ways in which premodern authors described immaterial fallen angels as haunting material spaces.

Although there is no single definition of “affect” or affect theory, modern scholarship on the subject tends to highlight varying degrees of corporeal responsiveness and complex relational experiences. In several studies of affect theory, the human body emerges as a nexus of sudden

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136 The body of literature on affect is immense. I have consulted works such as: Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008);
and often fleeting sensations that inform distinctions between “emotions” and “affects.” Kevin Lewis O’Neill, for instance, lucidly describes affective experience as “similar to emotion or feeling, but has much more to do with the body than either. Affect is raw, reactive sensation. It takes place before consciousness and before discourse. Hair standing on the back of a neck, the warm glow of holiday festivities, the rush of enthusiasm at a political rally—this is affect.”

Rather than an immediate emotional awareness of reality (e.g., as happiness, fear, or anger), scholars like O’Neill maintain that “affective experiences” constitute spontaneous somatic movements that occur before they are cognitively or socially identified. On this perspective, an “affective experience” is felt but difficult to immediately recognize; it communicates a mood or atmosphere awakened, subtly or violently, in response to gestures, expressions, or sensations from both internal (i.e., within the body) and external (i.e., foreign bodily) influences. To put it another way, the questions that govern an affective mapping of human experience ask: How does one sense a body, place, or object into existence? What processes provoke differentiated feelings or emotions that are unexpectedly or intentionally transmitted to others? Can we critically evaluate the dread, enthusiasm, or excitement spatially experienced through noises, smells, and other sensory activities?

In what follows, I employ the term “affect” as a means to demonstrate how premodern authors described demons manipulating the human sensorium from within (i.e., at a biological


level) or by producing apparitions outside the body. As noted above, affect theories often draw distinction between emotion and affective feeling, noting that the former can be labelled as, say, “fear” or “happiness” only after an affect has been initially felt. I maintain this contrast as far as is possible with the texts discussed below. The distinction is useful, as will be demonstrated, because both affects and emotions appear in demonological *exempla*, especially after a pious figure arrives (or the author himself interjects) and appropriately labels what the demonically affected have emotionally experienced. In what follows, then, “affective experience” is a heuristic device that can help indicate the ways in which premodern Christian communities were said to intimately and often unknowingly sense demonic presence. This is an admittedly substantial jump from the previous two sections which highlight prescriptive, orthodox valuations of Christian demons. And yet, explanations of demonic encounters entailed more than metaphysical propositions on spirits inhering in the cosmos. Late premodern demonologists commonly deployed descriptive anecdotes alongside theological precepts so as instructively excite, alarm, and entertain their audiences. To this end, the model of affective experience suggests that demonic encounters were described as interactive engagements, wherein response to the demonic became manifest through visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic qualities.

Importantly, not all demonological *exempla* contain vivid depictions of spiritual assault. Saint Augustine’s report of the travails of Hesperius, for example, offers little detail on the demons vexing Zubedi, stating only that the animals and servants of Hesperius suffered “*cum afflictione*.” Countless narratives portraying demons give minimal attention to the manner in which such spirits haunted humanity. At the same time, later demonologists drew from a cornucopia of exemplary accounts that did. The sixteenth-century Jesuits, Petrus Thyraeus and Martin Delrio, for instance, included in their respective treatises a tale of demonic infestation markedly similar to Augustine’s
seminal story about Hesperius. The excerpt is originally found in the life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon (also called Theodore of Byzantium or Theodore the Archimandrite) whose hagiography was written in the seventh century. Thyraeus transcribes only a few lines from Theodore’s vita (citing it repeatedly), whereas Delrio includes three discrete tales from Theodore that are compiled together from the same source. In order to provide a more robust account of demonic infestation, I have translated Delrio’s longer version for analytic purposes below:

Saint Theodore the Archimandrite used to repel all harm with blessed water, even illnesses inflicted by demons. He did this with Pherentinus near Tautaendia, who met a demon in the form of a dog. Just by yawning at him, the demonic dog struck him with a most grievous malady [lying half-dead for a long time his face was twisted right round to the back]. Also the saint did this in the house of one Theodore, a tribune, where the humans and all the animals were tormented by demons. When they would dine, stones were thrown on the tables. From this a great terror invaded everyone, and the women’s beds were broken, and a great number of snakes and mice occupied the house, such that no one dared to enter the home. Thus the servant of God entered the household for the entire night, and by leading prayer to God and sprinkling the whole house with lustral water, he freed the home from the unclean spirits. This the priest Gregory often quoted. He also recited afterwards this illustrious miracle: The inhabitants of the village Apoukoumis had killed an ox in order to eat its flesh. But it happened that all those who consumed the meat fell ill, laying down as if they were dead, and whatever meat was leftover turned black and fetid. Therefore, those who did not taste the meat announced what had happened to the saint. The holy man responded that the ruin came from a company of demons that passed through the cooking pots. Since at that time he could not go with them, he blessed some water which one of the brothers sent to sprinkle over the sick and to offer for them to drink. When this was done they all rose as if from sleep, except one who was dead. For, the procurator John, whose brother had been afflicted, did not wait for the blessing of the saint, but ran to a woman for help and while applying her incantations to the brother he died.\footnote{Delrio, \textit{Disquisitionum Magicarum} (1606), bk 6, pt. 3, q. 3, sect. 3, pp. 202-3; Thyraeus, \textit{Loca infesta} (1598), ch 1, p. 3: “Beatus Theodorus Archimandrita noxas omnes aqua benedicta solebat repellere, etiam morbos a daemonis illatos, ut a Phetino illo apud Tantendiam, qui obvius daemoni in forma canis, solo illius hiatus in gravissimam agritudinem inciderat: ut a Theodori cuiusdam tribune domo, in qua homines, & animantia omnia a daemonibus cruiciabantur, & cum domestici praedenerunt, aut coenarent lapides super mensas iaciabantur. Ex quo magnus omnes terror invadebat, & mulierum tela rumpebantur, & tanta serpentum, & muriur multitude domum occupabat, ut praeformidine in eam ingredi nemo auderet. Domum igitur Dei servus ingressus, totam noctem psallendo, & Deum obsecrando traduxit, & aquam cui benedixerat, totam domum aspergens, eam a spiritibus immundis liberavit. Hactenus Georgius presbyter saepus iam citatus. Idem postea hoc quoque recenset illustre miraculum: Apocomensis vici incola bovem occiderunt, ut carnibus eius vescerentur. Contigit autem ut omnes qui ex illis carnibus comederant, in morbum inciderent & iacerent ut mortui, & quicquid carnis reliquum fuit, nigrum evasit ac foetidum. Qui igitur ex carne illa non gustarunt, id quod acciderat, viro sancto nunciaverunt. Qui respondit exitium illud a phalange daemonum, qui per lebetes pertransierant, provenisse. Et cum eo tempore non posset cum illis,
In very general terms, the account typifies a representative understanding of how demons might attack humanity and manipulate the human senses: the spirits invade an ordinary location, graphically torment its inhabitants, and a servant of God triumphantly addresses and alleviates the spiritually vexing situation. It makes good sense that Thyraeus and Delrio would couple this story (or collection of stories) with the tale of Hesperius from *City of God*—along with numerous other antique and contemporary anecdotes. The attendance of demonically vexed humans and animals, as well as the introduction of an authoritative Christian leader to resolve the infestation, affords the two accounts overt similarities.

Premodern demonologists made use of such examples to convey the universal truth that, despite singularities found in diverse reports of demons, the narratives vividly expressed uniform convention relating to diabolical evil. For our purposes, Saint Theodore’s *exemplum* provides descriptive features of how demons were said to affectively invade or attack spaces. Three prominent and interrelated tropes are noteworthy in this and other narratives: 1.) the demonic as contagion, 2.) as disordered sensory experience, and 3.) as marvelous occurrence. While these broad themes are not universally present in all exemplary accounts of demonic encounter, stories like the one above were often deliberately included (among copious amounts of others) to prompt these recurrent motifs in different forms.

discendere, benedixit aquae, quam per unum e fratribus misit, ut periclitantes conspergeret, eisque bibendam propinaret. Quo facto, cuncti tamquam e somno surrexerunt praeter unum, qui mortuus est. Ioannes enim procurator, cuius fratri ea calamitas contigerat, non expectans viri sancti benedictionem, accurit ad mulierem veneficam, & dum eius incantations adhiberet fratri, ille animam egit” (italics are Delrio’s). Thyraeus only includes two sentences from the second narrative concerning the beds, tables, snakes, and mice. I have also included the extra sentence in brackets—included in the life of Theodore—qualifying that the dog yawned at Phereintinus, from Elizabeth Dawes (ed.), *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies translated from the Greek*, trans. Elizabeth Dawes and Norman Baynes (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), pp. 156-9, #106; pp. 174-5, #131; pp. 180-1, #143. I have used this last source from Dawes in aiding my translation.
The three motifs function at two overlapping levels of interpretation and inquiry. First, the motif of demonic contagion, and to some extent that of sensory disturbance, works within the framework of narrative aesthetics. By this I mean that an affective mood is awakened in such stories in order to convey how sensate experiences were generated by and described in the meeting of hostile spirits and humans. Depictions of spiritual contagion, and more broadly the issue of demonic affliction of the sense, begged consideration of how the presence of fallen angels was descriptively felt within the stories themselves. Unsurprisingly, the stories are often framed in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century demonological works as puzzles to be solved by the trained theologian or preacher; they are meant to reflect how demons worked seemingly inexplicable feats that could be explained by expert exegetes.

Second, and following from the first level of inquiry, premodern demonologists were principally concerned with issues of metaphysical causation. Here, a set of conventional theological questions were raised (or assumed to be present) in reporting the phenomena: 1. Within the such tales or experiences, did these events actually take place or where they the result of diabolical illusions? 2. Whether authentic manifestations or illusory events, how could the unfolding events be respectively explained (as real or illusory afflictions) in terms of metaphysical causality? The latter two motifs (sensory interruptions and marvelous occurrences) were generally approached under the assumption that a rational order of causes could be deduced. As such, disturbances in the sensorium and wondrous happenings transpired, scholastically trained theologians argued, because devils possessed very specific attributes and potencies, which were natural rather than supernatural. Drawing logical conclusions from the teachings of Augustine, Aquinas, and others, the trained demonologist, therefore, set out to elucidate standard demonic
behavior and capabilities within exemplary accounts. A closer look at the example from Saint Theodore will help illuminate the differentiated affective work within these motifs.

With regard to the first motif, the notion of contagion communicated how an “immundus spiritus” (unclean spirit) might spoil the human body, home, and environment. One explicit way in which contagion could be represented was through the language of “infestation.” Petrus Thyraeus, in particular, favored the designation “loca infesta” when annotating how historical spaces (loca)—like those described by Augustine and Theodore—were plagued (infesta) by malevolent spiritual invasion. Derived from classical Latin of antiquity, Thyraeus and others assimilated the language of human warfare to demonic assaults. The Oxford Latin Dictionary registers the verb infesto to mean 1. to repeatedly attack, harass, molest, 2. to make unsafe or unsettled, to disturb peace or repose, 3. to have a bad effect on, damage, impair. The past participle infestus similarly signifies something hostile, antagonistic, marked by strife, inimical, unsafe, insecure, and threatened. Moreover, infesto is etymologically related to the root words fendo and fensus. In turn, these inform the terms found in literature on demons like infenso (to strike or attack) and defendo (to ward off, avert or defend against). Drawing from these militaristic expressions, “infestation” at once connotated a demonic siege on the human body and its senses, often spreading from one individual to the next.

Where Saint Theodore’s narrative is framed by the broader theme of demonic infestation (in Thyraeus’ telling), contagion is represented in the first lines by way of collapsing the physical distance between the human and nonhuman. This is witnessed as the infernal dog yawns at Pherentinus, striking “him with a most grievous malady.” The single sentence account records what modern readers would understand as an oral reflex, the canine’s yawn. The act, however, is not depicted as involuntary; to the contrary, it establishes deliberate and visceral contact between
the doggish apparition and Pherentinus. And instead of a gesture that would normally produce a reflexive response (i.e., another yawn), the demon forcibly (or what Thomist natural philosophy would later call “virtually”) compels the man to buckle under the force of the dog’s gaping mouth. Pherentinus is also thereafter described as incapable of controlling his own posture and body, “lying half-dead for a long time his face was twisted right round to the back.” Hence, the demon’s yawn conveys a sense of proximate ravishment, as the man’s face is descriptively contorted in haptic discomfort. By extension, the irruption of the demonic into the ordinary world reinforces the idea of a demon contagion that transmits or triggers an unexpected violation of the man’s bodily control.

Often depicted as source of spiritual impurity, the presence of demons similarly transformed safe, mundane locales into spaces lacking any semblance of sanctuary. Saint Theodore’s second encounter indicates how the site of infestation was no longer a proper “domus” (or home) but a location of violent intrusion which “no one dared to enter.” Within this polluted area, the identity-slippage from familiar home into a space of insecurity galvanizes unstable categories of communal distress and trespass. In the house of the tribune Theodore, the demons disrupt the tables and beds, while noxious vermin (i.e., snakes and mice) are described swarming the household. Notably, the hostile spirits only reveal themselves through concealed actions and sounds but also at crucial sites of human activity: where the people eat, sleep, and congregate. Throughout this short account, the demonic presence registers palpable absences, for the inhabitants are never able to point to a discrete object to show that “this” or “that” is the group of demons. Instead, the demons are descried enacting spuriously visible disturbances which produce the combined feeling of “magnus omnes terror.” On this reading, demonic contagion need not overtly relate to the spread of bodily illness; instead, it becomes a spectacle of concatenating
torments that display the transmission of “terror” within the at-one-time home. The source of distraction is finally identified only upon the saint’s arrival and then confronted with the therapeutic procedures of prayer and sprinkling holy water.

In the third episode of Saint Theodore’s entry, another extended series of chain events occurs as the inhabitants of Apoukoumis become infected with demonically rancid meat. The communication of disease is made legible from the cooking pots, to the ox flesh, to the humans that consume the animal. Here, the sickness itself is expressed by means of conspicuous inactivity. Having eaten the animal’s plagued flesh, the humans become completely supine, “laying down as if they were dead.” In fact, they no longer exhibit the ability to use reason, to move, eat or function at all. As such, the contagion has not only dispossessed Apoukoumis of its original domestic identity (i.e., a docile living space), the entire community itself has lost its defining human faculties. In this way, the narrative illustrates the limited lay comprehension of the troubling situation: hearing of the illness, Theodore arrives and instructs the inhabitants that the “ruin came from a company of demons.” The saint effectively diagnoses the malady afflicting those who partook in the meal. Thereafter, the holy man’s inspired medical powers reanimate all but one of the inhabitants.

For these reasons, the holy figure of Theodore represents an appropriate contrast of remedial presence to the demonic pollution. He is physically and visibly “there”, just as his curative measures miraculously spread across the infected space. Akin to the *terra sancta* Hesperius possessed in Augustine’s account from the *City of God*, Theodore’s *vita* communicates how the saint transmits godly blessing by means of holy water. Significantly, the narrative accentuates an affective mood by means of recognizable disparities between demonic clamor and “prayer to god”, between stones “thrown on the table” and the sprinkling of holy water, between
eating rancid meat and drinking blessed water, and even the language of invasion (invadebat) and freedom (liberavit). In short, the human body becomes the terrain upon which demonic encounter comes to be felt, exciting and distorting the body itself. The three narratives are meant to descriptively convey how premodern folk were paradoxically bound together by the experience of contagious disorder—a demonic perversion of healthy community formation.

Dovetailing with the motif of demonic contagion, accounts of demonic encounter were frequently charged with visceral insecurity as foci of sensory disorientation—the second motif. Following Augustine, and Aquinas citing the Bishop of Hippo, later demonologists warned Christians to:

> take heed that the wicked spirit may never foul this habitation, and that, intermingled with the senses, it may not pollute the sanctity of the soul and becloud the light of the mind. This evil thing creeps stealthily through all the entrances of sense: it gives itself over to forms, it adapts itself to colors, it sticks to sounds, it lurks hidden in anger and in the deception of speech, it appendes itself to odors, it infuses tastes, by the turbulent overflow of passion it darkens the senses with darksome affections, it fills with certain obscuring mists the paths of the understanding, through all of which the mind’s ray normally diffuses the light of reason.  

On the one hand, Augustine’s statement served as a seminal admonition to protect and discipline the thresholds of sense perception. On the other, the reference to “habitation” is equally important, as the human body represented a vessel for the soul, as well as an evocative analogy for domesticity.

More relevant here is how, by associating devilry with the activities of the human sensorium, demons were allotted mastery over the entire field of sensory input. In De malo, Aquinas explained that, because the human soul was hierarchically positioned below angelic...
natures, humans were incapable of perceiving spiritual substances as such. Aquinas explained by way of analogy that, just as humans could not discern another’s soul with their eyes, so they were unable to behold the pure intellection of angelic being. Yet, angels and demons could project incorporeal semblances or forms by means of local motion, whereby they either affected the internal gases, fluids, and humors of the human body to perceive an object or being that was not actually present, or they could just as easily produce visible aerial bodies.\footnote{On Evil., qu. 16, art. 11.} From these perspectives, the yawning canine perceived by Pherentinus, for example, could represent either a demonic illusion generated from internal (i.e., humoral) impressions or an aerial shape. As Stuart Clark has argued, in all such instances, “the devil could control (and subvert) each of the stages of Aristotelian cognition—manipulating the world of perceived objects, tampering with the medium through which visual \textit{species} travelled, and altering the workings of both the external and the internal senses.”\footnote{Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.} The five senses and the bodily humors could be affectively disarranged, excited, or depressed in an attempt to obstruct the Christian from knowledge of God.

Several late medieval and early modern authors commented on these facets of demonic affliction. “It is not without great reason,” warned Noël Taillepied, “that one should fear when at night we perceive [i.e., see, hear, feel] something unfamiliar. For spirits often attack people while sleeping, sometimes forcing the inhabitants to abandon their homes and not without great injury to those living there.”\footnote{Traité De L’Apparition Des Esprits (1588), 184: “Non sans grande raison donc l’homme a peur quand de nuict apperçoit quelque chose inaccoustemuee de voir. Ces esprits aussi empeschent les gens de dormer, quelquefois font abandoner les maisons, ce qui ne se fait pas sans grandement endommager ceux qui y habitent.” My translation of “de voir” is admittedly loose, although in this section of the treatise Taillepied...} With greater detail on the organs affected, Johann Weyer noted that for
melancholic women in particular, demons interrupted visual experience of the world “through the medium of the optic nerve.” Weyer alludes to an understanding of cognition founded upon premodern theories of vision. The human faculty called the imagination (imaginatio) was said to physically preserve impressions (or in Augustine’s words above “forms”) in the mind by means of tactile, visual contact. Two predominant optical theories in the Middle Ages (and earlier), commonly called extramission and intromission, suggested that either the eye itself emitted rays of light which communicated an image back to the organ of sight or that a visible object actively transmitted its impression to the human eye. In both cases, demons could interrupt and manipulate the transmission of haptic object-impression. One common and long-lasting debate involving extramission related to discourses on “fascination”—the idea that malicious power could be deliberately communicated in a glance by enchantment or charm. For demon-theorists, the potential transmission of noxious intent—often called the “evil eye” or “the lust of the eyes”—meant one had to guard against inimical intentions and sensory invasion by diabolical forces.

Visual disruptions, however, were only one type of sensory experience within loca infesta. Akin to Taillepied’s warning, Ludwig Lavater claimed that by the devil’s “speed, and by his experience in natural things, he can deceive the human eye and other senses.” Martin Delrio, discusses a whole range of sensory disturbances that suggest perception (de voir) is more than mere visual sight.

143 Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance (1991), 186.


145 Von Gespaenstern (1569), part 2, bk 17, p. 177: “Durch sin geschwinde und durch die erfarnuß der natürlichen dingen kan er die gesicht der menschen und andere empfindnussen betriebei.”
too, averred that demons excited the imagination “into fear, shame, anger, or sadness; these affections indeed so affect a man that heat or cold are altered, that his body pales or reddens, and he almost becomes exhilarated, or torpid and dejected.”

Understood as a set of bodily organs and mental faculties, demons often yielded mechanical control over the premodern mind. In Saint Theodore’s example, wicked spirits demonstrated how sensory manipulation descriptively applied to all the senses. Where Pherentinus beholds the illusory dog’s impassioned and fascinating yawn, the inhabitants of the tribune Theodore’s home visually and audibly hear stones thrown on tables and beds broken in their rooms. At Apoukoumis, the people taste and observe the meat’s hue turn black. The aroma of decay would also likely fill the final scene with malodor. Such sensory references indicated that appearances absolutely mattered. Taillepied commented, for example, how “in our times there are some people so possessed with this melancholy humor that, spiritually alienated from themselves, they describe themselves as the most wicked people of the whole world.” Those afflicted with sensory degradation thus reflected the profoundly disordered moral and spiritual qualities inherent to spaces filled with demons. Loss of control over bodily sensation often indicated the Devil’s evil, and theologians commonly pointed to the moral connotations that attached to a deficiency of the senses. Hence, sensory perceptions could exhibit how a demonically infested space reflected both individual-human and communal-household assaults by evil spirits. Strikingly, the conceptual overlap between the demonic as contagion and sensory disruption stressed how demonic presence affected human experience at a biological level. In Aquinas’

146 *Disquisitionum Magicarum* (1606), bk 1, ch 3, qu. 3, p 13: “excitat potentiam appetituam ad timorem, vel ad pudorem, vel ad iram, vel ad tristitiam; hae vero affectiones hominem sic afficiunt, ut calore vel frigore alteretur, ut pallescat vel rubescat, ut quasi exiliat seu efferatur, ut torpescat seu dejiciatur.”

147 *Traité De L’Apparition Des Esprits* (1588), 29: “de notre temps quelques uns si saisis de cest humeur melancholique, qu’alienez d’esprit, se disoient estre les plus meschans de tout le monde.”
words, demons work “changes in the situs of vapors and fluids...[and] sentient spirits sink with the blood and move the sources of sense perception.” Hence, the ecclesiastical admonishment to guard and discipline the thresholds of sense perception at once stressed the limits and vulnerabilities of the human body. Narratives like Saint Theodore’s offered demonologists an opportunity to discursively “catch” historical instances of affective experience with demons. Theologians authoritatively identified the emergence of demons in a household as sources of destabilizing fear and communal disruption.

Finally, the third motif orbits Thomist definitions of spiritual beings as marvelous creatures. As we have already seen, Thomist metaphysics placed fallen angels in the specific category of “natural” rather than “supernatural” causes. In distinguishing between the two, Aquinas recognized that extraordinary events would provoke inquiry into their origination. In response, many medieval writers employed the Latin terms mirabilia or mira (marvels or wonders) to convey naturally occurring phenomena for which the original causation was opaque. Conceptually related to the terms miroir and mirage, marvels typically presented an inverted image of the usual (i.e., regularly observed) processes of nature. Frequently the occult properties of certain stones, liquids, plants, and animals—sometimes categorized under “natural magic”—were explained using this designation. Particular mountains, fountains, shrines, and other earthly

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148 Aquinas, On Evil, qu. 16, art. 11, response.


locations could similarly evoke marvelous effects and perceptions of singularity. That *mirabilia* were deemed natural or sometimes classified as magical meant that they were subject to the prescribed theological limits of divine creation. Marvels by definition exhibited exceptional attributes but never violated the natural order of the world. They presented elusive albeit profoundly meaningful boundaries for God’s creation. Importantly, the failure to understand these hidden virtues in nature stimulated inquiry into how and why such things happened. Marvels marked an occasion to “wonder” (*admiratio*) at a universe replete with new, if confounding, signs and portents. This final point is crucial because marvels were pedagogically useful within the integrated schema of medieval Christian cosmology: one could be taught to marvel at the unknown for its moral and ontological significance in relation to God.

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, marvels were contrasted with miracles (the term *miracula* shares the root word *mira*); as we have seen the former were defined by an indeterminate origin and a response to investigate the phenomenon. For the latter, the trigger of wonderment was likewise paramount, although miracles were said to definitively transgress the ordinary workings of nature. Divine miracles thus differed from marvels by degree of divine involvement: God alone produced *miracula* through unmediated grace, whereas singularities in nature or created agents like demons engendered marvels. The parting of the sea, resurrection of the dead, transubstantiation, and the deeds of saints were considered miracles that demonstrated the direct hand of God and the attendant suspension of natural operations. Attractive for their pastoral applicability, miracles and miracle-stories promoted ecclesiastically sanctioned sites for pious devotion (e.g., saints’ relics and canonizations, the Eucharist, and various acts in the Christian

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Bible). Marvels, on the other hand, worked negatively to illustrate where miracles were absent. Especially in those instances involving scholastically naturalized demons, marvels provided an alibi for the miraculous: the supernatural work of God is not “here” (in demonic marvels) but in the inspired actions of saints, the sacraments, and benevolent angels.

Drawing from theological tradition, demonologists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were excessively preoccupied with describing demonic marvels. One historical proof of demonic marvels was found in Book 21 of the *City of God*. Augustine remarked that at the temple of Venus a lamp was observed to burn perpetually. The Bishop of Hippo reasoned that it was feasible a demon, under the name Venus, manifested itself there permanently in order to “cunningly seduce them [humans], either by imbuing their hearts with a secret poison, or by revealing themselves under a friendly guise, and thus make a few of them their disciples, who become the instructors of the multitude.”

According to Augustine, where the weak of mind could be swayed by spiritual intrusion of the senses (“imbuing their hearts with a secret poison”), humans predisposed to wickedness were presented with illusory companionship and false miracles engendered by demons. Aquinas’ much later discussion of spiritual local motion added further points of reference when considering the marvels of demons. Thus, when Martin Delrio (and others) discussed demonic feats in the sixteenth century, he divided the wonders produced by devils into two kinds (with varied effects): 1. following Augustine, the marvels of demons occurred either as specious miracles and/or, 2. relying on Thomas, devils might just as easily deploy deceptive acts through local motion.

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154 Aquinas would also repeat Augustine’s precepts on the false miracles of demons in his *Summa contra gentiles*, see Bartlett, *The Natural and Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (2008), 20.
The Jesuit explained how, in the first case, “supposing an effect does not originate in local motion and exceeds actively applied natural causes, such as resuscitating the dead or truly curing blindness, then deceit and illusion are introduced.” Demons thus enacted one facet of their marvelous works by appearing to furnish outcomes only possible for the Christian divinity (i.e., supernatural miracles). Delrio went on to assert that spirits could also contrive confusing mental impressions called *phantasmata* in the human imagination to make the impossible appear authentic. Akin to the ostensibly everlasting fire at the temple of Venus, demons manufactured marvelous tricks in order to mislead humans into believing they were capable of seemingly divine works. By moving latent memory perceptions (technically by local motion of the humors), wicked spirits entered the human mind to make an illusion manifestly real to the human senses. This motif was widely reported by demonologists in many forms, sometimes from personal testimonies or when chastising magicians that claimed they could control the demons themselves. As will be demonstrated in chapter 4 of this dissertation, Protestant authors also polemically engaged the category of demonic marvels to neutralize claims of the miraculous within the Catholic church.

The second marvelous effect of demons Delrio called prestidigital machination: “when something is seen and then suddenly vanishes, though not permanently.” Here, demonic marvels extended beyond fantastic impressions in the imagination to elaborate acts of transvection (flight typically associated with witchcraft) that nevertheless amounted to illusory activity. A famous

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155 For a personal account see Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance* (1991), 72-3. Interestingly, the marvelous deceptions of demons were often of a mundane flavor: throwing stones, making noises, etc. For examples, see Taillepied, *Traité De L'Apparition Des Esprits* (1588), 78-80 and Lavater, *Von Gespaenstern* (1569), part 1, bk 16.

156 Disquisitionum Magicarum (1606), bk 2, qu. 8, p 114: “Prima est, si effectus non oritur a motu locali, & superat causarum naturalium applicatarum activitatem (v.g. suscitatio mortui, aut verae caecitatis curatio) intervenit deceptio & praestigium. Secunda quando id, quod visum est, statim evanescit, nec permanet, est praestigiosa machinatio.”
example of this effect was when an object (e.g., a human body) might be quickly withdrawn from a room and substituted for an animal. To the human eye, the speed and dexterity of the invisible spirit deluded the observer into believing a corporeal metamorphosis had taken place, when in fact an extraordinary slight-of-hand had occurred. On this view, demons could not induce true corporeal transformations or make material bodies completely disappear; rather, they rapidly replaced proportional bodies through natural operations the human eye could not easily discern. A major nexus of contention in demonological debates orbited whether demonic locomotion actually took place (e.g., carrying witches during flight) or whether devils moved the bodily humors in an ornate hoax within the imagination.

That demons were said to perform elaborate marvels functioned as yet another way of interpreting how demons generated affective experiences among premodern Christian communities and audiences. Indeed, the act of diagnosing demonic marvels—and the complex ways in which extraordinary phenomena stimulated embodied responses—evinces learned concerns over representations of the Devil. Late premodern intelligentsia garnered countless anecdotes similar to those of Augustine and Theodore in order to illustrate both inspirational events in sacred history and profoundly troubling encounters within the natural world. In Thomist demonology especially, the experience of wonder called attention to how demons sought to obfuscate the boundaries between divine action and demonic cunning. Midway through Delrio’s account of Saint Theodore, the term “miraculum” marks such a boundary, as the saint introduces


158 On this debate, see the tale recounted by the Dominican, Johannes Nider, and its relation to the *Malleus maleficarum* in Michael Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 47 ff.
blessed water to heal those sick from demonic infection. The brief scene serves to distinguish the miraculous acts of Saint Theodore from the spurious marvels of the demons. Even without such an explicit marker (the word “ miracle”), medieval and early modern authorities highlighted how marvelous events triggered affective experiences of wonder at astonishing phenomena. In the next chapter we will see that imaginative and poetic literature would confound and complement traditional perspectives on demonic marvels. Christian demonologists—whether medieval, Protestant, or Roman Catholic—cautioned their audience against investing erroneous belief in the tantalizing feats of malevolent spiritual beings. With deft literary maneuverings, theologians and preachers endeavored to demarcate the differences between demonic wonders and divine interventions.

The recording and compiling of such stories demonstrates that tales of demonic encounter were repetitively diagnosed, experienced, and remembered. They registered sites of learned debate but also shared responses to the extraordinary. Narratives about demons could at once inspire Christian devotion and evoke instinctive fear toward the seen and unseen. In this sense, the accounts from Aquinas and Theodore regarding Zubedi and Apoukoumis ring of pious triumphalism, although they also gesture toward intense concerns of alarm and anxious excitement. We know this because premodern demonologists fervently frequently designated the appropriate reactions audiences should have in engaging such accounts. Johann Weyer, for example, repeatedly remarked how the Devil “drives men to wonderment,” but carefully qualified that “the more to be wondered at, or rather regretted” was how evil spirits were falsely accorded honor for their deeds. As we shall see, the same rebuke was uttered repeatedly throughout the

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preceding centuries: demons thrived on fomenting seemingly auspicious affective and emotional qualities among premodern Christian communities.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the distinctive features of Western Christian demonology. The formative images of the Devil and his fallen angels offered by Augustine and other first-millennium authors would provide later demonologists the conceptual vocabulary and arguments for understanding wicked spirits through a framework of divine providence and moral action. Alongside Augustinian precepts, Thomist metaphysics advocates for natural-scientific approaches to the Devil’s nature and potency, arguing that demons were finite creatures with more freedom to passively act within the natural world. Drawing from both traditions, late medieval and early modern authors also wrote about how premodern communities affectively experienced demonic encounters. When demonologists commented on the attributes and nature of demons, they employed exemplary anecdotes to convey how wicked spirits behaved and engaged with humanity in the physical world. It is in this last approach that we find motifs of demonic contagion, sensory disturbance, and marvelous occurrence. And yet, the above investigation has left several unanswered queries: Were all stories about demonic encounters the same in form and content? Were there other sources from which late medieval and early modern demonologists would draw that demonstrate ambiguous, even helpful spirits? If so, how were these reconciled with orthodox prescriptions for demonic apparitions? These questions are the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2: A Second Demonological Inheritance: Neutral Angels, Helpful Demons, and Non-Angelic Spirits

Introduction

Moving adjacently from Augustinian and Thomist theology (in Chapter 1) into High medieval accounts of morally ambiguous spirits, this chapter examines a second body of demonological inheritance. It analyzes those spiritual creatures that were not irrevocably placed on one side or the other of the angel/demon binary. Such imaginings are important to the overall project of this dissertation, because they underscore how the identity of certain spirits remained unclear in popular literature. In order to explain perceived human interactions with diverse spirits in premodern homes (in the following chapters), this chapter tracks the theologically repugnant notion that there existed spirits whose moral status was obscure.

A rich variety of visible and invisible beings co-inhabited the premodern world of Latin Europe. As we have seen, ecclesiastical figures divided spiritual creatures into blessed and wicked angels. According to theological tradition, a number of God’s angels were said to have fallen after creation due to the sin of pride. Forever displaced from divine grace, these demons generally tempted and tricked humankind into sinful behavior with sensory illusions. The opening decree and declaration of faith at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 formulated a concise expression of this idea: “The devil and the other demons were indeed created by God naturally good but they became evil by their own doing. Man, however, sinned at the prompting of the devil.” For most, if not all medieval Christians, fallen angels represented agents of moral disorder and displacement from the Christian God.

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Existing alongside this orthodox duality, ethereal spirits such as ambivalent angels, hobgoblins, fairies, and ambiguous “others” sustained recurrent appearance in premodern stories, texts, and imagery. These para-theological beings constitute the focus of analysis in this chapter. Often described in poetic, courtly, and exemplary literature as morally tepid or vaguely mischievous, many haunting spirits occupied the furthest borders of Augustinian-Thomist demonology.

To take one example, in book 3 of his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) rehearses a general hierarchical order of evil angels according to “some of the school of the theologians.” A controversial Renaissance magician and humanist, Agrippa begins with the biblical names attributed to specific devils: Beelzebub (Spirit of False Gods), Pytho (Spirit of Lies), Belial (Vessel of Wrath), Asmodeus (Revenger of Evil), and so forth. The sixteenth-century occultist then notes that within the nine degrees to which demons are conventionally placed (and in contrast to angelic hierarchies),

some that are nigh to us wander up and down in this obscure air, others inhabit lakes, rivers and seas, others the earth, and terrify earthly things, and invade those who dig wells and metals, cause the gapings of the earth, strike together the foundations of mountains, and vex not only men, but also other creatures. Some being content with laughter and delusion only, do contrive rather to weary men, than to hurt them, some heightening themselves to the length of a giant’s body, and again shrinking themselves up to the smallness of the pygmy’s, and changing themselves into divers forms, do blasphemies…but the worst sort of devils are those, who lay wait and overthrow passengers in their journeys, and rejoice in wars and effusion of blood, and afflict men with most cruel stripes.\(^\text{161}\)

The passage exemplifies a typical view of the myriad forms of demonic encounter. Agrippa was well versed in scholastic philosophy and theological attitudes toward fallen angelic beings. However, the last book of the *Occult Philosophy* also proffers perspectives concerning spirits on

the fringe of orthodox theology. Drawing from a mixed diet of biblical and apocryphal precedents, early and medieval Christian authors, Jewish Cabbala, Neoplatonic thought, and premodern European legend more generally, Agrippa’s demonology was unconventionally inclusive. Providing a synthetic treatment of occult magic and Christian faith, the Occult Philosophy demonstrates that theologians were not the only Christians to contribute meaningful discourses on angels, demons, and other ill-defined spirits.\footnote{162 For a recent analysis of the Occult Philosophy and Agrippa, see Christopher Lehrich, Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa’s Occult Philosophia (Leiden: Brill, 2003). For a seminal analysis of Agrippa’s life and writings, see Charles G. Nauert, Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).}

To this end, Agrippa’s initial arrangement of devils in Book 3 of Occult Philosophy is as instructive as the ambiguities he cites thereafter. For instance, he remarks how Origen, the third-century theologian of Alexandria, opined that through the act of repentance, and after the resurrection of Christ, demons could return to the grace of God.\footnote{163 Agrippa, Occult Philosophy (1995), 511.} Capable of shedding their ethereal bodies at the cosmic end of the temporal world, wicked spirits would—with the appropriate pious disposition—ostensibly enjoy momentary embodiment and the potential for salvific contrition.\footnote{164 This is Origen’s doctrine of apokatastasis, which asserts that hell was not final and that demons would be restored to their original state of blessedness. The doctrine was censured at the Council of Constantinople in 543. See Wilhelm Breuning, “Apokatastasis: ‘Restoring all things’,” Theology Digest 31 (1984): 47-50.} Christian theologians familiar with Origen’s thought firmly denied the possibility of demonic contrition (and corporeality), “since the force of their first choice abides in their every choice.”\footnote{165 Aquinas, On Evil (2003), qu. 16, art. 5, p. 472.} The sixteenth-century magician prudently includes Origen’s position with an air of ambivalence; it is unclear whether he shares in Origen’s heterodoxy. Yet Agrippa goes
on to cite an equally provocative account of fallen angels. Referencing the popularity ascribed to the medieval “Legend of Saint Brendan,” Agrippa gestures towards the “many people” who believe the prayers of demons are heard by Christ. He states that several Christians contend “there are many of the devils who are fallen, who hope for their salvation.” Linking the trope of demonic sorrow to Origen and Saint Brendan, the *Occult Philosophy* provides a brief glimpse into the theologically impossible: the existence of penitent demons.

This chapter will begin with Agrippa’s signpost in the “Legend of Saint Brendan” and how it gestures towards the larger truth that many ideas about the spirit-world fit awkwardly with orthodox demonology. In addition to the *Legend of Saint Brendan*, multiple other premodern sources also evince imaginative descriptions of innocuous demons. For instance, the theme of so-called “neutral angels”—one I discuss below in reference to a small band of indecisive angels before the fall of Lucifer—appears in the twelfth-century romance *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, as well as in Dante Alighieri’s epic masterpiece of the fourteenth century, *The Divine Comedy*. On a slightly different perspective, one also finds clerical and monastic works of collated miracle stories that delineate “helpful demons” working in the benevolent service of humankind. Of a pastoral flavor, Jacques de Vitry and Caesarius von Heisterbach convey complex depictions of purported demonic goodwill. Broadly speaking, the notion of neutral angels and helpful demons was oxymoronic to the vast majority of theologians. Yet conceptions of these benign demons share similarities with the idea that the cosmos contained spirits that were neither inclined toward good nor evil, but located somewhere in-between. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century chroniclers and encyclopedists also collected and compiled marvelous tales of ethereal creatures found diversely represented throughout Europe. As we shall see, Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury recorded

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varied perspectives on the demonic and even non-angelic apparitions (e.g., fairies) of unknown origins.

Chapter 2 is thus divided into three sections on the specific motifs of neutral angels, minor or helpful demons, and non-angelic spirits. These ethereal beings deserve attention not just for their furtive existence in the historical register, but also because they complemented and confounded demonological convention. This is an important point: orthodox demonologists accepted kobolds, passive angels, and fairies as a cunning facet of the Devil’s snares. Assimilated into the angel/demon binary, theologians almost always positioned morally ambiguous spirits in the latter (demonic) category. Formal teachings of the Catholic church urged that encounter with a malevolent intelligence might be manifold and severely diverse. Since fallen angels could assume countless forms and transform the appearance of material objects, they were capable of employing their subtle natures to inventively deceive humanity. For these reasons, theological discourses on demons did not cauterize creative descriptions of spiritual creatures. To the contrary, the host of spiritual creatures that populate folk tales and exemplary texts helped to inform orthodox demonology—meaning theologians and clerics could use such tales to demonstrate the wide range of demonic deceptions and encounters in the premodern world.

Admittedly, the subject of mysterious apparitions and spirited presences does not easily lend itself to critical historical study of premodern Christianity. For example, accounts of “neutral angels” are recorded exclusively in poetic compositions and legend. To a considerable degree, passive angels and demons existed in a literary tradition steeped in medieval entertainment, storytelling, and fabula (fables), rather than proper historia (i.e., things done in history or res gestae). The same could generally be said of tales in high medieval chronicles, as well as in courtly and exemplary literature, which include “helpful demons” and “non-angelic spirits.” On the
surface, these imaginative conceptions may seem to present certain challenges to the teachings of theologians. However, to premodern eyes and ears they commonly reflected a narrative “state of exception,” in which benevolent devils and whimsical fairies revealed prominent forms of pious didacticism.\textsuperscript{167} Hence, despite any unorthodox assumptions or claims about spirits inhabiting the cosmos, these discourses did not attract sharp theological censure in their original setting. With rather broad strokes, we can say that the type of “cultural work” performed in texts that mention neutral angels, helpful demons, and non-angelic spirits is fictive and experimental rather than theologically definitional.\textsuperscript{168}

At the same time, “other” spirits do frequently appear in \textit{historiae rerum gestarum}, as we shall see. And it was precisely for this reason that later demonologists drew from many of the sources interpreted below, appropriating their labile manifestations for theological and pastoral purposes. In order to provide a representative and workable cross-section, I use sources primarily from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While these are by no means the only examples one might investigate, they are illustrative of concerns about spiritual ambiguity adopted in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century demonological analyses. Moreover, the sheer wealth of material that derives from this period did not go unnoticed in the following centuries. Johann Weyer, Ludwig Lavater, Martin Delrio, and others found both useful and frustrating responses to preternatural ambiguity from these earlier authors. Thus, Walter Map, Gervase of Tilbury, Jacques de Vitry, and Caesarius von Heisterbach feature as authorities in later texts on the subject. These high medieval men proffered their own pious responses to questions concerning demonic deceits as they emerged and


re-emerged. This chapter, therefore, moves forward with an eye toward the late medieval and early modern bricolage of spiritual beings. It takes seriously that, at the very least, premodern individuals and communities claimed to have extraordinary experiences with diverse spiritual creatures—and these would have significant implications for the cultures in which they were generated.

**Literary Accounts of Neutral Angels**

Medieval literature that features morally ambivalent spirits can be unwieldy. Our earliest chronological source (or collection of sources), the broad corpus of premodern *Brendaniana*, is exemplary in this regard. Extant copies of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* survive in over 125 medieval manuscripts. These were translated between the eighth and sixteenth centuries from Latin into nearly a dozen vernacular languages. They also exist in several textual variants across a wide array of different times and places.\(^{169}\) It is therefore understandable that some confusion would arise over how the *Navigatio* was interpreted. As the varied stories of Brendan entail an exemplary holy figure guided by divine providence, and therefore defined by sanctity, hagiography seems an appropriate genre. However, the *Navigatio* was rarely treated as such; for it creatively blends hagiographic tropes with those found in Irish voyage (*immrama*) and Latin visionary literature.\(^{170}\)

In particular, the eighth-century Latin text tells of an Irish monk named Brendan and a small group of monastic companions as they embark to find the “Promised Land of the Saints.”\(^{171}\)

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\(^{171}\) There are numerous translations of the legend. I have chosen the collection of translations found in *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).
Exactly one year into their journey, the seafaring religious brothers anchor on a previously uncharted island. Upon immediate landfall, Brendan spots a sizeable flock of white birds covering an enormous tree and prays that God may reveal their purpose there. One of the feathered creatures approaches the monk, explaining that

We survive the great destruction of the ancient enemy, but we were not associated with them through any sin of ours. When we were created, Lucifer’s fall and that of his followers brought about our destruction also. But our God is just and true. In his great judgment he sent us here. We endure no sufferings. Here we can see God’s presence. But God has separated us from sharing the lot of the others who were faithful. We wander through various regions of the air and the firmament and the earth, just like the others spirits that travel on their missions. But on holy days and Sundays we were given bodies such as you see now so that we may stay here and praise our Creator.172

The angelic bird thereafter returns to the others. To the astonishment of the monks, the mysterious spiritual beings chant vespers together in harmony later that evening. The following day they even give reverence to God by performing the canonical hours.

In this earliest extant version of the *Navigatio*, the angels do not share “the lot of the others who were faithful” but are given visible bodies on specific occasions in order to give praise to the heavenly Lord. In later variations of the story, the narrative assumes a number of differing forms. For example, in a late medieval German version—closer to Agrippa’s native language and meaning above—we read of similar beings that assert:

We were close to him [God] in Heaven and lost our beautiful appearance because we were Lucifer’s followers when he was thrown out of Heaven. When he rose against God, we did not have enough judgement to be able to love or fear God. We also lacked discernment of what was good or bad for us to do. When Lucifer fell, God saw our lack of judgement and cast us out, together with Lucifer and the other angels who fell with him, who did not have the power of judgement…Because we did not suggest it, God in his mercy excluded us from Lucifer’s company and did not cast us into Hell. God gave us the land and we have hope that in the future he will show us some mercy.173


As Cornelius Agrippa intimates (above) in the *Occult Philosophy*, certain traditions orbiting the legend attest to demons that are said to hope for divine mercy and salvation. These brief episodes also imply that, alongside corrupted and blessed angels, a third coterie of partially fallen spirits existed in popular storytelling. In the Latin version of the *Navigatio*, this third group of angels was not expressly sinful during the celestial rebellion. In the later German telling, they were initially “Lucifer’s followers” but remained morally indecisive during the war in heaven; they are also said to still “wander through various regions of the air and the firmament and the earth, just like the others spirits that travel on their missions.” The *Navigatio* thus creatively flirts with the idea that these angels might also be encountered in the known world.

Yet, it is important to notice as these so-called “neutral angels” are encountered on the outermost reaches of the known world—not in the premodern home. Likely the product of Celtic monastic traditions, Brendan’s voyages exhibit typical motifs of otherworldly adventure, discovery of fantastic islands, treacherous waters, and eventual arrival at Christian paradise.174 This means that the stories of Brendan and his entourage show an interest in the marvelous, the unknown, and the otherworldly. Indeed, the *Navigatio* represents a highly inclusive and cross-breed literary category—that of widely celebrated legend. With its broad readership in the Middle Ages, the *Navigatio* exists as one of the most famous European legends to carry forward into the early modern period and beyond.175 Small wonder that notable intellectual figures would comment on the tale of wondrous seafaring voyage.

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The eleventh-century chronicler and monk, Rodulfus Glaber, for example, includes mention of Saint Brendan in his *Five Books of History* at the abbey of Cluny. A rather credulous historian, Glaber claimed that Brendan was not Irish but English born, and that popular opinion of the saint’s journey attested to the existence of a giant whale that “seemed like an island.” Others doubted the legend altogether (seen below)—a highly conspicuous fact considering that incredulity was not a common response in medieval thought. More often, stories of extraordinary transformations or astonishing occurrences were interpreted as illusions or marvels rather than fictions. It is therefore striking that in the twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis poked fun at the travels of Brendan, proclaiming that “these things might truly be thought incredible, except that, to those who believe, all things are possible.” A century later, the great encyclopedist, Vincent de Beauvais, similarly declared that the work was “apocryphal delirium.” The harshest attack on the *Navigatio*, however, comes from an anonymous (high-late) medieval poem found in a manuscript at Lincoln College, Oxford. The poem begins by ascribing a grave crime (grave crimen) to the saint, calling the legend ridiculous (risu), full of absurdity (plenam stulticie), and an outright fable (fabulosum). For our purposes, the short work of poetry denigrates Brendan’s Christian orthodoxy regarding created spirits. Midway through the text, lines 24-28 read:

His fabellas addit plures, non cessando fingere,
Demones saluandos fore, laudes Deo soluere;

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According to the poet, the legend contains a great deal of naïve and unworldly imagery, but some images are more egregious than others. In particular, the notion that a portion of the angelic choirs sided neither with God nor Satan was considered especially distasteful, if not suggestive of heresy. In an admonishing tone, the anonymous poet is clear that these spiritual beings should not be understood as neutral angels: they are labeled “demones.” The author also bemoans that these demons are said to give praise to God and ask for divine forgiveness—an idea that suggests some demons were not entirely driven by hatred for the creation and will of God. Perhaps for these reasons some variations of the legend entirely omit the scene of neutral angels praying for redemption.

Whatever the Navigatio’s intellectual reception, one will be hard-pressed to find canonical justification for neutral angels. Possibly alluding to Revelation 12:7-9, the biblical scene of battle


\[181\] The seriousness of such a charge was later witnessed in accusations of “Luciferanism”—the purported belief that fallen angels could be restored to heaven—in the fourteenth century. See Robert Lerner, \textit{The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 25-31; Euan Cameron, \textit{Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe} (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 99-100.

\[182\] Two surviving Catalan manuscripts briefly describe the birds as birds (not spirits); Margaret Burrell, trans., \textit{The Voyage of Saint Brendan} (2002), 257.
between the Archangel Michael and the dragon—called the Devil and Satan—maintains that the serpent was hurled down from heaven “and his angels with him.” Equally condemning, Revelations 3:15-16 renounces tepidity as an acceptable moral position toward God. Scholars have suggested that perhaps the legend draws from biblical passages concerning the sexually licit actions of angelic Nephilim. These watcher angels, described in the apocryphal 1 Enoch, brought to humanity occult knowledge and were associated with the Great Flood that followed. On the other hand, some have also endeavored to find precedents in Teutonic and Irish myth. In all these accounts, the attempt to fully reconcile biblical or pagan accounts with the voyage of Brendan remains tenuous. It seems plausible that the legend relies on imagery from the Bible and elsewhere to make the scene both comprehensible and compelling to readers. On surer footing, we can assert that the concept of neutral angels was disseminated with the Navigatio across Latin Europe and refashioned in other literary accounts.

In two spectacular examples the tradition exists in the twelfth-century romance Parzival and Dante Alighieri’s Inferno. To the former, Wolfram von Eschenbach depicts a scene of chivalric longing for the Holy Grail, an object which grants the reward of heavenly afterlife. Accentuating the miraculous power of the Grail, Wolfram describes how

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183 “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (NRSV).


186 See, for example, references to Zingerle, Alpenburg, and Lütolf in Seeber, “Über die ‘Neutralen Engel’” (1892): 33-34; Jacob Grimm, Irischen elfenmärchen, hrsg. von Johannes Rutz (München: Piper, 1906).
those who stood on neither side when Lucifer and the Trinity began to contend, all such angels, noble and worthy, had to descend to earth, to this same stone [the Grail]. The stone is forever pure. I do not know if God forgave them or whether he condemned them from that time forth. If He deemed it right, he took them back. The stone has been tended ever since by those appointed by God to the task, and to whom He sent His angel.\textsuperscript{187}

The introduction of angels “on neither side” functions to intensify the reader’s understanding of the Grail’s fictive power. Set within a larger discussion of pious humility, Wolfram plays with the idea that, even among the most seemingly ambivalent and obscure of God’s creatures, such an imaginative object would prove enticing enough to draw the neutral angels to it. As hidden guardians of the supernatural Grail, their location and divinely ordained fate remains unknown. Both the \textit{Navigatio} and \textit{Parzival} thus depict these angels as cast from heaven but hoping for divine redemption.

Interestingly, the scene in \textit{Parzival} is itself carefully framed by ambivalence and uncertainty: “I do not know if God forgave them.” Later in the romance, the character Trevrizent qualifies for the reader that “the tale I told you was that the expelled spirits, with God’s support, were present by the Grail, waiting there until they won favour. God is so constant in His ways that He contends forever against those I named to you as being in His favour.”\textsuperscript{188} The initial introduction of neutral angels operates as a literary device meant to heighten the sense of wonder orbiting the Grail’s power, stewardship, and salvific magnetism. However, this early astonishment is later retracted, presumably in favor of compatibility with Christian theology. On the theme of neutral angels, therefore, \textit{Parzival} concludes that God will always mete out just punishment to those who deserve it.


\textsuperscript{188} Wolfram, \textit{Parzival} (2006), 334.
With similar penal emphasis, Dante masterfully includes mention of passive angels in his fourteenth-century epic poem *The Divine Comedy*. Just beyond the gates of Hell in Canto 3 of the *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil suddenly encounter the deafening din of spiritual anger, suffering, and tumult. Inquiring into the source of this loud wailing, Virgil instructs his Florentine passenger that

This miserable mode the dreary souls of those sustain, who lived without blame, and without praise. They are mixed with that caitiff choir of the angels, who were not rebellious, nor were faithful to God; but were for themselves. Heaven chased them forth to keep its beauty from impair; and the deep Hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them…these have no hope of death; and their blind life is so mean, that they are envious of every other lot. Report of them the world permits not to exist; Mercy and Justice disdains them: let us not speak of them; but look, and pass.\(^{189}\)

Dante offers the brief episode of non-rebellious angels, in part, to explain why certain human souls experience a form of isolated torment and damnation in the afterlife. At first indistinguishable to Dante, Virgil clarifies that morally indecisive humans and angels ultimately fail to recognize and love God. The neutrals are, in other words, punished for moral indeterminacy. Unlike the *Navigatio’s* positioning of the angels on a remote island, it is significant that Dante locates them inside the gates of Hell: as in *Parzival*, they have been condemned to everlasting separation from the Christian divinity.

That three of the most celebrated literary works of the high and later Middle Ages include mention of neutral angels begs brief consideration of what orthodox theological teachings might inspire their legacy. One recalls that, for Augustine, angelic existence was predicated on an instructive facet of divine providence. Granted remarkable spiritual abilities, Satan and his fallen angels represent evil as a deficiency from good, a dysfunctional relationship with a perfectly just creator. Augustine maintains that there was no intermediate position between the angelic and the

demonic; they represent two sides of the same spiritual coin. Almost a millennium later, Thomas Aquinas would add further detail, interpreting intelligent creatures (i.e., spirits and humans) and their voluntary activities along ethical and social lines. According to Aquinas, the activities of intelligent beings have polarizing moral valences, namely good and evil. Evil, in particular, arises from active causes that result in some voluntary moral fault. That is, wicked humans or spirit choose to act wickedly, and this constitutes evil behavior. Yet, contrary to the processes governing human thought and action, the moral character of corrupted and blessed angels never oscillated between good and evil. Arguing explicitly against Origen, Thomas avers that no measure of “repentant conversion” occurs for demons. Ethical reorientation was impossible because all angels were judged once and for all by their initial voluntary choice to remain with or rebel against God. The moral DNA of angelic beings, as it were, was made “immutable in either good or evil after their first choice.” In very concise and consistent terms, early Christian and scholastic theology asserted the impossibility of morally “neutral” spirits in the cosmos.

In a highly nuanced analysis, John Freccero has argued that the problem presented in literary depictions of intermediate angels emerges from their refusal to choose and act—the scholastic prerequisites for the commission of sin. On Freccero’s subtle reading, the accounts found in the Navigatio, Parzival, and Inferno intentionally frustrate the Thomist paradigm of choice and action by presenting angelic ambivalence at the crucial moment of either everlasting

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190 See chapter 1 of this dissertation and its sources, pp. 14-24.

fidelity or infidelity.\textsuperscript{192} With particular attention to the \textit{Inferno}, Freccero concludes that “privation of action, won for the \textit{per sè} [neutral] angels complete isolation in Dante’s cosmos.”\textsuperscript{193} From this perspective, the notion of angelic ambivalence comes close to the original demonic sin of pride. Yet angelic ambivalence is also distinct from Satan’s \textit{superbia} (pride) even if it is a negation of divine perfection. Specifically, these fanciful depictions of neutral angels are based upon indecision and separatism from absolute goodness. As Freccero notes, Dante’s neutral angels come closest to oblivion as denizens of a void and perpetual solitude: they are awarded a space outside even Limbo and will forever exist on the outskirts of Hell’s moralized topography “frozen in a state of aversion form God.”\textsuperscript{194}

Strikingly, in the \textit{Navigatio}, the neutral angels are placed on an isolated island (as punishment) rather than in Hell (or by the Grail in \textit{Parzival}). In all three texts, our authors have cordoned the angels off from all but the most unusual of human contact. The Latin version of the \textit{Navigatio} does, as noted above, leave open the possibility that these partially fallen beings may “wander through various regions of the air and the firmament and the earth, just like the others spirits.” And on a generous reading of the \textit{Inferno}, one might suggest that while the spirits are isolated in Hell this-side of the River Acheron, they are still further from Lucifer and his demons than scholastic theologians would ever admit. By and large, however, these angels that “were for


\textsuperscript{193} Freccero, \textit{Dante} (1986), 116.

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Ibid.}, 117.
themselves” predominantly serve as a warning against lukewarm morality. Virgil warns Dante that there is no thoroughly immanent neutrality, insisting that they “not speak of them [the angels]; but look, and pass” because “report of them the world permits not to exist; Mercy and Justice disdains them.” In the Dutch and German tellings of the *Navigatio* as well, Saint Brendan’s authority, wisdom, and piety is consistently contrasted with the neutral angels’ displacement from divine majesty.

And yet, several versions of the *Navigatio* communicate a sense of sanctuary and a divine congeniality when the neutral angels are encountered. For example, the angelic creatures always appear first as white birds that are given bodies on certain holy days so as to sing praise of God. In the Anglo-Norman voyage the avian transformation is permanent. Medieval references to white could symbolize purity and peace, just as the figure of a white bird (especially the dove) could represent manifestations of the holy spirit. Likewise, as Augustine teaches, the Latin term “*angelus*” is derived from the Greek *angelos*, which means messenger. In the Latin version, this is precisely the role performed by and the designation (“God’s messenger”) given to the bird with which Brendan initially converses. The use of such symbolic imagery suggestively reinforces the idea that the voyagers have happened upon a place of rest from the precarious ocean. Hearing the birds chant vespers with the rhythmical sounds of their wings, Brendan tells his companions

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195 See, for example, biblical references to doves as the Spirit of God at Luke 3:22; Matthew 3:16; John 1:32; also a dove or white bird that Noah sends out after the Flood at Genesis 8:6-11.


they will “repair our bodies, for today our souls are filled with divine food.” As Jude Mackley has noted, this scenography “contains a didactic message of salvation, rather than damnation: the birds are allowed to worship God, and draw comfort from the monks’ presence, and Brendan describes the birds’ welcome as an example of God’s love for them.” In other words, the neutral angels do not behave like wicked spirits; they communicate faithful worship of God and offer rest to the holy voyagers. This is conveyed both symbolically through their visual appearance and through their actions within the narrative.

It should be noted that despite their white, avian bodies, late medieval demonologist could easily point out how demonic spirits were incorporeal and had no natural “appearance,” that these manifestations were not a true reflection of their invisible being and essence. Other versions of the Navigatio also strongly suggest a demonic pedigree. In the Dutch and German iterations, the fallen angels have the conjoined appearance of dog and pig. Closer to medieval conceptions of the demonic, the beings “had boars’ heads and teeth like wolves, human hands but dogs’ legs, human bodies, but long necks like cranes. They wore silk clothing above their shaggy legs.” While marveling at the creatures, the band of monastic brothers even become terrified at the sight of such “horrible, frightening beings.” Unlike other versions of the legend, the encounter notably accentuates physical rather than spiritual descriptions. In medieval portrayals of hybridity the

198 Ibid., 37.


201 Ibid., 148.
corporeal manifestation of monstrous attributes commonly communicated an externalization of internal moral qualities. This is duly clarified in the text:

like swine, we lacked judgement. The swine does not know what to love or fear, nor even its own nature; often it prefers to be in dung than in clear water. We also had to have bodies like dogs, because once we had the habits of a dog; for a dog does not bark at someone he knows, however much that person steals from his master. We did the same in Heaven: we left Lucifer unreported when he rose against God, and did not stop him.  

For their celestial silence, the creatures have thus been punished with hybrid appearance meant to outwardly reflect their inner dispositions during the war in heaven. As behavior and appearance could reveal character, the spirits now partly embody the pig with its lack of discernment (“we lacked judgement”), its implicit loss of identity (not knowing “its own nature”), and general livelihood in filth (“prefers to be in dung”). They have also been given canine bodies, because the angels did not alert God to Lucifer’s assaults. In the Latin Middle Ages, representations of dogs were multifaceted, ambiguous, and often contradictory. In allegorical and devotional literature, hounds traditionally evoked meanings of fidelity or loyalty, as they do today. However, in the case of the neutral angels, canine reliability reveals a misplaced recognition of master-servant relations: they mistook Lucifer’s actions as innocuous. In short, the mixture of dog and pig corresponds to a “bestial confusion of inner and outer (a wolf in sheep’s clothing)” in which the purity of once blessed angels was easily associated with demonic impurity.

Accompanying these portrayals of infernal impurity, the creatures are also called Walserands in the Dutch and German translations—a term possibly derived from the Germanic Waldschrat, which was (and still means) a woodland demon discussed in Chapter 3 of this

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202 Ibid., 126-7; 149.

203 Bynum, Metamorphosis and Identity (2001), 119. I, here, borrow the phrase from Bynum, who is referring to Bernard of Clairvaux’s response to Arnold of Brescia—not “neutral angels.”
dissertation. At first glance, the designation supports the idea that the Walserands are nothing other than demons. Curiously, however, the fallen are contrasted with explicit demons in the story: the Walserands briefly report to Brendan’s group of their constant travails against veritably evil “wood goblins” (waldschrantzen). The neutral Walserands liken this ongoing battle with other demonic hordes to when they themselves “were cast from Heaven.” Here, the audience is presented with a paradox: the spirits both attest to and resist imagery that would confirm their diabolical identity.\(^{204}\) In those versions of the *Navigatio* that include these spirits, their original vice (the fall with Lucifer) and contemporary virtue (as helpful messengers/combatants against demons) leaves open the question of their moral disposition. Whether singing white birds or horrendous dog/pig hybrids, the narrative tension between good and evil is left unresolved.

Particularly compelling in the *Navigatio, Parzival, and Inferno* are those moral attributes which the neutral angels are said to have rejected. The spirits resist orthodox demonological categorization because they aligned themselves neither with rebellion nor fidelity, heaven nor hell, damnation nor salvation, sin nor righteousness. In most cases, they are represented as quarantined denizens on the remote periphery of divine creation. I have examined this body of literature because it depicts spiritual creatures as “things expelled but not relinquished,” to borrow a phrase from Nancy Levene.\(^{205}\) In treating the motif of passive angels as something of a cultural taboo, the texts above imaginatively call attention to a paradigm outside opposition and negation—one that creatively eludes, not dissolves, orthodox theology. The neutral angels are introduced as an unorthodox idea through poetic and literary texts that was exceedingly popular throughout the later

\(^{204}\) *Ibid.*, see translator’s note 12, p. 347 and note 21, p. 349.

\(^{205}\) This quote is taken from a lecture delivered at Yale University on October 22, 2012 by Nancy Levene, “Kant and the Worlds of Religion and Reason,” cited in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. by Sally M. Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 651.
Middle Ages. Besides the brief reference found in Agrippa’s *Occult Philosophy*, however, late medieval and early modern demonologists seem to have all but ignored literary claims regarding “neutral angels.” As we shall see in the next section, courtly and monastic exemplary literature would creatively flirt with the subject.

**Helpful, Harmless, and Minor Demons in Exemplary Literature**

A final example of “neutral angels” can be found in the heterogenous text composed by the twelfth-century English cleric, Walter Map. His work called *De nugis curialium* (“On the Courtiers’ Trifles”) memorably includes an assortment of satirical fables, exemplary narratives, and historical vignettes. These concern the lives of monks and nobles, as well as numerous human encounters with angels, demons, and ambiguous spirits. Map’s eclectic repertoire of “apparitions,” in particular, indicates a confluence of romantic-courtly and didactic-clerical motifs which guide his imagery of a spiritual world enveloping this one.  

The lengthy account of purportedly passive spirits is included in this section (and not the previous) because Map deliberately attempts to dissolve the neutrality attributed to so-called ambivalent angels. In doing so, he proffers a thoroughly orthodox anecdote steeped in Augustinian cosmology and the dialogic form of Gregory the Great. His story of ambivalent spirits thus refigures their “neutral” identity as one meant to disclose superficially helpful demons.

In Distinction IV of *De nugis*, Map introduces the tale of an English baron’s son named Eudo, who has recently lost his family inheritance.  

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207 The tale is found in *De nugis curialium* (1983), dist. iv, c. 6, pp. 314-41.
man encounters a stranger promising the return of Eudo’s former wealth and status. We are told that Eudo has only to listen to the man’s advice and submit to his “lordship” (dominio).\textsuperscript{208} Suspecting demonic enslavement in the man’s meaning, Eudo prudently questions whether the stranger is of infernal provenance. In response, the man states that he is a spirit called Olga who was exiled from heaven with Lucifer. The creature stresses, however, that humans should distinguish between those spirits that “followed that shining prince to the North; [for] some were fosterers of schism, some helpers, some seducers of others, some acquiescing, some uncertain of what was afoot, but all proud against God, or careless of prudence.” Pleading with Eudo, the spirit Olga urges his human counterpart to discern that “we harmless ones are stained by their [the harmful demons’] ill repute.”\textsuperscript{209}

Akin to the passages found in the \textit{Navigatio}, \textit{Parzival}, and \textit{Inferno}, Map’s audience is immediately thrust into a narrative that approximates the theme of neutral angels. The episode also implies that readers and listeners will understand the reference to a general hierarchy of wicked angels. Occupying the nadir of demonic evils, Olga confesses he is capable of performing certain affective abilities: he can “cast glamour, contrive hallucinations, cause apparitions so as to veil reality and produce false and absurd appearance.”\textsuperscript{210} Despite this propensity for illusory activity, Olga implores Eudo not to fear such spirits “on the authority of books” because they are not “hunters of souls” nor even “criminal or cruel.” Map initially depicts Olga as a theological enigma, then, by suggesting the creature is demonic but harmless. Modelled on human image and likeness,

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 316-17.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 318-21.

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 320-21.
the spirit is endowed with recognizable emotions, passions, interests, and reactions. Moreover, the character is appealing for his moral proximity to humankind.

The first half of this thirteen-page tale thus presents something of a climactic tension. By depicting Olga as morally attractive, Map playfully portrays an ethereal being that ought under any other circumstances have already been designated an evil demon. In a sense, the audience must await proof that Olga cannot be what he claims. Partial release is given as the man (Eudo) concedes fealty to the spirit by having “assented to the pact” (*adquiescit in pactis*).\(^{211}\) We will return to the relevance of “the pact” shortly. For now, it is important to notice that as the story unfolds Eudo falls further and further from the humanity he increasingly neglects. Gathering criminals to him, he sleeps through his days and engages in nocturnal crimes which allow him to regain his former wealth. Eudo’s exploits also notably earn him social isolation and episcopal condemnation. The true nature and intentions of Olga are tacitly exposed only when the spirit assumes the form of an “angel of light” (*in angelum se transformans lucis*).\(^{212}\) In an angelic plea for his moral innocence, Olga claims that his human servant now practices “a wickedness that exceeds what is suitable to my fairy nature.” Unsurprisingly, Eudo’s dreadful crimes end in death shortly thereafter, with the moral of Map’s tale assuming an orthodox conclusion: despite any claims to the contrary, engagement with ostensibly benign demons will consistently prove disastrous to the human soul.

Modern readers of this and similar stories might ask: What purpose do these rather circuitous tales serve in making such a critical soteriological point? Why not just plainly state, as orthodox theologians like Augustine and Aquinas do, that demons are never to be trusted, no matter the visible or invisible forms they assume? Admittedly, *De nugis* is not quite paradigmatic of


medieval exemplary literature; it draws from and inspires a novel “emancipation of story” in the context of the High Middle Ages.\footnote{G. T. Shepherd, “The Emancipation of Story in the Twelfth Century,” in \textit{Medieval Narrative: A Symposium}, Proceedings of the Third International Symposium of the Centre of the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1979), 44-57.} Map indulges in a measure of poetic license that exceeded many of his contemporaries’ preferences. His text also bespeaks a courtly audience somewhat different from, say, that of Jacques de Vitry and Caesarius von Heisterbach—both authors produced tremendously influential collections of preachable \textit{exempla} (discussed below). These authorial differences notwithstanding, Map includes pertinent theological commonplaces that would have been readily apparent to his readers and listeners—and these are found universally in more traditional pastoral sources. That is, anecdotes like Map’s productively communicate that helpful demons were often more than they appeared to be.

In general, the association of any narrative figure, worldly or otherwise, with the pride of Lucifer would cast them in a demonic mold. Even as one said to have rejected satanic rebellion, Eudo’s proximity to and general identification with the fallen angels suggests something is amiss. Moreover, the very obvious devolution of Eudo’s slavish character into criminal affinities points toward the diabolical influences of Olga. With more nuance, Map relies on courtly and theological motifs to make his point. Eudo’s initial reticence at the word “\textit{dominio}” and his later assent to a spiritual “\textit{pactum}” combines medieval motifs of vassalage with Augustine’s notion of “a pact of faithless and deceitful friendship.”\footnote{Augustine, \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill/Library of Liberal Arts, 1958), c. xxiii, p. 59. For modern scholarly perspectives on the pact—these will be given further attention in the next chapter of this dissertation—see Hans Peter Broedel, \textit{The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 122-4; Euan Cameron, \textit{Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 84-127; Michael Bailey, \textit{Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 9-21.} By inverting conceptions of secular fealty (to a spirit rather
than a Christian king or noble family), Eudo’s voluntary submission to Olga symbolically conveys a rejection of both worldly protection and divine covenant (a biblical-historical “pact” with God). The contractual transformation is made explicit toward the story’s end, where Eudo tells Olga: “Henceforth I call you not a demon, but an angel of the Lord, not merely my master but my father too.” Map thus aptly portrays the insidious manner in which Eudo’s original fear of demonic enslavement has become a reality. Our author first implies and then explicitly communicates that the character Eudo has turned away from God and relinquished his communion with Christendom.

Equally instructive, Eudo’s demonic enslavement is witnessed in Olga’s final transformation into an “angel of light.” Every medieval schoolboy and courtier would have recognized the phrase as an axiomatic reference to the Devil’s prevarication. It derives from the apostle Paul’s words at 2 Corinthians 11:14: “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” The passage also evokes the directive at 1 John 4:1 to “believe not every spirit,” lest appearances prove deceitful. For Walter Map’s purposes, his audience is regaled by the anecdote’s moral twists and turns, but with clear denouement: Eudo definitively lacks the necessary discernment to secure salvation for his soul. That is, the baron’s son demonstrably allows himself to favor a demonic spirit. In this case, fault lay not with the duplicitous demon per se, but in Eudo’s failure to recognize the consistent exacerbation of his already faltering human disposition. As Map himself remarks: Eudo patently becomes “worse than his former self.”

In light of Map’s mixed ecclesiastical historia and courtly fabula, it is important to notice that such colorful accounts were increasingly employed in the High Middle Ages for their entertaining and didactic character. Indeed, demonic deeds, characters, and influence was

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215 Map, De nugis curialium (1983), dist. iv, c. 6, pp. 334-35.

216 De nugis curialium (1983), 336-7. This phrase is repeated twice by Map in this section for emphasis.
extensively developed in the tradition of medieval exempla. With broad strokes, exempla exist as brief anecdotes or collections thereof and often convey edifying moral truths to an audience. The employment of apoloques in medieval sermons would become common practice until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially among monastic and mendicant authors. In general, these illustrative stories include details that communicate a familiar time, place, and associational figures (e.g., a monk, noble, virgin, rustic, bishop). Widespread in this historical period, they contained edifying narratives coupled with the emotional force of a well-delivered joke. The combination of both was meant to register a reassuring tale to be repeated and remembered.

With this in mind, a number of influential pastoral figures in the High Middle Ages emerged as theological authorities on demons within the medieval exemplum tradition. One such author was Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), a clerical preacher and later cardinal to Pope Gregory IX, who garnered in his Sermones Vulgares numerous tales of marginally harmful demons. At times, the illustrative narratives of Vitry’s sermons assume a satirical tone reminiscent of Map’s De nugis. In such instances, the “story” might appear to take precedence over its “moral” illustration. This is not to say that moralization was completely dismissed, but that it variously informed how the narrative was interpreted and remembered. With playful levity, for example, Vitry tells of a penitent woman confessing her desire to cease swearing but was unable to do so before her priest:

She replied: “Sir, God help me, I’ll not swear again.” The priest said: “You have just sworn.” “By God, I’ll refrain from it again.” The priest told her her speech should be “yea, yea,” and “nay, nay,” as the Lord had commanded, for more than this was wrong. She

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217 Scholars have identified at least twelve different types of exempla. See, for example, Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages, trans. by Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). See also the introduction to The Exempla of Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry, ed. and trans. by T. S. Crane (New York: B. Franklin, 1971), xviii; Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, L’Exemplum, pamphlet 40 in the series Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental, ed. by Léopold Génicot and R. Bultot (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982).

replied: “Sir, you are right, and I tell you by the blessed Virgin, and all the saints, that I will do as you command me, and you shall never hear me swear.”

While the exemplum does not describe demonic interference, it illustrates the entertaining quality some accounts assumed: each time the woman makes an oath, she instantly breaks the previous with yet another venial sin. More relevant to our purposes, the example shows that one had to be constantly vigilant in speech and action, which was a common motif in demonological literature. In many instances, Christians inadvertently invoked the Devil with hasty words. Thus in one of Vitry’s anecdotes, we are told that an anonymous man spoke to his servant: “Come devil, off with my shoes,” at which point a devil appeared and loosened the man’s footwear with the realization that “he found him [the devil] ready, who is always on the watch.” Vigilance in speech was equally important in the context of cloistered monks. Margaret Jennings has traced the historical lineage of what would become in the later Middle Ages a ledger demon named Tutivillus, who collected misspoken verses in churches and monasteries. The earliest known account is found in Vitry’s Sermones Vulgares:

I have heard that a certain holy man, while in the choir, saw a devil with the onus of a full bag. However, when he abjured the demon to tell what he carried, the devil said: “These are the syllables and syncopated words and verses of the psalms which the clerics omitted from God during Matins; these I diligently preserve for their accusation.” Diligently observe, therefore, the mystery of the altar lest indignation arise over the people.

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220 Ibid., ccxcv, pp.124, 263. This is found originally in Gregory the Great, Dialogues (1959), bk. 3.20, p. 151. There are countless examples of accidental invocation: another of Vitry’s examples of demonic utterances can be found in Goswin Frenken, Die Exempla des Jakob von Vitry. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Erzählungs-Literatur des Mittelalters (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1914), no. 64; also, Caesarius, Dialogue on Miracles, vol. 1 (1929), bk. v, ch. xi, p. 332; ch. xxvi, pp. 353-54; ch. xxvii, p. 354, ch. xliii, p. 376. On this topic generally, see Gurevich, Medieval Popular Culture (1988), 189.


222 Vitry, The Exempla of Illustrative Stories (1971), xix, pp. 6, 141.
The tale was later repeated in different forms by such notable figures as Caesarius von Heisterbach, Etienne de Bourbon, Johannes Herolt, and Johannes Gobius.\textsuperscript{223} To the “accusation” threatened by the demon, the \textit{exemplum} implies that the demon kept a tally of both mortal and venial sins and was particularly keen to sniff out clumsiness with divine prayer. At least by the end of the thirteenth century, the record-keeping demon was designated as Tutivillus but without any clarification for what the names means. Several other stories in this tradition communicate how relatively innocuous devils were prepared to enact relatively minor mischief rather than widespread destruction.

The above examples raise intriguing questions for modern readers: If demons represented threatening forces that sought to cause human suffering, what about those wicked spirits which sit inactive on lettuce, collect omitted prayers, and remove people’s garments by implicit command? How did clerical preachers and theologians explain the diversity of experiences or accounts of experiences with fallen angels? As noted in Chapter 1, most orthodox theologians argued that the Devil and his demons constituted obstacles to salvation. The same lesson is found in Eudo’s moral perversion and general attraction to Olga, as well as in the examples from Vitry above: despite seemingly harmless appearances, demons sought to befuddle humanity with minor, albeit insidious temptations and illusions. Other theological teachers admitted that particular names and affective attributes could be given to a vague ranking among demonic beings. Following Gregory the Great, one way to approach the subject was by associating demons (often the names of pagan deities in the Bible) with the seven deadly sins: pride, sloth, envy, lust, anger, gluttony, and avarice.\textsuperscript{224} As

\textsuperscript{223} Jennings, “Tutivillus” (1977), 14.

an orthodox system of community ethics, these grievous acts were relatable to the deeds of fallen angels. Alternatively, some theologians with Neoplatonic inclinations speculated that demons might become allied with diverse forms of matter. For example, the eleventh-century dialogue called *On the Workings of Demons*—attributed to the eleventh-century Byzantine philosopher, Michael Psellus—asserts that “some demons are corporeal and palpable,” inhabiting the elements of fire, wind, water, and earth. Akin to the early Christian heresy of Origen, the treatise declares that demonic embodiment exists (but unlike Origen) for the purpose of explaining their immortal suffering in Hell. The text attributed to Psellus acknowledges that all aerial, earthly, light-fleeing, igneous, aqueous, and subterranean demons are uniformly evil. It asserts, however, that these spirits lack the capacity to perform marvelous feats: for they “have not a particle of wit, and are incapable of cunning.” Both arguments—that demon possess asinine characteristics and are said to embody elemental qualities—are presented in order to elucidate different facets of misfortune and suffering experienced in the physical world, suggesting that various types of demons afflicted


226 The text attributed to Michael Psellus is *Psellus’ Dialogue on the Operation of Daemons: Now, for the first time translated into English from the original Greek*, trans. Marcus Collisson (Sydney: James Tegg, 1843), 18-49 (the quote is at p. 28). While the text would become increasingly popular, if controversial, only during the early modern Renaissance, it should be noted that a similar identification of demonic spirits with elemental matter is found in more orthodox, Western texts and traditions. To take one example, the Dominican preacher of the thirteenth century, Thomas de Cantimpré, included in his collection of sermons a rough ordering of demons that were said to inhabit earth, water, and the air. Cantimpré, however, is careful not to argue that the demons constitute the elements themselves; they only dwell there. See Thomas de Cantimpré, *Les exemples du Livre des Abeilles*, trans. by Henri Platelle (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), bk. 2, ch. 57, p. 250: “Il y a des demons qui demeurent dans les eaux: les poètes les appellent des neptuni; d’autres demeurent dans les grottes des montagnes ou dans la forêt; saint Augustin les appelle dusii (succubes); d’autres enfin dans les airs: ce sont les espirits d’iniquité répandus dans les airs, dont parle l’Apôtre (Ephésiens, 6, 12).”

humanity according to their elemental characteristics. Orthodox theologians in the Latin West accepted that demons occupied and manipulated the natural environment and atmosphere to lead humanity into confusion. They rejected that fallen angels were in any sense trivial; moreover, demonic spirits never constituted material aspects of the elements themselves. According to received tradition, demons could act as animating forces that manipulated nature in order to throw human knowledge and experience into confusion. Scholastic authors insisted that the inimical qualities of demonic evil worked discretely, by divine permission, within the natural world.

In medieval courtly and exemplary literature, demons are generally introduced as didactic set-pieces or as reported phenomena; very rarely do they represent abstract metaphysical principles, as in scholastic theological treatises. In many cases, however, exemplary accounts could reflect the conventional tropes encouraged by learned churchmen. The contemporary of Walter Map, William of Newburgh, for example, told of a rustic man named Ketell who possessed the unique ability of perceiving invisible devils in the physical world. According to William, his reputable informant observed a range of malicious forms: “some demons were large, robust, and crafty, and, when permitted by a superior power, extremely hurtful; others were small contemptible, impotent in strength and dull in understanding; but all, according to their measure, mischievous to men, and highly pleased at injuring him, if even only slightly.”

As Thomist metaphysics would describe in greater detail a century later, fallen angels assumed both inimical and seemingly innocuous forms as a method of corrupting human intellect and emotions.

In the thirteenth century, Caesarius von Heisterbach in his *Dialogue on Miracles* reiterates results similar to those of William of Newburgh, adding that demons appear to laity “in the form

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of a dog or a pig, or again in the form of a bear or a cat or any other animal.”229 Most of the Cistercian abbot’s moral tales convey how encounter with a demon translates into certain death or misfortune. Through a continuous dialogue between the figures of a Monk and Novice, Caesarius explains that demons “are called tempters, because they are either the authors or provokers of all the temptations that draw men to sin.” Thus, the Monk relates to the Novice “that there are demons, that they are many, and that they are wicked, I shall be able to show you by many examples.”230

In the majority of accounts scattered throughout the Dialogue on Miracles, demons attack, deceive, and arrange various means to tempt Christians into sinful action. In one example, a demonic incubus deals a priest named Arnold “so violent a blow in the breast, that he vomited blood, and, within three days, was dead.”231 In another, a demon disembowels a knight named Thiemon after gambling with dice—ending in the double loss of the knight's money and life.232

Strikingly, some demons in Caesarius’ Dialogue also speak through and with humans, and at times by means of benevolent counsel to Christians in need. In one spectacular instance, the Monk conveys to the Novice that a demon—having possessed an unknown man—spoke the unconfessed sins of a pious canon with the result that all “the brethren were much edified.”233


230 Ibid., bk. v, ch. i, pp. 313-14.

231 Ibid., bk. iii, ch. viii, pp. 135-36.

232 Ibid., bk. v, ch. xxxiv, pp. 364-65.

233 Ibid., bk. iii, ch. v, pp. 128-29.
More ambiguously still, after a report on how the inhabitants of the German town Soest debated whether “their [personal] demons” would protect them from death, the Novice asks if “all demons are not equally malicious?” The Monk clarifies that “it is said that some [demons] simply consented to join the others who with Lucifer rebelled against God, and while these fell with the rest, yet they are less evil, and they do less harm to men.”

In view of these few examples, it would appear that certain demons could exemplify both good and evil traits, thereby suggesting some demonic spirits demonstrated varying degrees of moral correctness and turpitude. The antics of these “less evil” or minor demons usually amounted to inane childishness; they also had precedents in the earlier Middle Ages. In the ninth-century *Life of Charlemagne*, Notker the Stammerer recorded a tale concerning “a certain devil of the type called hobgoblins, whose particular function it is to foster the petty foibles and deceits of human beings.” This fallen creature promised the local blacksmith a full cup of daily wine, if he would allow the spirit to play with his hammers and anvils at night.

In cases where exemplary literature directly addresses the theme, apparently harmless demons are typically said to be part of a larger ruse manufactured by the Devil. In his *Dialogue*, Caesarius notably begins Book V, entitled “Of Demons,” with the rhetorical question: “If the devil tempted the first man in Paradise, if he presumed to tempt Christ in the Desert, what man is there in the whole world that he will leave untempted?” The Cistercian abbot thus introduces his fifth book with overt moral and theological gestures that connect the life and deeds of Christ to demonic influence on humanity. As such, Caesarius frames his exemplary tales around an orthodox


\[236\] Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, bk. v, ch. i, p. 313.
theological understanding of the demonic, echoing the declaration of faith at the Fourth Lateran Council recounted in the introduction above. Hence, it is all the more surprising to find Caesarius’ *Monk* suggest to the *Novice* that moderately helpful devils were at the very least conceivable. Resonating with Map’s account of Eudo, the figure of the *Monk* avers that a host of rebellious angels were separated from God as punishment for their pride and malice. According to Caesarius, however, there exist some angels that passively acquiesced “to join the others…with Lucifer” and were punished for this reason. No biblical evidence is presented for the *Monk*’s explanation, nor are we given references from the church fathers. Rather, the *Monk* frames his brief discussion of the issue with the qualifying phrase “it is said,” at once indicating authorial distance from or perhaps credulity towards the account and that conceptions of a *diabolica bonitas* were all but exceptional.

Significantly, the issue of minor or helpful demons is not directly discussed in scholastic theology, but assumed under the themes of demonic changeability and potency. In large part, clerical exempla typify the most fertile source for conceptions of benevolent demons, presumably for their entertaining and didactic character. Remarking on the possible provenance of Caesarius’ account, the Russian scholar Aron Gurevich has argued that notions of innocuous demons “entered medieval Latin literature from popular fantasy.” Here, Gurevich endorses the contentious view that a divide existed between vernacular and Latin worldviews in which “popular” and “elite” (i.e., learned) cultures held radically different understandings of the cosmos. On this perspective, Caesarius (a literate monk) recorded an idea derived from “popular” folk tales and vernacular storytelling for the purposes of didactic entertainment, rather than to make a theological point. The

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237 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (1941), pt. 1 qu. 64.

thorny problems orbiting theories of “popular culture”—reducing medieval mentalités to a two-tier binary—have been dealt with at length (for decades) by scholars. Without wanting to support a strict cultural dichotomy, contrast can be observed; namely, where ecclesiastical discussions of demonic affliction focus on a cohesive moral framework orbiting fallen angels, exemplary literature often foregrounds hapless spontaneity within the ambit of demonic and lay interactions. In this latter body of literature especially, a moral purpose is not always apparent. Instead of neatly fitted into received theological tradition, morally ambiguous spirits often serve to describe the vagaries of human life in the forms of untimely death, illness, and general loss. Questions of retribution and sin are generally sidelined in favor of grappling with slippery examples of misfortune. These differences were sometimes diversely addressed by medieval authors.

Walter Map, for example, inquired into “what is to be said of these and of like stories” in which eremites, such as Saint Paul and Anthony, encountered centaurs and the ancient demon Pan, who “has in him the form of all nature.” Map mentions most of his anecdotal apparitions without clear delineation of a moral purpose, although here he seems to suggest that nature itself


exemplified indiscernible moral qualities. More prominently, Caesarius rehearses several anecdotes about invisible demons that push lay Christians into wells, foment storms and sickness, manufacture misspoken words and awkward actions, appearing as an ominous cloud or a brush of wind that blows out candlelight. Caesarius even highlights the distinction between: 1. “the Religious and especially the monastic Orders, [where] temptation is penance or satisfaction for sin,” and 2. “the worldly and carnal, who walk according to the flesh, [and] are not properly said to be tempted.”241 As a Cistercian abbot, the Dialogue was composed largely for trained monks whose purpose centered on enclosed monastic asceticism and pious perfection, thereby intimating that where monks experienced veritable “temptation,” while the rest of Western Europe was prone to wickedness even without temptations.

The ample number of exempla which delineate notions of minor misfortunes may well “have entered medieval Latin literature from popular fantasy,” as Gurevich and others have noted;242 they also certainly bespeak a universal anxiety concerning the precariousness of premodern life.243 In this, vivid descriptions of demonic action become instructive for a much broader audience that scholastic theology, especially if we acknowledge that the medieval world was far from rigidly dichotomous with regard to demonic encounters. Whether theologically comprehensive or locally particular, medieval thinkers produced and collected tales about demons that could communicate a wide range of subtle and seismic afflictions. Above all else, Caesarius’ discussion of demons communicates how the entire premodern world was beset with devils in a variety of forms. Like Walter Map, Jacques de Vitry, and others, he consistently perceives demons


242 Gurevich, Medieval Popular Culture (1990), 191.

243 On such dangers and misfortunes, see Cameron, Enchanted Europe (2010), 31-40.
as the “stumbling blocks in the way of our salvation,” while also demonstrating that the heterogeneity of such obstacles was difficult to systematically discern.244

**Non-Angelic Entrances and Entrancements**

In addition to neutral angels and helpful demons, authors ascribed numerous names and descriptions to a mixed lot of other “non-angelic” spirits from various vernacular traditions. In fact, a good deal of premodern literature reminds us that we cannot always assume to know to what many authors are referring when they call attention to “alii spiritus” (“other spirits”). Unlike the accounts above of neutral angels and helpful devils, we now turn to reported phenomena that exhibit highly parochial expressions and impressions. Broad terms like “spirit,” “angel,” or “demon” thus often fail to accurately characterize beings variously called fairies (in Latin *fata* or *fatalita*), fauns, satyrs, nymphs (or driads), neptunes, *inter alia*. At the same time, where these elusive creatures often resist orthodox categorization and signification, interpretation is possible where vivid accounts are given for how these uncanny “others” were reported to appear, act, and make demands before those privileged or burdened humans that encountered them.

Often found in narratives that convey a sense of wonder at remarkable bodies, abilities, and environments, non-angelic manifestations occurred unexpectedly in naturalistic surroundings (i.e., mountainous, wooded, and watery locations) and small cityscapes. In such cases, the spirits themselves become visible of their own volition, which could be dangerous or salvific. In rarer instances, engagement with “non-angelic” spirits could entail ritual practices predicated on an opportunity for reward or punishment—the idea that by propitiating certain ethereal creatures, one would gain access to spiritual favor or suffer some form of penalty. Small wonder that orthodox

theologians were profoundly concerned with how, when, and in what form these spirits might appear. Given the demonological traditions exemplified in Augustinian (and later Thomist) theology, spiritual substances were said to assume manifold visible appearances while working countless invisible deeds to lead humanity into sin. With this in mind, the accounts examined below exhibit important, if contested, responses from the communities that generated them. Taking examples from Gervase of Tilbury, Walter Map, and several other authors, this section explores medieval traditions wherein humans happened upon highly capricious beings whose origins and natures remain obstinately obscure.

To begin, the thirteenth-century encyclopedist and chronicler of marvels, Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1160-1211), reported an impressive stock of spirit-encounters in his massive work entitled *Otia imperialia* (“Recreation for an Emperor”). Organized into three books, *Otia imperialia* begins as a modest “description, at least in brief, of the whole world” coupled with a traditional commentary on the Book of Genesis.245 Gervase borrows freely from traditions established by the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville and, later, Peter Comestor’s *Historia scholastica*, among several others. The second book offers a lengthy entry on provinces found around the world, their inhabitants, and general customs. The third and final book includes a collection of the world’s marvels, either seen by or recounted to our author.246 The majority of descriptions concerning haunting spirits are found in this last section. As Gervase tells the audience, his purpose for writing the treatise was to “afford pleasure to a listener” rather than evince theological precepts.247 Such “pleasure” is also notably balanced by a reverence for reliable


authority. In his preface to the third book, he qualifies how “no one should take the things we write to be idle tales,” for such marvelous accounts amount to more than the whims of “mere storytellers.”

Hence, Gervase endeavors to provide faithful descriptions of wonders found within the wide world, whereas doctrinal teachings are afforded only minor attention.

Throughout *Otia imperialia*, Gervase demonstrates the complexities involved with discourses on vaguely defined spirits and their classification. Early in the first book, for instance, he calls attention to spiritual creatures “which the common folk call *follets*.”

For orthodox demonologists, *follets* invariably elicited the concept of minor demons that pelt people with stones, mimic human speech, and mischievously interrupt the ordinary workings of the household. The thirteenth-century theologian and bishop of Paris William of Auvergne commented that “among the French people, the foolish expression *follet* is known to mean a spirit to whom a small portion of natural wisdom has been left.” In a larger discussion of minor devils, William affirmed that these provincial spirits were unquestionably demonic manifestations: these *follets* typically haunted premodern homes by working noisy and trivial illusions therein.

In stark contrast to William, Gervase remarks that while “these inhabit the homes of simple peasants,” they resist demonological convention and categorization because “they are not deterred

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either by holy water or by exorcisms.”

Here, sacramental rites could prove a deciding factor for the discernment of spiritual friend or foe. Decades earlier, Walter Map told of a figure named Henno with-the-teeth who forcibly took a fairy-like woman near the shores of Normandy as his conjugal spouse. According to Map’s telling, Henno’s new wife attended church frequently but “shunned the sprinkling of holy water, and by a wary retirement (making the crowd or some business the excuse) anticipated the moment of the consecration of the Lord’s body and blood.”

These dubious indices culminated in Henno and his family discovering that, while alone, the young beauty revealed herself in the form of a “dragon” (*draconem*). Henno’s mother immediately sent for a priest, who sprinkled the bride with lustral water and produced her permanent disappearance. Tellingly, Map guides his audience to infer the lady’s demonic pedigree, affirming that such creatures “must in the end be dragged downwards against their will.”

If demons were, at least in part, discernible by their abhorrence to ecclesiastical consecrations and sacramental ritual, the *follets* described by Gervase were not easily defined as such.

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253 This may well be an early reference to the legend of the mermaid-demon, later named Melusine. Gervase also briefly discusses the creature; see *Otia imperialia* (2002), bk. 1, ch. 15, pp. 88-91. For a discussion of Melusine in Map and Gervase, see Jacques Le Goff, “Melusina: Mother and Pioneer,” in *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages* (1980), 205-22. The theme would have a long afterlife, extending into the early modern era. See, for instance, the Middle High German poem about Peter von Stauffenberg, a legend concerning a man who married a water-nymph but then married a human girl after growing unhappy with the spirit. The story was recorded in: Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, [*Theophrastus Paracelsus*], *Opera Omnia*, 3 vols. (Geneva: Ioannes Antonius & Samuel de Tournes, 1658), section 32 “De nymphis, sylvis, Pygmaeis, salamandris et caeteris spiritibus,” ii. 395-6. See also *Wahrhafte Geschichte Herrn P. v. St.* (Strasbourg: B. Jobins Erben, 1598).

With similar ambivalence, Gervase recalls how other seemingly demonic spirits “may actually be corporeal wild beasts, called fauns and satyrs.”\textsuperscript{255} Invoking Saint Antony’s famous encounter with a half-man, half-horse creature in the desert, he attentively acknowledges that theological tradition interprets the hybrid monster as one involving a demonic apparition. Yet, Gervase casts doubt on the familiar narrative by pointing out how a similar beast was preserved in salt in order to halt decomposition. In an attempt to reconcile differing opinions on the subject, he gives credence to the logical position that “if a body is embalmed in salt, it is because it rots after death: that does not sound like an airy body.”\textsuperscript{256} In short, Gervase questions how Anthony’s encounter could have been with a demon, given the creature’s capacity to putrefy.

Later, in the third book, the English encyclopedist also discusses other immortal visitors typically identified as devils, but admits “that I do not know whether I should call them demons, or mysterious ghosts [effigies] of unknown origin.”\textsuperscript{257} At an impasse about their spectral provenance, Gervase yields instead to cultural particularism: “the French call [them] neptunes, and the English portunes.” Rather than wager a conclusion on their ontology, he reports how these creatures (like the follets) take special pleasure in domestic chores, engaging in activities within the ambit of the premodern home: they close doors, catch frogs, move heavy objects, among other rather trivial deeds. In a tone resembling that of Caesarius’ \textit{Monk}, Gervase does consider their unconventional moral leanings: “it is a law of their nature that they can be useful but cannot do harm.” At most a minor nuisance, Gervase presents these spirits as capricious, rather than explicitly malevolent, forces within the household. As we shall see in the next chapter of this dissertation,\textsuperscript{257}


\textsuperscript{256} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{257} \textit{Ibid.}, bk. 3, ch. 61, pp. 674-75.
the theme of domestic demons would emerge as an instructive facet of demonological treatises in the late Middle Ages and early modern period.

Whether expressly demonic or something else entirely, it is a truism that spirits were capable of changing their form and identity in high medieval literature. As in the example of Henno’s serpentine bride, by appearing to viewers in disguise, there was an inherent difficulty associated with precise visual identification. Gervase also commented on spirits called *dracs*, which “put on human form…[and] their leaders come to a crowded market-place without anyone recognizing them.”

In other cases, detailed descriptions are provided with the presumable purpose of explaining why humans might struggle to perceive these marvelous creatures. The neptunes and portunes described by Gervase above are said, in fact, to “have an aged appearance, and a wrinkled face; they are very small in stature, measuring less than half a thumb, and they wear tiny rags sewn together.”

Walter Map also told of a “pygmy in respect of his low stature, not above that of a monkey” that held a fiery countenance and wore a long red beard. The tiny stature of these creatures presumably makes their relative invisibility intelligible, if only barely so. One wonders how a creature “less than half a thumb” in size could help in any household chores?

Most likely, the detailed descriptions of “a wrinkled face” with “tiny rags” or an intensely red appearance serve to anthropomorphize—that is, make discernible and visualizable—spirits that were barely visible but certainly wonder-full.

Most often, these non-angelic creatures existed somewhere between bestial, human, and spiritual being. A powerful sense of spiritual presence, in particular, was said to stimulate the

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259 Ibid., bk. 3, ch. 62, pp. 676-77.

imaginative faculties. Walter Map narrated how a certain man in Lydbury North encountered ephemeral ladies “circling with airy motion and gay gesture, and from their subdued voices singing in solemn harmony a delicate sound came to his ears.”

As in orthodox discourses on demons, sensory encounters with non-angelic beings entailed fair voices, aromas, mellifluous effects of vocal and musical performance. In several instances involving fairy women especially, these spirits are said to inconspicuously dance, sing, cry, and speak to humans. Yet, in their resemblance to the tutelary spirits of classical antiquity, the association of spirits with specific locales afforded a considerable degree of material presence. To a certain extent, follets, neptunes, portunes, fauns, satyrs, and others afforded medieval authors an opportunity to explore the limits of human knowledge about the known world.

This idea was often communicated in imaginative stories that focus on fairy mistresses. On the surface, these tales can suggest metaphors of subjugation and sexual advance, as in the example of Henno, who “grew hot with the fire that kindled in him.” Indeed, Map’s *De nugis* includes many narratives of sexual human-fairy exploits. In one anecdote, a Welshman called Gwestin perceived at night “bands of women dancing in his field of oats, and followed them till

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263 This is, no doubt, a product also of developments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, discussed in Chapter 1; see, pp. 30-32 above.

264 Scholars, especially folklorists, have pointed out that such tales commonly operate on a limited and recognizable range of motifs and themes, such as that of fairy mistresses. On such themes, see, John Arnott MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1932), 5-57, and on a much broader scale Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakaternia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004), 3 volumes.

they plunged into the water of the lake; but on the fourth night he caught one of them.”

Thereafter, we are told Gwestin forcibly married the lady of the lake, and that she bore him many children. In another, a man named Eadric the Wild—“so named from his bodily activity”—stumbled upon a large building at the edge of the forest after a late night of “hunting.” Apparently unfinished in this predatory task, he peered into the mysterious edifice and saw extraordinary women that were “desirable beyond any favourite of a king.” Unable to understand their language, Eadric “recklessly” entered the structure, took one of the ladies “and for three days and nights used her as he would.”

No doubt, an erotic violence pervades these and similar vignettes as chivalric characters expressly violate their otherworldly counterparts.

At the same time, perspectives of carnal desire are complicated by the semantic ambiguities within these narratives. As we have seen in the previous section, a medieval courtly context informs Map’s tales. In the second episode, we are told that the figure of Eadric has “heard tell of the fables of the heathen…and the bands of Dryads and Lares.” The reference to “the heathen” and “bands of Dryads and Lares” signals recollection of pagan spirits commonly associated with woodland creatures called nymphs. These antique designations were a commonplace in medieval schools and universities where Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was studied in Latin grammar, as well as in theological and philosophical discourses on the implications of hybrid beasts and semi-divine spirits found within natural world. Significantly, the Latin terms *driadum* and *nymphae*

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266 Ibid., dist. ii, c. 11, pp. 148-55.
267 Ibid., dist. ii, c. 12, pp. 154-61.
268 Ibid., 156-7.
connoted both fairy women and young (human) maidens old enough for marriage. There is thus a literary pun that heightens a sense of oscillation in the scene’s meaning. Especially compelling is how dominance over these extraordinary women is dangerously transgressive. The desire to overcome these curious beings, whether fairy or human, is coupled with explicit warning: “deadly vision” and “sudden punishment [falls] on those who suddenly catch sight of them.”

On this view, premodern folk conventionally approached non-angelic spirits with dutiful caution and trepidation, because they (the spirits) could presage imminent death and disaster. Exuding an aura of uncanniness, the alluring appearances of such creatures mirrored a commensurate degree of repulsion.

There is also a good deal of narrative attention to the enchanted dwellings which these spirits were said to inhabit and embody. To some extent, this made fairies and their kind all the more accessible to humanity. Whether occupying oat fields, cavernous mountains, or on the forested peripheries of town, fairy bodies transposed spiritual signification onto bodies of land and water. Marine locations, in particular, constituted such a haunting area. As we have seen in Map’s story of Gwestin, the Welshman snatches his fairy bride from beneath the surface of water—specifically called the lake of Brycheiniog (or Llangorse Lake). The penetrable, albeit dangerous, space that separates the human (above the water) and fairy (below the water) represents an intimate and potentially treacherous threshold to be violated. With similar warning, Gervase states that certain spirits “make their home in the depths of rivers, and at times, in the semblance of gold rings or goblets floating on the surface.” According to Gervase, these aquatic creatures lure women and children bathing in the river with the appearance of artificial rewards. Should a human fall for the

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deceit, “they are suddenly seized and dragged down to the bottom.”272 In certain cases, the proper name given to a body of water could also be applied to spiritual beings. Gervase recounts how in England, one finds horse-like demons called grants that commonly warn humans of imminent fire. Interestingly, “Grant” was another ancient name for the River Cam, suggesting the spirits functioned as a synecdoche for the river itself.273

In these stories, moments of human-spirit exchange exhibit how fairy-kin were thought to reside hidden within the natural world. Concealment could portend forbidden trespass, as when Gwestin and Eadric happen uninvited upon spirits and their elemental abodes in this world. In other instances, mortals were reported to have opened or wholly punctured the veil of parallel worlds enveloping this one. William of Newburgh told of a peasant who observed a spirited festival take place within a hillside outside of town.274 In another account, he was “so overwhelmed by the weight of so many and such competent witnesses” that he felt compelled to record how “green children” were found in the fields during harvest season. Several people attested that these mysterious children were (by their own admission) Christian, but came from the twilight land of St. Martin, which “precedes the sun-rise, or follows the sun-set.”275 These bizarre and magical accounts suggest that such beings could accentuate daily and seasonal change or liminality.


273 Ibid., bk. 3, ch. 62, pp. 676-79 (on “grants”); for the reference to the River Cam, see editor’s note, 1, p. 678.

274 This theme was diversely reported by other notable figures, such as Gerald of Wales and the author of the miracles of Saint Cuthbert. See Watkins, History and the Supernatural in Medieval England (2007), 61-62. The premodern concept of “changelings”—infants replaced by spirits or born of human-spirit relations—also overlaps the idea of spirit worlds aligned with this one. See Schmitt, The Holy Greyhound (1983), 74-78.

Appearing within the boundaries between day and night, the wilderness and the city, summer and fall, they functioned to personify natural and supernatural forces operating within and outside the temporal world.

In rare examples, time and space could be altered altogether. Walter Map’s fiery barbarossa “pygmy” reportedly led the ancient Briton called King Herla to a cave in a high cliff where he beheld an entire kingdom of similar beings. Upon return to his native land, King Herla learned that his journey had lasted 200 years, rather than the three days by his counting. Herla would also discover that his own human mortality had been permanently manipulated, for thereafter he became immortal in his “eternal wanderings, without stop or stay.” With often transformative effects, non-angelic spirits could even alter the bodies and faculties of those who witnessed them. In the collection of miracles attributed to Saint Cuthbert at Farne, for example, a peasant named Richard of Sunderland lost his ability to speak and reason after an abduction by mysterious green men.

Of course, moments of otherworldly encounter and transformation draw meaning from the very real dangers that were associated with perception of the Devil and his demons. For orthodox theologians, entrance into the spirit realm threatened entrancement, and slippage between realities often suggested demonic manipulation. Where spiritual beings might appear friendly or morally ambivalent, clerical authors tended to clarify that demons lay behind all such encounters. In the eleventh century, Burchard von Worms admonished ten days of penance on bread and water for the respective beliefs that “those who are commonly called the Fates exist.” He also discouraged

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277 Ibid., pp. 30-31.

the belief “that there are women of the wilds, called ‘the sylvan ones’ who they say are in bodily form, and when they wish show themselves to their lovers and, they say, have taken delight with these, and then when they wish they depart and vanish.” For Burchard, Christians who entertain such things ultimately misuse “Divine Piety and hand it over to the devil,” failing to uphold proper Christian values and, in doing so, more easily fall into superstition and sin. More egregiously in Burchard’s estimation, some folk were said to have ritually anticipated spirits of this sort, having “prepared the table in thy house and set on the table thy food and drink, with three knives, that if those three sisters whom past generations and old-time foolishness called the Fates should come they may take refreshment there.” In this case, propitiatory behavior was far more offensive—presumably for the degree of participation it demanded—as Burchard advised one whole year of penance on appointed days.

Importantly, the widespread beliefs associated with nocturnal female spirits would prove controversial, especially later in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century witchcraft debates. One irrepressible belief was that women would fly through the night in the company of the pagan goddess Diana and her entourage of (usually) female spiritual creatures. As early as the tenth century, a decree known as the canon Episcopi, written down first by Regino of Prum (c. 906), condemned these nocturnal flights as diabolically inspired illusions. A shortened version of the canon was recorded in the Corrector of Burchard von Worms; in the twelfth century, Gratian also


280 Ibid., canon 153, pp. 338-39.

281 Ibid.
Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury memorably include mention of the belief and its associations with demonic entrancement. In framing his tale of the huntsman Eadric and his capture of fairy mistresses, Map intentionally juxtaposes Eadric’s familiarity with “the nightly squadrons of devils” alongside his knowledge of the “heathen” deity “Dictynna.” In this, Map is almost certainly alluding to popular medieval beliefs related to the Wild Hunt of Diana. Map does so in order to pique his audience’s interest, casting yet another layer of interpretive meaning onto the narrative. In addition to the dual valences of “hunting” marriageable fairies and courting human maidens, his audience is lead to ponder a third, diabolical alternative: that the roles of hunter and hunted have been inverted with demons stalking their human prey. On this reading, the ethereal mistresses constitute demonic spirits that have lured Eadric into cunning trap.

Gervase also alludes to “the wretched lot of some men and women…[who] cover great distances in a swift nocturnal flight” and enumerates a long list of spiritual creatures—masks (mascas), stries, lamias, larvas, lares, silvani, pans, incubi, fays, and duses—variously associated

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with the belief. Intriguingly, rather than explicitly condemn these nocturnal flights and his
inventory of “demonic” names, he expatiates on spirits in France called “duses.” The reference
would have been well-known in theological circles. In City of God, Augustine proclaimed how “it
is widely reported that Silvani and Pans, commonly called incubi, have often behaved improperly
towards women, lusting after them and achieving intercourse with them…then there is the story
that certain demons, whom the Gauls call Dusii, constantly and successfully attempt this
indecency.”284 Isidore of Seville makes similar mention of such demons two centuries later.285
Commenting on these “duses,” Gervase echoes Augustine’s account, but personally confesses “I
do not know what these things mean…it must be, then, that those who sided with the devil but
whose pride was less grievous were reserved to provide phantoms of this nature to punish
humankind.”286 Tending toward a moveable middle ground between theological teachings and
provincial expressions, Gervase ambivalently concludes that these creatures may or may not be
what theologians call demons. In his estimation, the only thing that he could say about his cache
of marvelous spirits is that they resembled both angels and demons, but acted like spirits that were
less malicious than Lucifer.

Theologically, this is a bold position to hold. In the same century, the Dominican preacher,
Thomas de Cantimpré (d. ca. 1270), briefly remarked on the existence of aqueous demons called
neptuni, terrestrial incubes, and other demons called dusii (or succubes) that haunted French
mountains and forests.287 Cantimpré weighs in on many of the spirits identified by Gervase, as

284 Augustine, City of God (2003), bk. xv, ch. 23, p. 638.
well as those registered by Augustine and Isidore. It was conventional (following Augustine) to
describe incubi and succubi, in particular, as artificially gendered demons which tempted and
molested humans in carnal lust. Cantimpré does not explicitly comment on their sexual exploits;
instead, he depicts them as demons that inhabit natural locales in the French countryside. The
contrast between Cantimpré and Gervase is telling. Where Cantimpré affirms their demonic
pedigree, Gervase positions his collection of marvels oblique to orthodox theological teaching on
demons. He notes at the start of *Otia imperialia* that demons exist in the world, as the bible teaches,
and thereafter even presents a number of accounts to support this conclusion. Yet, Gervase also
repeatedly questions whether all reported phenomena must fall exclusively on the angel/demon
binary.

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288 In the thirteenth century, some debate existed over whether demon had lustful desires, especially in
goading inter-species sexual relations and miscegenation. Scholastics argued that demons could manage
this miscegenation, but their desire to enact artificial insemination stemmed from hatred rather than erotic
lust. William of Auvergne, for example, rhetorically asks the question: “What libidinal desire can there be
in these spirits for another species, and one that is comparably more ignoble than they are?” William of
Auvergne, *De universo*, IIIa-IIae, c. xxi, p. 1070bG-H: “Quae concupiscientia libidinosa potest esse
hujusmodi spirituum in substantias alterius specie, & longè ignobiliores, quam ipsi sunt?” Accordingly, he
argued that, were it the case that demons could lust after the beauty of sensual bodies, they would do so
with their own kind exclusively. Moreover, because demons are immaterial, William notes they are
incapable of emitting semen—the primary pleasure of human ejaculation. *De universe, ibid.*: “Dico in hoc,
quia nulla est voluptas conjunctionis hujusmodi, cum voluptas concubitus potissimum consistat in effusione
seminis, nulla autem est voluptas libidinosa in translatione seminis hujusmodi.” Juanita Feros Ruys also
notes in an interesting study of the subject that William adds another criterion: “If demons were truly driven
mad by the raging fires of lust, he suggests, there would be no limits as to their sexual targets, and males
would be as much at risk of demonic copulation as women apparently are. Yet, he contends, there is and
never has been any account of demons behaving in a sodomitic manner.” See “Love in the Time of Demons:
Thirteenth-Century Approaches to the Capacity for Love in Fallen Angels,” *Mirabilia* 15 (2012): 42. For a
study on Aquinas, scholastic theology, and demonic lust, see Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft,
Sex and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), as well as Dyan Elliott, *Fallen
Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 52-60.

At least by the start of the thirteenth century, William of Auvergne asserted that blessed and fallen angels were absolutely immaterial beings.\(^{290}\) And in the previous chapter we noted how Thomist metaphysics would later insist on this point. Gervase, however, proposes that these creatures may not all be demons or illusions created by them. He writes: “If anyone asks the meaning of these wonders…I reply with the words of Augustine…that the whole matter should be referred to the mysteries of divine justice,” and “[w]hen the question of the bodies of demons and bad angels of this kind arise, I answer that, like Augustine, I am not sure.”\(^{291}\) While this quote speaks directly to issues of demonic embodiment, in many ways it also represents Gervase’s broad approach to reports of diverse spirits: he cannot be sure that his ethnography of marvels and spirits aligns with orthodox theology.

By concluding with Gervase of Tilbury, we have come full circle to the initial gesture made by Cornelius Agrippa at this chapter’s start: that theologians were not the only Christians to evince meaningful discourses on spirits in the world. This chapter has examined descriptions of neutral angels, helpful or harmless demons, and non-angelic spirits of different stripes found lurking in many corners of premodern Christian storytelling and literature. In the following chapters (Chapters 3 and 4), we turn to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century demonological writings, which appropriated many of these tales and motifs. However, rather than imaginative narratives concerning wonderous spirits, later demonologists approached past and contemporary accounts of such creatures as important examples of the Devil’s presence in the world.


CHAPTER 3: Perilous and Peril-less Hauntings: Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Discourses on Minor Demons

Introduction

In his Lenten sermon series known as Die Emeis (delivered in 1508), Geiler von Keysersberg handles a troubling pastoral question: What causes noisy, unseen disturbances in the premodern home (frag von dem gerümpel in einem hausz)? A famous Swiss preacher and theologian in Strasbourg, Geiler's response is manifold. He concedes that forms of domestic unrest occur—bizarre sounds and misplaced or broken home furnishings—although he rejects human ghosts from the afterlife as the source thereof: “those in Hell do not come out and thus cannot do this; those granted the eternal life do not complete such foolish works; and those in Purgatory have other things to do.”292 The dead, in other words, cannot haunt houses because the souls of the departed are dutifully busied elsewhere. What, then, generates this unseen racket and disorder?

Not unreasonably, Geiler suggests that the perpetrators might well be this-worldly humans. One's neighbors, for example, may cause harassment as when “some evil people make noise to cause disquiet in another's house” (so thünt es etwann böß leutt in einem hauß, das sie die andern unrüwig machen). Or when certain homeowners are set against selling their property, they might “feign that a ghost lives there” (so macht er das man went es gang ein geist da) to ward off buyers. According to the Swiss preacher, the living rather than the dead frequently devised a number of furtive methods for misleading their fellow Christians. Alternatively, Geiler notes that human illness could produce (false) impressions of a spiritual presence. As Geiler outlines, “due to

sickness...one hears a knocking in the house here and there and thinks is must be a spirit” (so kumpt es von kranckheit her...so went er es kloppft also in dem hausz hin vnd her vnd es sei ein geist.). The majority of responses proffered in this sermon thus demonstrate that not all things which goes bump in the night could be attributed to spiritual creatures.

At the same time, Geiler’s use of the German term “gerümpel” (disruptive noise) clearly suggests that acoustic and physical disruptions were regularly associated with unseen spiritual presences, even when many of the causes themselves were not necessarily spiritual in origin. This is evident not only from the responses listed above—each implies or explicitly states that a spirit is not responsible—but also from the overall context of the sermon. Leading up to the inquiry on “gerümpel,” Geiler assessed the purported flight of women on Ember days, the existence of changeling children, and a variety of other demonic illusions (“das teuffels gespenst”) reported to occur in premodern Europe.293 After addressing these issues, he then enumerates causes typically associated with invisible domestic racket. The preacher thus raises the question of “gerümpel” after a series of sermons on devilish mischief, suggesting that his audience will anticipate another sermon dealing with similar subject matter.

Moreover, Geiler’s immediate source in this sermon is Johannes Nider’s Preceptorium divine legis (1438). A century earlier, the Dominican reformer listed the same arguments with regard to the question of “Quis faciat illos strepitus...ut in inquietationibus domorum nocturnis.”294 Following the Preceptorium point for point, Geiler echoes teachings from one of

293 Ibid., fols. 43r-44r.
the most influential demonologists of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{295} And like Nider before him, Geiler identifies inhuman spirits as the primary cause of household \textit{gerümpel}. Most often, Nider and Geiller affirm, the offenders were a particular type of devil: “the first cause is wicked spirits which have less power from God; for like humans, spirits are as distinct in kind. The same simple spirits make noise with pots and pans, engendering proper disturbances.”\textsuperscript{296} Geiler’s homily thus indicate that the most formidable threat to domestic wellbeing was demon, “distinct in kind,” that possessed less potency other fallen angels.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, a host of late medieval and early modern authors voiced similar concerns about parochial disruptions manufactured by wicked spirits. For instance, the same year as Geiler’s sermon cycle, the former abbot of Sponheim and Renaissance magician, Johannes Trithemius, responded to eight questions composed by Emperor Maximilian at the Diet of Cologne (1505). In the third question—“On the Miraculous Signs of the Impious”—Trithemius explained to his sovereign how “several demons, which wander the earth, completely disturb people where they live with noises (\textit{gerümpel}) by throwing and breaking things. These evil spirits our ancestors called \textit{Bacuceos homines}; that is \textit{Schrätlin} or spirit men or poltergeists, which frighten people and want nothing other than to be perceived as gods and holy spirits.”\textsuperscript{297} Through

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{295} On Nider’s influence as a demonologist see Michael Bailey, \textit{Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages} (University Park, PA: Pennslyvania State University Press, 2003); Werner Tschacher, \textit{Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider von 1437/38: Studien zu den Anfängen der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen im Spätmittelalter} (Aachen, 2000).
\item \textsuperscript{296} \textit{Die Emeis} (1517): “Zuo dem ersten vonn den schlechten bösen geisten, die nit viel gewalt von got habent empfangen, wan wie die menschen vngleich seind, also die geiste auch; die selben einfeltigen geist rümpeln also im schüssel korb vnd Machen ein semlich gefert.”
\item \textsuperscript{297} Johannes Trithemius, \textit{Antwort Herrn Johan Abts zu Spanhaim auff act fragstuck, jme von weylandt Herrn Maximilian Röm. Kayser [et]c. hochlöblichster gedechnuß, fürgehalten.} (Ingolstadt: durch Alexander unnd Samuel Weyssenhorn gebrüder, 1555), III, p. 43: “Also thun etlich Teüffel, die auff erden umb geen, wandlen umb die leüdt wonen ganz ungestümb mit gerümpel werffen unnd schlagen welche böse gayster unsere vorelter \textit{Bacuceos homines}, das ist Schrätlin oder nachtbuzen und boldergeister genent haben. Dise erschrecken die leüdt und gebern darmit von den menschen nichts merers dann das man sie für Götter und
\end{itemize}
a pair of similes Trithemius likened the Devil to an ape in “his” production of false miracles (wonders); demons are likewise compared to children in their wicked games of “hide and seek” (verbergen/lauffen) with humans. To the chagrin of Trithemius, too many people acquiesced to the company of these ethereal creatures—thus failing to appropriately perceive the deceptions of household devils. A decade later, Martin Luther would articulate a comparable complaint before the people of Wittenberg. He bemoaned how many Christians propitiated demons called lares familiars in Latin or Helekeppelin and Wichtelen in the German vernacular.

In the examples of Geiler, Trithemius, and Luther, demonic spirits were reported to have plagued domestic spaces. In and around the home, unexpected misfortune seemed to arise without clear lay comprehension of how and why such things occurred. In response, many churchmen admonished ordinary Christians against misunderstanding the potentially harmful nature of such marvelous events. Rather than mere mischance, these men argued that the imminent and pernicious presence of demons threatened individual families, as well as the collective Christian

haylige gayster halte.” The Latin version, which omits the German-specific words Schrätlin, nachtbuzen, and boldergeister, can be found in Liber octo quaestionum, qu. 3, in Busaeus, ed., Paralipomena opusculorum Petri Blenensis et Ioannis Trithemii, aliorumque nuper in typographeo monguntino editorum (Mainz: Apud Balthasarum Lippium, 1605), lib. II, cap. III, p. 460.

298 *Ibid.*, “Daher so geschichts als dann, das sie vor disen leütten, bey welchen jenen ainer gleichhait halben zu wonen, vergunt wirdt, zu zeiten vil unnd mancherlay ludification und betrügnuß uben[?], erzaigen sic him gamut der menschen nach dem sich der fal begibt ganz erschrockenlich.”


300 That the events orbiting demonic activities were labeled “marvelous” is especially apposite in the writings of Geiler and Trithemius, among others, because they emphasize the non-miraculous nature of demonic illusions and abilities. Repeatedly, Geiler and Trithemius stress how German folk wrongly feel “Wunder” at the seemingly miraculous deeds of fallen angels. This is especially apparent in the pointed title of Trithemius’ third response (On the Miraculous Signs of the Impious). On the emotional qualities of medieval “wonder”, see Caroline Walker Bynum, “Wonder,” *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1-26. For the importance of the marvels produced by demons, see Lorraine Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe” *Critical Inquiry* 18:1 (Autumn, 1991): 93-124.
community. Through their condemnations of such uninvited visitors, these authors suggest that
many Christian folk held relatively complex relationships with domestic spirits. Geiler's sermon,
for instance, insinuates that one might mistake demonic infestation for a ghostly visit. As is well
known, the high medieval development and later reification of the doctrine of Purgatory produced
a constellation of rituals and beliefs centered on a reciprocal relationship between living Christians
and their perished associates. Geiler warns, however, that wicked spirits (or human fraud)
obscured the roles of human spirits in the Christian afterlife. Equally troubling, the response
proffered by Trithemius, much like Luther's own addition, implies German folk actually found the
attendance of Schrätlin or Helekeppelin in the home a familiar, even potentially desirable, accident
or regularity.

Strikingly, nearly all such accounts include the qualification involving demons said to
possess “less power from God.” Labeled deleterious in their commerce with humanity, minor
demons differed markedly in their propensity for seemingly innocuous mischief rather than, say,
human possession, sexual relations and explicit pacts with women designated as witches. This is
an important distinction because scholarship on premodern demonology has largely ignored
accounts of so-called “lesser demons.” A number of excellent studies have addressed themes of
possession, exorcism, ghosts and witchcraft. My analysis will converge only obliquely with

301 On ghosts and purgatory see, Jacques Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 1984); Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval
Society, trans. by T. L. Fagan (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall,
eds., The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); P. Marshall, Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England

302 We have also already seen references to similar spirits in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. See my analysis
of the writings from Walter Map, Gervase of Tilbury, and Caesarius von Heisterbach, pp. 23-35; 39-42.

303 Moshe Sluhovsky, Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern
Catholicism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Nancy Caciola, Discerning Spirits: Divine and
these, foregrounding instead descriptions of minor devils inhabiting urban and rural households.

The current chapter, therefore, examines the complex cultural ramifications for why explicitly “lesser” demonic creatures were considered a veritable threat in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century theological and pastoral literature. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first, I give a brief contextual overview of demonological approaches to minor demons in the later Middle Ages. Where earlier representations of haunted houses exist, late medieval thinkers addressed less potent fallen angels and the locations they inhabited in a novel manner. Specifically, the tendency to marvel at such spirits is replaced by ecclesiastical condemnation. Furthermore, many late medieval authors deal publicly—Geiler and Luther preach to Christian congregations and Trithemius delivers his response to the Emperor—with issues of metaphysical causality that complement didactic narratives.

In the second section, I examine fifteenth- and sixteenth-century discussions of poltergeists, arguing that the term and its general cultural meaning helped demonologists account for reported demonic distractions of a relatively innocuous variety. The third section, then, turns to the related theme of “household spirits.” In contrast to widespread accounts of poltergeists as relatively harmless (though still frightful) spiritual creatures, there existed vernacular traditions which held that some ambiguous spirits thrived on reciprocal social relations with humans. One finds numerous cases in which ethereal beings were reported to emerge in homes, behaving as quasi-human beings and interacting with their human counterparts as if they were social companions. I conclude the chapter by discussing a little-known tale of demonic infestation related by Johannes Trithemius. The tale deftly outlines the contours of late medieval assumptions and attitudes concerning demons in the home. It also deserves special attention because later authors

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repeated Trithemius’ account in order to demonstrate the profound influence of the Devil in domestic situations.

**Late Medieval Demons in Context**

In Chapter 1, we explored the arguments of the Catholic theologians and how churchmen insisted that demons existed solely as fallen angels. From the precepts of the church fathers to the *summae* of scholastic authors, devils tempted humanity, created elaborate illusion, and broadly sought to pervert divine creation. Drawing from and reconfiguring this orthodox tradition, certain strands of Christian literature, legend, and vernacular storytelling expressed confusion about the moral valences of other, ambivalent spirit-beings inhabiting the cosmos. As seen from Chapter 2, the high medieval imaginary included numerous tales of obscure spirits, including so-called “neutral” angels, helpful demons, or fairy-like creatures. In the later Middle Ages, the fusion of these earlier ideations culminate in discursive concerns over two types of haunting spirits in particular: poltergeists and benign household spirits.

Context is important here because the issue of minor haunting spirits becomes a discrete demonological concern in the later Middle Ages. As we have seen, earlier texts presented spirits in similar domestic situations. Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury, for instance, recorded accounts wherein spiritual creatures performed mundane tasks in the premodern home. In these examples, however, the topic of minor spirits is a generic addition to broader themes of nature’s marvels (in Gervase) and fanciful tales of twelfth-century courtiers (in Map). The *neptunes, portunes*, fairy-brides, and others discussed within this body of literature were recorded to provoke wonderment and demonstrate irregular occurrences within the natural world. By contrast, in later centuries
minor household spirits are described as far more sinister.\textsuperscript{304} In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature, the impetus to marvel at mysterious spirits is replaced with theological warnings that all such stories are demonic events.

To take one memorable example, Martin Delrio rehearsed the twelfth-century account from William of Newburgh about a peasant who witnessed a hillside banquet of fairy people near the North Sea.\textsuperscript{305} In \textit{Historia Rerum Anglicarum}, Newburgh recalls that a rustic man beheld ethereal men and women inside a grassy mound celebrating a magnificent feast. The high medieval chronicler unmistakably offers the tale as a \textit{res mirabilis}. Delrio reiterates the entire story in his \textit{Disquisitionum Magicarum} but does so as evidence that witches and demons held assemblies together in order to venerate the Devil. Rather than portray Newburgh’s account as containing marvelous phenomena at the peripheries of the natural world, Delrio situates the tale among contemporary reports of witchcraft and demon worship. The Jesuit author thus clearly associates these fairy-kin with demonic beings that are closer to human affairs (not out on the peripheral landscape) and, in this new context, representative a widespread threat to Christian society. For many of Delrio’s contemporaries and immediate forbears, stories of ambivalent spirits affirmed that demons often lurked in seemingly harmless situations.

In tandem with appropriating tales of marvelous spirits, later demonologists also extended scholastic discussions of metaphysics into the province of pastoral theology and public awareness more generally. Geiler von Kaisersberg is exemplary in this regard. He preaches material that

\textsuperscript{304} The one exception to accounts of ambiguous spirits from the High Middle Ages is William of Auvergne, who handles the subject of domestic demons as a discrete phenomenological problem as early as the thirteenth century. My point is that public discourses on minor demons do not become a debated commonplace until the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

centuries earlier was almost exclusively the province of theological disputation and speculation in the universities. For instance, Geiler (and Nider before him) echoes the fourteenth-century thinker Nicole Oresme, who discussed comparable issues of supernatural causality inappropriately associated with purported spiritual phenomena. In the prologue to his *De causis mirabilium*, Oresme states that he will “show the causes of some effects which seem to be marvels and to show that the effects occur naturally, as do the others at which we commonly do not marvel. There is no reason to take recourse to the heavens, the last refuge of the weak, or demons.”

Thereafter Oresme lists a number of instances in which “a stick or shadow” appears to be something more frightening that it actually is. He also argues that when many people see the silhouette of a dog or cat in the home, fear typically compels them to perceive a devil. Elsewhere, Oresme claimed that magicians rely on quiet, dark places in order to produce psycho-physiological effects rather than conjure actual demons. According to Oresme, “by all these things a simple mind is distracted and shaken by terror.”

He evinces a highly erudite account of nature’s regularity so as to assuage human anxieties about unseen phenomena.

That Oresme, Nider, and Geiler all discuss physical and metaphysical causes is unsurprising. Thomist metaphysics was piously debated and reiterated in varying forms by most learned theologians from the fourteenth century onward. The difference is that Oresme writes for

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a university-trained and highly limited readership in the fourteenth century, whereas Geiler preaches similar material to a far broader audience at the start of the sixteenth century. This is an important point because the sources examined below are not works of theological speculation or natural philosophy, like Aquinas’ *De Malo* (as seen in Chapter 1) or Oresme’s *De causis mirabilium*. They are pastoral-theological discussions meant to convey moral-theological and practical points about demonic spirits to Christian congregations. One historical reason for this development in preaching derives from what some scholars have called a late medieval “pastoral revolution” that followed from the pronouncements and general impetus of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).  

A considerable goal of high medieval catechetical efforts was to instruct the laity (and untrained clergy) in orthodox Christian doctrine. The nature and relevance of demons, as outlined in the first canon’s lengthy profession of the Catholic faith, was consistently a part of this pastoral program. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries especially, preachers and theologians reiterate the reality of demonic afflictions occurring in Latin Europe.

From these perspectives, men like Oresme, Nider, and Geiler expatiated at length about natural sources that may appear supernatural but also all agreed that demons were capable of producing the above effects through illusions or local movement. In the later sixteenth century, Johann Weyer would similarly accentuate the problem facing his contemporaries at the start of his treatise *On the Illusions of Demons*: the Devil “criminally violates the natural order for the

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309 The opening decree and declaration of faith at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 reads: “The devil and the other demons were indeed created by God naturally good but they became evil by their own doing. Man, however, sinned at the prompting of the devil,” cited from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One Nicea I to Lateran V*, ed. by N. P. Tanner S.J. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 230.
destruction of the human race, expertly counterfeiting natural effects with his deadly deceits, and confounding many causes that are acting in accordance with their own rhythm and their own progression.\textsuperscript{310} It was universally accepted that the extraordinary power and influence of the Devil made the discernment of natural and preternatural causes a perennial problem. For this reason, trained authorities felt compelled to adduce reports of potential spirit visitation and identify the type of spiritual being present in one’s home.

**The Late Medieval Poltergeist**

What are these demons which “have less power from God,” and how were they treated in demonological literature from the later Middle Ages and thereafter? Precise definitions are often difficult to come by, as many sources remain anecdotal with no immediately obvious point or purpose. Premodern authors were far less concerned with contextualizing their material than modern scholarship. In many cases, past accounts assume the audience will already understand a given story’s moral-theological meaning and signification. The task of the historian is to uncover what is generally taken for granted in such discussions.

Today we are accustomed to pop-cultural representations of poltergeists as disembodied spirits of the human dead. Catherine Crowe’s novel *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) made the term popular to Anglophone audiences in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{311} More recently, Stephen Spielberg’s *Poltergeist* film trilogy of the 1980s and the 2015 reboot have contributed to this mainstream understanding of poltergeists as haunting human ghosts. In pre-industrial Europe this

\textsuperscript{310} Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance (1991), 36.

\textsuperscript{311} *The Night Side of Nature: or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1976-79).
meaning also existed, especially when the Latin equivalents “larva” and “lemur” were employed.\textsuperscript{312} As modern scholars examining the cultural importance of premodern ghosts have rightly shown, “the dead did not always sleep peacefully; they had a nasty habit of turning up unexpectedly and might even be recalled.”\textsuperscript{313} Throughout the Latin Middle Ages, human specters were widely reported to appear before family and friends in order to alleviate suffering in the afterlife. In the later Middle Ages as well, authoritative ecclesiastics, such as James of Clusa, also known as Jakob of Jüterbogk (d. 1465), accepted that Christian souls presented themselves to the living to get through purgatory.\textsuperscript{314}

At the same time, late medieval churchmen increasingly equated “geister” (ghosts or spiritual beings) with demonic spirits. As R.N. Swanson comments, “by the 1400s ghosts were perhaps being denied the opportunity to prove they were ghosts. This may explain cases where spirits treated as demons act like purgatorial ghosts seeking liberation from the effects of sin by demanding prayers, masses and other good deeds supposedly to liberate the souls of the people they purported themselves to be.”\textsuperscript{315} Appearances were often deceiving, and demons were eager to mimic the characteristics of ghosts and other relatively harmless spirits. This is not to say that


\textsuperscript{313} R. N. Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages,” in \textit{The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul: Papers read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society}, ed. by P. Clarke and T. Claydon (Saffron Walden: The Boydell Press, 2009), 143.

\textsuperscript{314} See Hans Peter Broedel, \textit{The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 48-49.

\textsuperscript{315} “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages,” (2009), 153.
Catholic theologians and preachers denied the existence of ghosts, but that they thought in most cases the Devil lay behind apparitions, invariably seeking to lead humanity astray. For many, ecclesiastical mediation was the primary way to discern human from inhuman spirits, and without priestly guidance, the laity were often encouraged to keep their distance lest the Devil’s illusions lead humanity into error.

Commonly attributed to Martin Luther, the term “poltergeist” is German in origin and signifies a spiritual being (geist) that generates noise (poltern/boldern).\footnote{Neuber, “Poltergeist the Prequel,” (2008), 1.} Like Geiler before him, Luther employs the synonymous word “gerümpel” to convey indistinct spiritual noise. Hence the premodern “rumpelgeist” is synonymous with a rumbling spirit. In his immense corpus of writings, Luther includes a great deal of discussion on poltergeister and remains an authority on the subject. Of course, most of Luther’s writings evince perspectives tempered by the effects of the Protestant Reformation. His use of tales about such spirits, therefore, often serve the specific purpose of critiquing the Catholic church. Moreover, scholars have rightly noted that, even as a Reformer, Luther was exceptional in his highly personalized view of the Devil’s presence in the world.\footnote{On Luther’s exceptional arguments about the Devil as a Reformer, see Heiko Oberman, Luther: Man between God and the Devil, trans. by E. Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Euan Cameron, Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157-73.} Yet many of his assumptions derive from and were shared by late medieval authors. Indeed, in many ways, Luther participated in the same cultural world as Geiler and Johannes Nider. His Tischreden or Table Talk, in particular, assumes the form of premodern exemplary literature, meaning it offers apt comparisons with medieval exempla on demons. I will discuss Protestant
attitudes towards haunting spirits in the following chapter. For now, I want to call attention to one of Luther’s descriptions of the auditory distractions performed by demons in his residence.

Among the numerous conversations with friends and family, Luther displays a range of first-hand experiences with poltergeists. In 1540, Luther addressed the topic directly:

Concerning Poltergeists: Osiander argues that poltergeists are nothing. To that the Doctor [Luther] replied: I contend that there is something to them: Osiander must always have very particular views. I have experienced it myself one time when I was tired from praying the canonical hours, when a great noise arose behind the hearth and I was terrified. But then I noticed that it was the Devil’s game, and I went to bed and prayed to God. 318

A typical example of the poltergeist phenomenon, Luther expresses initial fright at the experience. He recalls how during evening prayer he heard a loud commotion near the stove but could not immediately identify whence the sound originated. In many tales of poltergeists, the events orbiting these unseen spirits are described as both unwelcome and mysterious in origin; they also often end as mysteriously as they begin. In this case, it is significant that the poltergeist interrupts Luther’s performance of the canonical hours. As one of the Devil’s envoys, the poltergeist obstructs Luther from a pious activity—one that notably requires some degree of concentration. Rather than flee from the presence, Luther ignores the distraction and continues his prayer.

Like Luther’s account above, some of the most memorable accounts of poltergeist affliction were related first-hand by theologians themselves. The fifteenth-century Franciscan friar Alphonso Spina (d. 1491), for instance, described from personal experience how noisy spiritual creatures delighted in hammering on wine casks and removing the sheets from one’s bed. In his treatise Fortitalium fidei, Spina reports that he shared a bed with three companions one night, when

318 Werke, Tischreden, V, 5358b, p. 87: “Von Polter Geystern. Osiander helt, das nichts sey mit den Poltergeistern. Daruff der Doctor gesagt: Ich halt, das was dran sey: Osiander mus altzeit was sonderlichs haben. Ich hab es erfahren propria experiential, den da ich ein mall mude war von meinen horis canonicis zu bethen, da hub sich ein gros gereusch hinter der hellen, das ich mechtig sere ershrack; da ich aber marckt, das des Teuffels spiel war, giengk ich zu betth vnd bath Gott.”
out of nowhere they all heard mumblings and the sound of nuts being cracked. According to Spina, “suddenly a small light appeared which we felt but we never saw again.” The oldest of Spina’s companions explained that the commotion was caused by “a noble demon of the hierarchy, who does not cause harm, except for those little games.” Some fifty year later, Luther affirmed accounts like those of Spina and Geiler, noting that “it is not a unique, unheard-of thing for the devil to bang around and haunt houses.” A familiar presence in Luther’s life, the Devil regularly kept the former Augustinian monk awake at night by throwing nuts at the ceiling and rumbling in his bed (rumpelt mir am Bette).

Generally speaking, poltergeists were identified by indistinct noises and murmuring rather than intelligible speech. Before composing his Preceptorium, the Dominican scholar and ecclesiastical reformer Johannes Nider wrote the earlier text known as the Formicarius (1437/38), which was very influential in the later Middle Ages and early modern period. Nider couches his ideas in a kind of catechism, a dialogue between a learned theologian (Theologus) and his lazy student (Piger). In his fifth book (Chapter 2), the pupil professes his desire to hear about “examples of disquiet in the home” (De inquietantibus domos da exempla). In one longer response from the theologian, the student learns of a rather mild demon haunting a priest’s house near Nuremberg. Theologus relates how this unclean spirit repeatedly plagued the location with “hissings,

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319 Alphonsus de Spina, Fortalitium fidei (Lyons: Gulielmus Balsarin, 1487), bk 5, consideration 10, difference 2: “subito apparuit quidam parous splendor, et nunquam amplius vidimus nec aliquid sensimus…quidam spiritus malus nobilis hierarchie, qui alia mala non operabatur nisi ludosillos.”

320 Werke, Tischreden, (1912-21), VI, 6832, p. 219: “Es ist aber nicht ein seltsam unerhört Ding, daß der Teufel in den häusern poltert und umhergehet.”

321 Ibid., VI, 6816, p. 209.

322 On the Formicarius, see Tschacher, Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider (2000); Bailey, Battling Demons (2003).
whistlings, and blows, not very distinct, but audible; for sometimes he would beat on the walls of
the house, and sometimes the joker would blow, as it seemed, on the various pipes of actors, and
he would indulge in a lot of unrestrained behavior doing these sorts of things, that nonetheless do
no harm.”323 The anecdote, like many from Nider’s treatise, demonstrated the widespread power
and influence of the Devil in often mundane human affairs. While the spirit is never explicitly
called a “poltergeist,” the general activities of the spirit are comparable. The afflictions
experienced in the priest’s home are rather mild, indiscernible annoyances of the sort described by
Spina, Geiler, and Luther, In this, the demon keeps the priest from performing his regular duties
as an ordained member of the Church. The poltergeist demon thus represents a source of minor
didactic distraction.

Alongside the obvious auditory significations for the terms polter and rumpel, these lesser
demons enacted multiple other disturbances as well. Numerous sources disclose how they moved
or broke small objects like kitchen utensils and pottery; they might also furtively relocate much
larger objects, including tables, beds, and heavier furniture. Home furnishings were not only
misplaced, they often times disappeared altogether or were then found in unexpected locations.
Nider’s theologian conveyed to his pupil how the demon of Nuremburg not only made irritating
clamor, but hid items of clothing in inconvenient places throughout the cleric’s residence. In rarer
instances, poltergeists were culpable for fomenting larger disasters resulting in real physical harm.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, Nicholas Remy heard from servants in the village
of Dolmar how

Not twenty years ago a certain wanton Demon began to throw stones incessantly by day
and night at the servants of an inhabitant of this village; but after he had done this for a

323 Formicarius (1480; facsimile, Graz: Akademische Druck- under Verlagsanstalt, 1971), 5.2, 200:
“strepitibus et sibulis ac pulsibus, non multum excellentibus sed manifestis; ali-quoando enim ad parietes
percutiebat; aliquando vero ioculator varias mimorum fistulas ut videbatur flabat, et talia non nociua
multum gestiebat.”

138
long time without effect, they began to treat it as a joke and did not hesitate to hurl back taunts and insults at him. Therefore at the dead of night he set fire to the whole house in a moment, so that no amount of water was enough to prevent it from being immediately burned to the ground.\textsuperscript{324}

Poltergeists could agitate sizeable disasters that threatened the wellbeing of the community as a whole. The notion that such spirits sometimes threw stones to frighten or harm people would later be coined as “lithobolia.”\textsuperscript{325} The Roman historian Titus Livy is often cited as one of the earliest written accounts of the phenomenon, although notably without demonic causation. According to Livy, flaming stones of unknown origin terrified Roman soldiers during the Punic Wars as they fell from the skies.\textsuperscript{326} In the early Church, Christian saints like Daniel the Stylite (c. 409-93) commonly encountered stone-throwing demons as a challenge to ascetic practices.\textsuperscript{327} Throughout the Latin Middle Ages more generally, instances of demonic lithobolia intermittently appeared as a warning that wicked spirits lay waiting to pester humanity and manufacture forms of relatively tame suffering. William of Auvergne, for instance, claimed that he had personally experienced a minor spirit which tormented him by throwing stones, knocking on walls, and stealing the sheets off his bed.\textsuperscript{328}

Another prominent theme was that poltergeists represented emotionally sensitive spirits, reacting on a whim to the slightest discrimination. The sixteenth-century Saxon scholar Georgius

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{326} \textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{327} Helen Saradi, “The Christianization of Pagan Temples in the Greek Hagiographical Texts,” in \textit{From Temple to Church: Destruction}, ed. by J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 126.
  \item \textsuperscript{328} \textit{De Universo}, in \textit{Opera omnia}, 2 vols. (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1963), 1:1030.
\end{itemize}
Agricola provided what would become one of the most widely repeated accounts of this phenomenon:

Among the number of subterranean entities of (as theologians prefer) ‘substances’, one can include evil spirits who busy themselves in mines. These are of two kinds. They are aggressive, frightening to look at and, for the most part, dangerous and hostile to miners...Then there are the gentle ones which some of the Germans (like the Greeks) call ‘Cobali’ because they imitate human beings. These smile, as if longing for pleasure, and seem to do many things when actually they do nothing...They wander about in wells and burrows...they sometimes assail miners with gravel, they very rarely hurt them; and they never hurt them unless they themselves have first been hurt with laughter or insults.\footnote{De animantibus subterraneis liber (Froben, Johann & Bischoff, Niclausen, 1549), pp. 76-78. Translation from P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, Witch Beliefs and Witch Trials in the Middle Ages: Documents and Readings (London: Continuum, 2011), 4.}

Up to this point, poltergeists have been situated in domestic situations and not on the peripheries of human habitation. Agricola, however, who was cited and copied by Johann Weyer, and then virtually every demonologist copying from Weyer’s text, locates minor spirits in mines and subterranean spaces. The idea that these spiritual creatures were found in uncultivated areas of the world was not altogether novel. Luther eagerly pointed out that “there are many demons in the forests, water, swamps, and deserted places, where they like to harm people; others are in black, dense clouds and cause storms, hail, lightening, thunder, and poison the air.”\footnote{Werke, Tischreden, I, 1222, p. 609: “Es sind viel Teufel in Wäldern, Wassern, Wüsten und an feuchten pfuhlchten Orten, dass sie den Leuten mögen Schaden thun. Etliche sind auch in den schwarzen und dicken Wolken, die Machen Wetter, Hagel, Blitz und Donner, vergiften die Luft.” Luther also includes “houses” at VI, 5375e, p. 105.} Poltergeist demons not only haunted houses, they every corner of the sixteenth-century European landscape.

As these examples show, it can be difficult to ascribe universal patterns to poltergeist manifestations. They were broadly understood to be noisy spirits, but also physically disruptive and emotionally reactive demons encountered in homes and elsewhere. Perhaps because of the wide range of reported poltergeist afflictions, the issue of minor demons conformed awkwardly to
orthodox theological descriptions of fallen angels. Agricola’s entry, for instance, divides these “subterranean entities” into malevolent and seemingly benevolent spiritual creatures. He begins with the orthodox declaration that all such beings are harmful “evil spirits” but then entertains the notions that some are perhaps “gentle ones.” Thereafter, Agricola circles back to the standard theological position that these spiritual activities are either a trick of the Devil (they “seem to do many things when actually they do nothing”) or the minor local movements of demonic spirits (“they sometimes assail miners with gravel”).

Several learned authors struggled with the idea that “intellectual substances” were at once a perennial threat to humanity and a source of minor distractions, that all evil spirits exhibited the same universal attributes and infernal intentions but somehow enacted afflictions which were relatively trivial in character. The modern historian Hans Peter Broedel describes the problem well: late medieval and early modern authors had “to make evidence based on direct observation of sensible demons square with evidence of the devil’s unseen presence and with his theologically determined identity.” As Broedel points out, scholars and preachers wrestled with academic descriptions of demons as spiritual intelligences, on the one hand, and the numerous reports of mischievous spirits in the everyday settings, on the other.

One approach, most popularly derived from Augustine and widely employed by Renaissance humanists, was to associate pagan names with demonic spirits. Greco-Roman literature provided late medieval and early modern demonologists with a cornucopia of designations for minor deities and spirits infesting diverse places. Agricola, for example, accounts for the disparity between accounts of demonic beings by rendering the scholastic definition of demons (i.e., “substances”) into Greek (“Cobali”). The latter cobali notably functions as an

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331 The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft (2003), 44.
equivalent to minor household spirits in ancient Greek mythology. By blending the theological understanding of demons as an abstract principle of evil with the Greek designation, the reader is to infer that these beings are none other than demons in disguise.

Significantly, the Greek designation also converged with vernacular German conceptions of the Latin mineral “cobaltum” or in German “kobelt.” In Bergpostilla, oder Sarepta (1578), Johan Mathesius, a pastor in the mining town Joachimsthal (now Jachymov in Bohemia), explicitly likens the mineral to the activities of demonic kobolds, attributing theological meaning to the suffering caused in mines:

the Devil is a wicked, malicious spirit, who...work[s] much evil and mischief with cobalt...the most poisonous of the metals, and with them one can kill flies, mice, cattle, birds, and men. So, fresh cobalt and kisswasser devour the hands and feet of miners, and the dust and fumes of cobalt kill many mining people and work people who do much work among the fumes of the smelters. Whether or not the Devil and his hellish crew gave their name to cobelt, or kobelt, nevertheless, cobelt is a poisonous and injurious metal.\(^\text{332}\)

Mathesius indicates that the stinging caused by the mineral substance called cobalt was conceptually associated with the physical effects agitated by minor demons.

The most prolific collector of ancient, medieval, and contemporary names of demons was Johann Weyer. The physician from the Low Countries found Christian demons hiding behind the apparitions of the Greek goddess Hecate, the daimon of Socrates, and the “penates,” “manes,” and “lares” of ancient Rome. Supplementing ancient literature, he also reported how demons inhabited distant places around the known world. To the east, Weyer announced that “the king of Calcutta, the most famous trade center of India, worships and evil demon called Deumus,” just as to the west

\(^{332}\) Bergpostilla, oder Sarepta (Nuremberg, 1578), 154. Agricola also discusses cobalt in mines in De Re Metallica: Translated from the First Latin Edition of 1556, trans. by L. H. Hoover (London: The Mining Magazine, 1912), 214. However, Agricola does not make the direct association of demons and cobalt; he merely notes that demons do occupy some mines later in the work (p. 217).
and south, wicked spirits called “Grigri” populate forest in Canada and Guinea.\textsuperscript{333} For this author, both history and the known world proved that demons haunted Christians, as well as ancient and foreign peoples.

On a slightly different approach, several theologians turned instead to earlier Christian sources for precedent. A typical point of entry was John Cassian’s fifth-century treatise the \textit{Conferences}: Book 7, Chapter 32. There, the monastic author mentioned spirits called “Planii” and “Bacucei” which “have taken possession of certain places or roads [where] they delight themselves not indeed with tormenting the passers by whom they can deceive, but contenting themselves merely with laughing at them and mocking them try to tire them out rather than injure them.”\textsuperscript{334} For ecclesiastical figures a millennium after Cassian’s lifetime, the excerpt was an authoritative statement derived from one of the Desert Fathers. The passage draws distinction between a type of devil that haunts specific locales with deception and mockery and other demons that sexually tempted or physically tormented Christian individuals and communities. In effect, the passage provided Christian theologians with a model of demonic being that enumerated different classes of devils.

Discussing the whistling demon of Nuremberg, Johannes Nider cites the passage from Cassian, rejecting suggestions that these noises and distractions were the work of demons called incubi and succubi. Like Geiler, Nider also notably denies the opinion that human ghosts are the culprits. Instead, he insists that among the several classes of demons, there are those that do no harm except revel in childish deceits.\textsuperscript{335} The same point is made by Heinrich Kramer in his

\textsuperscript{333} \textit{Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance} (1991), 72-78.

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{Conferences}, in P. Schaff et al. (eds.) \textit{A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), vol. 11, bk. 7, ch. 32, p. 374.

\textsuperscript{335} \textit{Formicarius}, 5.2, 200.
infamous text on witches and witchcraft, the *Malleus maleficarum*. Again referencing Cassian, Kramer prefigures Geiler’s sermon, noting that “demons come in many different varieties” and there are “as many unclean spirits as pursuits among men.” Kramer then adds that the deceptions and harassments performed by trickster demons were not only different in kind from the nocturnal visitations of other infernal spirits, but also distinct from the torments of bodily possession enacted by yet other demons. Rather than enticing men to lust or murder, Kramer claims, these teasers are content with silly games and “are unable to harm anyone, at least not severely, but basically they just play jokes.”

Likewise, in his response to Emperor Maximillian, Johannes Trithemius evokes the language of John Cassian when he speaks about “these evil spirits our ancestors called *Bacuceos homines,*” whose sole purpose it to frighten and confuse pious Christians.

The impetus to contrast minor demons with more harmful devils was also found in exemplary literature. In a tale recorded by the thirteenth-century preacher Jacques de Vitry, the Devil is said to have chaperoned a man’s adulterous wife while he was away on pilgrimage to Compostela. The *exemplum* relates that the spirit invisibly protects the man’s wife by thwarting the (apparently welcome) advances of several suitors and thereby preventing the sin of adultery. At first glance, the story does not appear to involve a poltergeist demon, although we have later clues that it was read as such. The sixteenth-century *Zimmern Chronik* retells the story, stating that

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337 *Antwort Herrn Johan Abts zu Spanhaim* (1555), III, p. 43: “welche böse gayster unsere vorelter *Bacuceos homines.*”

the spirit engages in “noises or knocking” (“gerumpel oder klopfen”) in the man’s home.\textsuperscript{339} Johannes Trithemius, Johann Weyer, and the Jesuit Petrus Thyraeus also included the tale as an example of demonic infestation. Weyer places the anecdote in his chapter on the vernacular names attributed to so-called harmless demons, citing Trithemius specifically.\textsuperscript{340} Thyraeus repeatedly tells of the “infestatem Spiritum” as evidence that wicked spirits haunt human habitations.\textsuperscript{341}

What is interesting about the tale is how the demon guards the woman from her own lustful inclinations. Rather than eliciting sinful behavior, as premodern accounts would often tell of demons, the story exhibits an ironic inversion of orthodox theological teachings about wicked spirits. Numerous scholars have noted how the bonds between demons and women, in particular, were common stock for narratives concerning moral and sexual transgressions. Dyan Elliott has argued for two different religious narratives wherein incubi and succubi received considerable examination in clerical literature. On the one hand, Elliot notes the manner in which the feminized succubus stalks churchmen and served as an explanatory cause for nocturnal emissions. On the other, real and illusory sexual relations between women and masculine incubi were seen as “consensual, giving rise to a binding agreement not unlike the pact imputed to the sorcerer and the devil.”\textsuperscript{342} According to Elliott, medieval discourses on this sexually-charged apparition

\textsuperscript{339} Froben Christof Graf von Zimmern, Zimmerische Chronik, hrsg. von K. A. Barack (Tübingen: Literarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1869), 90.

\textsuperscript{340} Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance (1991) 74-6. For Trithemius, the tale is found first in Chronicon Monasterii Hirsauensis (Basileae, 1559) 160-61. In the last section of this chapter, I demonstrate that another version of the story exists in Trithemius’ revised history of the monastery at Hirsau.

\textsuperscript{341} Loca infesta: hoc est, De infestis, ob molestantes daemoniorum et defunctorum hominum spiritus, locis, liber unus (Cologne: Cholinus, 1598), ch 1, p.8.

\textsuperscript{342} Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 54.
demonstrates concerns over clerical purity and celibacy, bodily pollution, and especially claims of carnal vulnerability orbiting women.

In his work *Demon Lovers*, Walter Stephens has similarly commented on the central importance of incubi to demonological arguments from our period. Deftly arguing that “demon-theorists” were skeptical about the reality of demonic beings, Stephens contends that “the real demon lovers, the persons who most ardently desired physical relationships with embodied devils, were the theologians themselves,” rather than the women reported to have had intimate relations with demons.343 Like Elliott, Stephens highlights the importance of the incubus in widespread debates over the possibility of human copulation with spiritual creatures. The studies of Elliot and Stephens thus foreground how late medieval ecclesiastical authors wrote extensively about the influence of succubi and incubi in human affairs.

Nider, Kramer, and many of their successors felt compelled to write at length about the specific assaults of succubi and incubi, because their liaisons with humanity (often women) helped substantiate claims of witchcraft. To some extent, Vitry’s devilish apologue even appears to suit this conclusion. It emphasizes how the voluntary actions of the woman are especially licentious and categorically worse than the those of the Devil. In later iterations of the story, the woman even dabbles in practices that witchcraft theorists would have certainly associated with *malefica*: in order to cure herself of the Devil’s contraceptive presence, she “used many and various remedies made from shellfish.”344 Remarkable references like these could help establish and sustain learned late medieval worries over malefic women in tales of demonic encounter.

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344 This comment is actually omitted from *Chronicon Monasterii Hirsauensiis* (Basileae, 1559) 160-61, as well as Weyer’s *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance* (1991). It is found in Joannis Trithemii [. . .] *Annalium Hirsauensiis*, 2 vols. (St Gallen, 1690), 1:395–97. I explain the differences between the two accounts from Trithemius in the last section of this chapter.
Yet the anecdote also distances itself from the sole conclusion that the man’s wife is a witch. Indeed, didacticism rather than condemnation is prominent throughout the tale. At the story’s start, for instance, Vitry evokes the moral lesson of Gregory the Great. Upon leaving for Compostela, the man casually commends his wife to the Devil with hasty words. As discussed in Chapter 2, High medieval exempla often teach that careless words can invoke evil spirits that lay ready to intervene in human affairs. Moreover, while the episode clearly exhibits the woman’s moral failures by foregrounding the misuse of her body, it also highlights the culpability of her lovers “in a campaign to reach the object of their evil desires.” In general, the Devil does more than just a protect the wife from unchaste behavior. The infernal spirit comments on the morality of human behavior, telling the man upon his return: “Take back your wife whom you commended to me. I have guarded her with great difficulty and trouble. I would rather guard ten wild mares than so evil a woman.” The scene ironizes how the wife ought not need a spiritual chaperone, nor to this end should the husband commission a spiritual protector. Stated differently, the human beings, rather than the spiritual creature, lack Christian virtues and common sense.

With regard to the broader subject of poltergeist demons, it is hardly surprising that later authors would repeat this tale in varying forms. Vitry portrays the wicked spirit as a relatively minor, even ambiguous nuisance. In many ways, the demon serves as something of an unlikely spiritual guardian. For our purposes, the Devil’s unseen presence and demonic afflictions are markedly less harmful than (and deliberately contrasted with) the many tales about sexualized demons. In this sense, the story suits the later distinctions made by Nider, Kramer, and Geiler: that minor demons were often considered distinct from conceptions of incubi and succubi. As pliable instruments to catch an audience’s attention, medieval exempla that mention such spirits could emphasize different aspects of demonic being for the purposes of moral reflection.
Given the spectrum of afflictions afforded poltergeist demons, the subject also appeared in treatises dealing with witches and witchcraft. As we have seen, these spirits frequently irritated humanity with muffled noises, although physical harm and human death were also real possibilities easily relatable to the activities of malefic women and men. It is important to stress, however, that while late medieval attitudes towards poltergeists could be absorbed into mainstream discourses on witchcraft, they were by no means exclusive to them. Witches were said to serve and employ demons for deeds that diversely informed grand theories of diabolical conspiracy against the church and humankind. Uses of demonic magic and maleficia ranged from inciting mortal sins to many of the physical misfortunes described above. Depending on the author and context witches, demons, and magic had variegated roles to play in explaining human suffering.

Yet, scholars run the risk of overlooking other cultural motifs inherent to this literature, if they focus solely on late medieval and early modern charges of witchcraft. In the eyes of many churchmen, witches were an immediate concern, often dealt with at length and in great detail. The very same authors also reflected on the realities of everyday life, where unexplained occurrences perplexed the instinctive patterns of mass culture. One specific concern was that the home itself might become a site of demonic infestation. For this reason, Christians had to be made aware of the Devil’s capacity to manipulate the household and its inhabitants. From this perspective, discussions of poltergeist demons might dovetail with anxieties over witchcraft, but they were also a method by which the boundaries natural and supernatural causes were delimited. Rather than a separate ontological category of spiritual being, they served the very practical purpose of describing how demons disrupted tranquil spaces and Christian lives.

In many cases, this amounted to descriptions of how fallen angels wasted Christians’ time and energy. Here, the breaking of pots and other noisy activities were detrimental insofar as they
demanded a great deal of unwarranted attention. In numerous accounts, demonic activities were nothing but illusions that amounted to an elaborate hoax. As Georgius Agricola commented: the Cobali “seem to do many things when actually they do nothing.” Johann Weyer echoed this sentiment, claiming that ostensibly “gentle” demons “are active in households especially at night during the first period of sleep, and, by the noises they make, they seem to be performing the duties of servants—descending the stairs, opening doors, building a fire, drawing water, preparing food, and performing all the other customary chores—when they are really doing nothing at all.” This line of argument helped explain the ubiquitous claim that some spirits do less or no harm at all. Quite literally, “no harm” could communicate that demonic illusions “do nothing.”

Complementing this idea, the language of demonic games and tricks often suited the critiques of court jesters and minstrels. William of Auvergne made the allusion explicit in the thirteenth century, calling minor poltergeist spirits “joculatores” (professional entertainers) and “joculares” (jugglers). The medieval practices of minstrelsy and juggling were never ecclesiastically condemned, although churchmen often warned against the sinful vices associated with forms of vain entertainment. The early Church Fathers emphasized how the banquets,

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345 Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance (1991), 72.

346 This idea is evident in William Tyndale’s Obedience of a Christian Man, where the English scholar and theologian ridiculed the rituals of the Catholic papacy by likening them to the illusions of the folk spirit called Robin Goodfellow, thereby suggesting that neither the pope nor the demonic spirit actually perform what they say they do. See The Whole Workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes […] (London: John Day, 1573; Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery copy, Early English Books Online), p. 174.

347 De Universo, 1:1030. Johannes Nider also used this terminology, Formicarius, 5.2, 200.

games, and theatrical shows of poets and performers helped preserve ancient paganism and, therefore, the worship of demons. Medieval and early modern authors followed this line of reasoning and equated vulgar entertainment with the magical arts. The Catholic Archbishop of Uppsala Olaus Magnus, for example, affirmed that several of the so-called gods of the Goths and northern peoples won “possession of simple folk’s minds by their skill in some marvelous trick of jugglery.” Magnus reserved four chapters on the specific issue of actors, jesters, buffoons, comics, natural fools, and “dumb music.” In his diatribe against these pointless activities, the archbishop directly associated such dubious occupations with demonic oblations. Citing Vincent de Beauvais, Magnus claimed that “to give anything to actors was tantamount to sacrificing to demons.” The unspoken logic behind such critiques was that, like those humans skilled in legerdemain, demons deceived Christians with counterfeit imitations of what was actually happening. As such, Christians were better off ignoring them entirely by engaging in other pious and communal activities.

**Premodern Household Spirits**

Orbiting human encounters with noisy demons, late medieval and early modern authors also addressed a number of beliefs and practices associated with benign household spirits. According to traditional lore, these ethereal beings occupied premodern homes and often either demanded reward for keeping the house tidy or punished those who did not. Akin to learned

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discourses on poltergeists, the standard position of the clerical elite regarding ambiguous spirits was one of unrelenting antagonism. At the end of the fourteenth century, the ecclesiastical leader and theologian Jean Gerson produced a list of twenty-eight theological “errores” included in his treatise De erroribus circa artem magicam. The pronouncement, originally made by the Faculty of Theology at Paris in 1398, rejected in error 23 “that some demons are good, others kindly, others all-knowing, and others existed neither in a state of salvation nor in a state of damnation.”

Johann Weyer attached the entire list of errors to his De praestigiis daemonum, as did copies of the Malleus maleficarum in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Without citing all twenty-eight condemnations, the French political philosopher Jean Bodin drew attention to error 23 twice in his Démonomanie (1580), emphasizing the “resolution…to cut off the excuses and impiety of those who call upon and invoke devils under the guise of good demons.” The statement definitively denied that some demonic spirits were tepid in their hatred of humanity. This was a non-issue with regard to poltergeist hauntings, for these noisy spirits usually provoked fear and alarm appropriate to orthodox theological teachings. In cases of morally ambivalent spiritual creatures, however, Gerson’s warning gave preachers a means to confront traditions that seemed to welcome demons into Christian homes.

Multiple sources indicate that familiarity with such spirits was a relative commonplace. The itinerant fifteenth-century singer and poet Michael Beheim commented that “many believe

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353 On the Demon-Mania of Witches, trans. by R. Scott (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), bk 1.1 and explicitly alluded to at 1.2.
that every home has a domestic spirit and those who honor it is given fortune and prestige.”  

Decades later, a young Martin Luther echoed these sentiments, explaining to the people of Wittenberg how “some people have certain domestic demons, in the same way as there used to once be lares familiares, who sometimes appear by day. Some people in the vernacular call these Vichtelen, others Helekeppelin. It is believed that a house is most fortunate, if it is occupied by these illusions of demons; people are more afraid to give offence to those demons than to God and the whole world.”

Where Beheim’s declaration is morally equivocal about these creatures, Luther assumes the role of the orthodox theologian and preacher by demonizing spirits of the home. The Lutheran chronicler Enoch Widmann recalled with similar scorn that “Schretlein and little devils” were tame (kirre) and familiar (heimlich) manifestations in German households.

The above comments all indicate that many people variously accepted ethereal creatures as relatively harmless domestic companions. A recurrent German expression in these accounts is the spirit identified as a schrat, schretl, or schrätlin. Beheim, Trithemius (in the introduction above), and Widmann respectively employ the term schreczlin, Schrätlin, or Schretlein for purportedly spirits of the home, whereas Luther calls similar beings Vichtelen and Helekeppelin. The origins of these designations remain obscure, although folklorists have remarked that some meaning can be gleaned from their later usages. For

354 “Auch etlich glauben haben, Jeglichs haus hab ein schreczlin: wer das ert, dem geb es gut und er.” Cited in J. Hansen, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1963), 208.


instance, the diminutive “schrätzel” may be related to the word “rätzel,” which in medieval and contemporary German means “riddle.” In Dichtung und Wahrheit, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe speaks of rätzel in the traditional sense of a riddle or puzzle, but also adds that it can mean a person of dubious character with adjoining eyebrows. Swiss, French, and German folklore also employ the term rätzel to describe unsavory figures like dwarves, goblins, and demons, although I have not found any reference to a monobrow.\textsuperscript{357} Here, the implication is that the schrat is a mysterious personality generally associated with some unpleasant appearance.

Equally puzzling, Luther calls household demons of this sort Wichtelen and Helekeppelin. In modern German, the term “wichtel” is still employed to mean a furtive spirit of the home; it may also refer to the practice of anonymously giving presents to friends and loved ones (usually around Christmas). A wichtel in contemporary parlance thus communicates an invisible spirit and something like having a “Secret Santa,” as it were. Most importantly, both meanings retain the premodern idea of unseen or disguised action. A “helekeppel,” on the other hand, is synonymous with the German word “Tarnkappe,” or cloak of invisibility. As Charles Zika has shown, in the sixteenth century conceptions of magic hoods were associated in popular belief with diverse invisible spirits and communicated the Devil’s duplicity and capacity for manufacturing illusions.\textsuperscript{358}

The premodern significations afforded spirits of the home differed according to geographic location, as well as cultural and linguistic traditions. Alphonso de Spina, for instance, reported domestic disturbances fomented by spirits of Spanish folklore called duen de casa. As would be


expect of an orthodox theologian, Spina reifies these household spirits as demonic beings within the broader discourse of his *Fortalitium fidei*. Akin to the German *wichtel*, *duen de casa* would prove a remarkably durable expression, which is spoken in Spanish today as *duende*. The twentieth-century poet and playwright, Frederico García Lorca, famously expatiated on the subject in his poem “Play and Theory of the Duende” (1933), which describes the modern Andalusian appeal and cultural significance of household spirits. García Lorca refers to these creatures as Bacchic or Socratic daemons that artistically inspire authors, poets, artists, and especially flamenco performers to this day. He even flirts with the idea that when an audience cries “*Ole!*” in recognition of a flamenco performer’s talent (his inspired *duende*), the cry shares striking parallels with those in Arab music and dance that explicitly praise “*Allah! Allah!*” García Lorca’s poem thus suggests that *duende* personify divine inspiration and possession which engender artistic creativity.

García Lorca’s analysis is intriguing because it poetically suggests that the relationship between spirit, human, and home was (and still is) one fraught with significant semantic and cultural tensions. In effusive language meant to evoke mysterious appeal and playfulness, García Lorca writes:

> I don’t want anyone to confuse the *duende* with the theological demon of doubt at whom Luther, with Bacchic feeling, hurled a pot of ink in Eisenach, nor the Catholic devil, destructive and of low intelligence, who disguised himself as a bitch to enter convents, nor the talking monkey carried by Cervantes’ Malgesi in his comedy of jealousies in the Andalusian woods. No. The *duende* I mean, secret and shuddering, is descended from that blithe daemon, all marble and salt, of Socrates, whom it scratched at indignantly on the day when he drank hemlock, and that other melancholy demon of Descartes, diminutive as a

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359 *Fortalitium fidei* (1487), bk 5, consideration 10, difference 2.

green almond, that, tired of lines and circles, fled along the canals to listen to the singing of drunk sailors.\textsuperscript{361}

On this perspective, \textit{duende} was and is an elusive force or entity that mischievously generates artistic inspiration. It obstinately resists ecclesiastical definition while participating in and thereby giving meaning to the unseen processes of human history, literature, and life.

Admittedly, this modern literary perspective strays far from historical notions of medieval household spirits, although the allusion to \textit{duende} as an ambivalent source of spiritual meaning resonates with ecclesiastical critiques of these creatures. For premodern churchmen, superficially benign demons occupied Christian homes wanting, in Trithemius’ words, “nothing other than to be perceived as gods and holy spirits.”\textsuperscript{362} This was all the more worrisome, as Luther preached, because people were said to “believe that good fortune comes to a house, where such demons play their tricks.”\textsuperscript{363} The vast majority of extant source material on household spirits express similar condemnations, some of which date back to the thirteenth century.

In the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, for instance, clerical authors handled a number of penitential themes aimed at the spiritual care of Christian souls. One little known text in this pastoral tradition refers to idolatrous customs in the home. Entitled the \textit{Summa fratris Rudolfi de confessionis discretionе}, the document is attributed to the Cistercian monk Rudolf—about whom very little is known. The author disparagingly recounts practices and beliefs held by German settlers in Silesia between 1235 and 1250:

\textit{In novis domibus, siue quas de nouo intrare contigerit, ollas plenas rebus diversis diis penatibus, quos Stetewaldiu}

In new homes or into those which people should move, they bury vessels filled with different things in corners and behind the hearth

\textsuperscript{361} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{362} Trithemius, \textit{Antwort Herrn Johan Abts zu Spanhaim}, III, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{363} \textit{Decem Praecepta Wittenbergensi praedicata populo} (1518), vol. 1, p. 406.
vulgus appellat, sub terra in
diversis angulis et quandoque
fodiunt retro larem, vnde nec
retro larem fundi quicquam
permittunt. Et de cibis suis illuc
quandoque proiciunt, ut habitantibus
in domo procipientur. Quid hoc non
ydolatriam appellemus?

The passage aligns customs involving spirits called Stetewaldiu (or Stetewalden in another extant manuscript) with idolatry. Throughout the later Middle Ages, the critique of idolatry centered on the attempt of Christians to earn material benefits through ritualistic practices. Here, Brother Rudolf condemns activities wherein Christian folk either interred containers at the edges of the home or behind the stove in order to “appease the spirits in the home.”

An abundance of textual evidence supports the idea that favorable spirits were associated with the home. The author of the fifteenth-century Dives and Pauper alludes to the dubious “obseruauncys in the new mone or in the new yere, as settynge of mete or drynke be nyghte on the benche to fedyn Al-holde (or Gobelyn).” The reported ritual suggests that certain spiritual beings expected diverse offerings (e.g., food or drink) from human communities and in return their human counterparts received some form of service from the spirit. In the thirteenth century, William of Auvergne similarly wrote with contempt about beliefs in “Satia” or “Abundia,” and how people apparently left out dishes of food or flasks of wine “in the expectation that such gifts would be rewarded with fertility and prosperity for the home.” Étienne de Bourbon also alluded to

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beliefs of this kind among rural folk in France.\textsuperscript{366} Brother Rudolf, William, and Étienne align these practices with idolatry because God alone was to be commended for gifts of prosperity.

Of course, it might reasonably be claimed that these traditions are nothing more than the projections of theologians seeking to impose their own values on vernacular traditions. Yet the wealth of archeological evidence substantiating customs similar to those described above is considerable. The scholarship of Tobias Gärtner, in particular, demonstrates that numerous household rituals involving kitchen utensils were not uncommon in the later Middle Ages. Pots, pans, and other forms of kitchenware have been found in the corners of late medieval German homes in Bad Saulgau, Göttingen, and Dahlenburg. Likewise, in late medieval Goslar, Hannover, and Brandenburg an der Havel we find earthenware jars and small pitchers buried under hearths.\textsuperscript{367} As Gärtner points out, both literary accounts and archeological evidence indicate that many late German folk propitiated spirits in their homes despite ecclesiastical warning against the prescribed harm of such activities.

In Brother Rudolph’s \textit{Summa}, the hearth is mentioned twice as a focal point for such spirited activities. As Carra Ferguson O’Meara reminds us, “to a person of the fifteenth century, the hearth was a basic necessity of life: it provided light, warmth and the source of heat for cooking and baking.”\textsuperscript{368} In very basic terms, the pre-industrial fireplace was what made the home a safe

\textsuperscript{366} Nancy Caciola, \textit{Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 161. The citation above concerning William of Auvergne contains Caciola’s own words, not William’s.


\textsuperscript{368} “‘In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb’: The Iconography of the Holocaust in Late Medieval Art,” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 63:1 (1981): 82-83.
haven. It was a place where meat and vegetables were literally transformed in the home for consumption, but also a location where family and friends regularly met. From a social-anthropological perspective, activities in and around the hearth helped sustain domestic livelihood and well-being. Intriguingly, Ferguson O’Meara also indicates that the altar-like form of the hearth may have made analogies between baking bread and preparing the Eucharist conspicuous. Examining artistic representations of the Eucharistic altar, the household hearth, and the teachings of Thomist theology, she argues that a complex web of symbolism orbited the late medieval hearth in which the Eucharist, fire, and light communicated themes of divine mystery, health, and prosperity. Small wonder, then, that the house and hearth might have also been associated with other spiritual presences. The mid-fifteenth-century author of *The Distaff Gospels*, for instance, claimed that some women thought boiling water on a dormant stove revealed whether witches inhabited the home and repelled demons. As Amanda Vickery has famously argued, the house served as a metaphor for the body: “the weak points were its orifices: the doorway, the windows, the chimney and hearth.” In medieval Europe, it was widely accepted that wicked spirits might invade the house and its occupants through such openings. The reports of Brother Rudolf and others above anxiously indicate that some Christians propitiated diverse spirits of the home. In different forms, these ethereal beings animated domestic life in meaningful ways—whether as tricksters or protectors of the home.

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While the provenance of these traditions remains elusive, a few studies have considered earlier indices that may have informed beliefs in trolls, fairies, and their kin in domestic situations. Tutelary deities were integral to Roman religions as guardians of the home and empire, for example. Yet there is no direct evidence to suggest that late medieval vernacular traditions were aware of, much less entertained, Roman systems of belief and practice. More approximate to late medieval culture was literature on the Christianization of Northern European territories that features plentiful spirits co-inhabiting the natural world with humans. The thirteenth-century *Kristni saga*, for example, tells of Iceland’s conversion to Christianity in the late tenth century. Often described as a “missionary” or projected ecclesiastical history of Iceland, the retrospective narrative frames a proleptic division of the text: “the first half in heathendom and the second in Christianity.” In the first half, the saga relates the deeds of the first bishop in Iceland named Friðrekr and the ensuing process of miraculously converting the inhabitants there.

The *Kristni saga* begins by noting how a group of thirteen Icelandic men were initially reticent to accept Christianity. Upon the arrival of Bishop Friðrekr, the men challenge the holy man to prove his spiritual potency, explaining that they already have a source of spiritual sanctuary: a stone at Giljá that has been “used to sacrifice, and they claimed that their guardian spirit lived in it.” The brief scene posits an ultimatum of sorts in which the native Icelanders will only consent to “the bishop or the spirit in the stone.” In typical hagiographical style, the bishop triumphantly

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breaks the stone after chanting over it—presumably banishing the residing spirit—and all but one of the men thereafter receive baptism. The introductory episode thus communicates that the stone was thought to possess some spiritual power and protective benefit. The natives are initially slow to respond to the bishop for fear of angering the spirit and losing their spiritual custodian. Thereafter, they witness the bishop’s holiness and power over the foreign spirit. In much of Norse saga literature one finds the idea that spiritual inhabited portions of the landscape. While the account does not feature household spirits, it nevertheless conveys the idea that spiritual beings animated the physical world, serving as patron or guardian presence.

Valerie Flint has traced similar early medieval “complaints about persistent non-Christian practice, a complaint found very widely in the sermons and the legislation of the period…[that] deplores the reverence still displayed toward stones and trees and fountains, and poured out upon places where the ways on highroads forked or parted or crossed.”375 With examples ranging from Augustine to Burchard von Worms in the eleventh century, Flint elucidates the demonization of pagan places of reverence as interpreted by early medieval theologians. More recently, Ellen F. Arnold has found a ninth-century monastic account of demonic infestation.376 In the Vita Remacli, the monk Remacle is glorified as a founder and leader in establishing Christian monasteries by evangelization of the physical environment—in this case one associated with pagan ritual beliefs and therefore demons. Both Flint and Arnold highlight varied processes of conversion of a pagan landscape—physical and spiritual—into a Christian one.

Although the examples from Flint and Arnold, like the reference to the Kristni saga, are much earlier than the fifteenth century, scholars have highlighted that the process of


Christianization did not end in the eleventh century. Stella Rock has shown that: “Rus, like Scandinavia and the Baltic region, was Christianized comparatively late, and therefore by the twelfth century had far more limited exposure to Christian ideas and culture than, say, France.” The Grand Duchy of Lithuania officially adopted the Christian tradition only in 1387—with the even later conversion of the ethnic region of Samogitia in 1413. These are important points because a cultural awareness of Christian conversion in Northern and Eastern Europe may have informed the presence and demonization of residual pagan beliefs and practices.

In the late Middle Ages, conceptions of paganism, in particular, were often fitted into a broader category of spiritual creatures, including beings such as trolls, elves, and night-flying female spirits, among others. As the German scholar Karin Baumann has shown, the fifteenth-century “Wiener Schule” created catechismal materials that designated multiple spiritual apparitions as “superstitious” (ungelawben):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martin von Amberg “Gewissensspiegel”</th>
<th>Thomas Peuntner “Christenlehre”</th>
<th>Stephen von Landskron “Himmelstrasse”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…Die do gelawben an dy perchten mit der eysren nasen”</td>
<td>“…die da gelauben an die perecht mit der eysnem nasen”</td>
<td>“…oder glauben… an die fraw percht oder fraw hold”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an herodiades an dyana an dy heidenischen</td>
<td>an herodiadis an dyana die haidnisch</td>
<td>an herodiadis an diana dy heidnisch göttin oder tewfflin</td>
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<tr>
<td>an dy nachtvaren und</td>
<td>an die nachtarunden</td>
<td>an dy nach varünden</td>
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<tr>
<td>an dy pilweisen</td>
<td>an dye pilweys</td>
<td>an die pilweis</td>
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</table>


378 Here, Olaus Magnus’s treatise, Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus (1555) is exemplary. It relates the process of historical conversion for people in the northern lands, often commenting on the persistence of vernacular beliefs about trolls, elves, and many other spiritual creatures, which he calls demons.
The three lists above translate roughly as: “To believe in Lady Perchten or Holda, Herodias, Diana, the heathen gods, night flights, pilweisen, hynnepritten, trolls, domestic spirits, monsters, werewolves, elves or any others like this is impious.” Vernacular claims about spirits and their appearance could thus merge into wider debates about pagan superstitions and the type of invasive spiritual creature seeking to infest Christian homes. The Vienna school assigns foolish (“närrische”) and heathen (“heidenische”) beliefs to these traditions; it also importantly remarked how “many Christians were also regrettably counted among them.” For this reason, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century churchmen felt compelled to mediate on why such beliefs persisted.

It is also remarkable that in the catechismal teachings of the “Wiener Schule,” the authors unanimously begin with reference to the diverse names associated with a “heathen goddess.” As early as the eleventh century, Burchard of Worms compiled his *Decretum*, which covered an extensive list of “superstitious” beliefs and practices. As noted in Chapter 2, Burchard included in his collection of canons and codes a document called the “canon Episcopi” taken from Regino of Prüm around the year 900. The canon would become authoritatively entrenched in canon law with Gratian’s *Decretum* in the twelfth century. It recounted the delusion of “certain wicked women” who held that they travelled with the goddess Diana at night as her mistress. The allusion to the

Teutonic goddesses Frau Holda and Perchte, as well as the Greco-Roman deity Diana, in the fifteenth century by Amberg, Peuntner, and Landskron suggests that these authors turned to canon law when dealing with reports of other vernacular names attributed to spiritual beings. In the minds of such late medieval clerics, the variety of vernacular terms for spirits could be explained as illusory names falsely given to fallen angels. On this view, the miscellany of popular beliefs was less remarkable than the threat posed by demons in counterfeiting pagan deities.

That prominent theologians and preachers sought to curb vernacular customs associated with household spirits intimates these ethereal creatures enjoyed considerable popular currency. Whatever the church taught them about the wickedness of minor demons, vernacular traditions appear to have continued investing some amount of meaning into domestic apparitions. After all, these spirits were reported to offer individuals and communities a sense of wonder and surprise about the home. The story of the spirit Hutgin, to which we now turn, offers a charming illustration of this idea.

**Johannes Trithemius and the Tale of Hutgin**

In his late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century annals of the Abbey at Hirsau, Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516) recorded a lengthy narrative concerning an ambiguous creature named Hutgin. Dated to the year 1132, Trithemius begins the entry by stating that a local spirit named Hutgin wore a felt cap (pileus), and that the rural folk of the diocese of Hildesheim thus also referred to creature as “Pileatus.” Likewise, the abbot recalls how the Saxons generally distinguished the spiritual creature as “ein Hudeckin” or “Hütchen.” These introductory remarks give the impression of a highly localized spiritual creature, one with which people in German lands would have been relatively familiar. Trithemius then describes how Hutgin
appeared visibly in rustic garb to many persons as often as he wished...speaking, laughing, and taking pleasure in people’s company; he answered questions put to him and worked many marvels...and used to appear often in the kitchen, speaking to and assisting the cooks sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly. He did not hurt or offend anyone unless he had been injured first. However, he remembered insults and resented mockery, paying back those who inflicted abuse upon him.

Thereafter, Trithemius delineates four short, interconnecting episodes that were likely collated from oral sources to make a more robust narrative: 1. Hutgin advises the bishop of Hildesheim in successfully joining the neighboring county of Winzenburg to that of Hildesheim, 2. The spirit takes horrific revenge on a young boy that harasses Hutgin while working in the kitchen, 3. An anonymous man commissions the spiritual creature to act as a chaperone to his wife’s chastity while he is away on a business, and 4. Hutgin fashions a laurel ring (annulum ex foliis lauri) for an unnamed priest and turned “a simple and unlearned cleric...into a great scholar for a while.”

The entry abruptly concludes with the statement that the Bishop of Hildesheim permanently banished Hutgin from the county of Hildesheim.

Notably, the third episode is an alternative version of Vitry’s exemplum above, one that in the sixteenth-century existed as an entertaining tale of poltergeist affliction. To some extent, all four episodes evoke this idea. Throughout the entry, Trithemius emphasizes Hutgin’s invisibility and audible participation in the community of Hildesheim. At numerous points throughout the four episodes Hutgin catches his human interlocutors unaware with his (at times) inconspicuous presence and speech. For instance, the spirit is said to audibly wake the Bishop Bernard from his sleep, terrify the master chef with a loud voice, keep the city guards alert with shouts, and invisibly speak to a man gone on a long journey. The entry thus foregrounds how human figures react with fright and surprise to Hutgin, because the spirit’s precise location remains indiscernible to the majority of Christian observers.
Yet, the passage also accentuates the idea that haunting demons were household spirits that act as “surrogate human beings, with bodies and passions and moral ambiguities.” Trithemius frames the entire narrative by stating that the spirit regularly engaged in communal acts by day, such as cooking, congenial conversation, and “customary behavior” (*consuetudine familiaris factus*). We are told that the *Hutgin* delights to be with men (*delectabatur esse cum hominibus*), “speaks familiarly to all” (*respondens familiariter omnibus*), and participates in multiple mundane human activities. At different points throughout the tale, the spirit also counsels a churchman (the Bishop of Hildesheim) regarding “many dangers,” and later *Hutgin* helps protect an unchaste woman from vicious debauchery. The spirit of Hildesheim is even given the general qualification at the entry’s start that “no one feared him.”

Furthermore, physical and anthropomorphic descriptions are conspicuous throughout Trithemius’ anecdote. These presumably serve to portray *Hutgin* as an almost-human creature with familiar attributes and inclinations. In this, the account seems to hedge in Hutgin’s spiritual (or demonic) potency by emphasizing a certain materiality to the creature: *Hutgin* appears in “rustic garb,” his head is “covered with a felt cap,” and works “with his hands.” The household spirit is also given an actual name with the epithet “capped one,” suggesting an additional layer of familiarity for the community of Hildesheim and Lower Saxony. In short, *Hutgin* is presented as a relatively approachable figure but one that also resonated with ecclesiastical condemnations of demonic spirits.

My interest in Trithemius’ tale stems from the ways in which it communicates learned theological assumptions poltergeists and household spirits. In what follows, I will demonstrate

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how the passage alludes to and appropriates elements from folklore to serve Trithemius’ own moral-theological purposes. Before looking at how the story conveys orthodox demonological attitudes, however, it is important to note the entry’s history of transmission because at least two versions (or three, counting the Zimmern Chronik) exist, and these indicate subtle variations in demonological emphasis and interpretation. Most importantly, Trithemius revised his first account of Hutgin so as to provide a far more concise metaphysical explanation of Hutgin’s demonic actions and intent.

Trithemius recorded his chronicle of Hirsau in two separate texts that are accessible today via printed early modern editions: the Chronicon Hirsaugiense (Basileae, 1599) and the Annales Hirsaugienses (St. Gallen, 1690). The earlier of these two works, the Chronicon Hirsaugiense, Trithemius started in 1495 and finished as a manuscript in 1503. The Chronicon notably commences as a Klostergeschichte with the year 1049 and ends its report with 1370. Then around 1509, Trithemius began the Annales Hirsaugienses, which is a much more extensive account of Hirsau’s history in two volumes. Like the Chronicon, it starts in 1049 but continues to 1514, the year in which Trithemius finished his second manuscript.381

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Both the *Chronicon* and *Annales* relate noteworthy events orbiting the monastery, and these are presented in chronological order. To be clear, the two iterations of the chronicle of Hirsau do not center on the theme of demonic infestation, although Trithemius does rely on knowledge and stories collected from earlier chronicles, hagiography, and oral legend which sometimes mention angels, demons, and saints, among others. As Noel Brann has shown, the *Chronicon* and *Annales* bear the mark of northern Renaissance humanism, meaning Trithemius focuses on virtuous occurrences in the past in order to inform moral action in the present.  

The Abbot of Sponheim wrote his chronicles to preserve the sacred history of Hirsau, as well as to champion Catholic wisdom and holiness in his own time.

Trithemius’ life would become embroiled in controversy around the time he was finishing the *Chronicon*. At some point in 1503 or 1504, the French philosopher Carolus Bovillus, also known as Charles de Bovelles, visited the Abbey of Sponheim and, after viewing a partially finished manuscript by Trithemius entitled the *Steganographia* (c. 1500), Bovillus accused his host of necromancy. In very general terms, *Steganographia* exhibits Trithemius’ fascination with cryptology and the possibility of summoning angelic spirits to communicate over vast distances. It memorably earned Trithemius the dubious status of occult magician in many ecclesiastical circles. Thereafter, he would nevertheless find patronage from Emperor Maximillian I and was widely read by his contemporaries and successors as an authority on ecclesiastical history, church reform, and demonology.

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For our purposes, the two early modern editions of the Hirsau chronicle evince slightly different accounts of the Hutgin narrative. At first glance, the disparities appear minute in detail. Both versions generally recount the outline of four episodes given above but with minor omissions and additions in each. One of the most obvious variations is that the later Annales (1690 edition) omits the brief episode in which Hutgin transforms a simple cleric into a learned scholar. Instead, it states that the spirit was ultimately exiled from Hildesheim and then seen among a crowd of people in Aachen. In the concluding narrative, Hutgin pleads with an anonymous man, who recognized the spirit, to ask permission from the local bishop that the he (the spirit) be allowed to return to Hildeshem. The man follows through with Hutgin’s request, but the Bishop Bernard denies Hutgin the possibility of return to the diocese. In this version, the entry assumes an overtly orthodox conclusion: ill-defined spiritual creatures should be expelled from Christian communities, despite any ostensibly redeeming characteristics.

The Chronicon and Annales also introduce and identify Hutgin’s spiritual status in different ways. The former text opens by designating Hutgin a “certain wicked spirit” (spiritus quidam malignus). In contrast, the latter omits the word “malignus” altogether, favoring the ambivalent designation “spiritus” throughout the entry. The term “daemonium” is used later in the Annales, as in the Chronicon, when Hutgin becomes irate with the young boy harassing the him in the kitchen. More strikingly still, Hutgin’s actions are described differently in the two records. The Chronicon initially states that “this spirit Hutgin worked many marvels” (iste spiritus Hukin multa mirabilia fecit) but then confusingly announces in the concluding section how “this spirit worked miracles” (spiritus iste miracula fecit). The Annales employs the phrase “plura miranda fecit” at the entry’s start without mention of marvels or miracles in its conclusion. As discussed in Chapter 1, the distinction between marvels and miracles was important in later medieval analyses, because it
helped delineate the boundaries of the natural world and the capabilities of spiritual creatures therein. Theologians argued that blessed and fallen angels existed as created beings; they were said to possess the capacity to produce marvels but never miracles—at least not of their own volition. God could manifest miracles through demonic actions, but rarely did so. Following the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, demonologists tended to foreground that God alone, the creator and sustainer of the natural world, transcended the order of nature. By calling attention to the marvels produced by demonic spirits in particular—a point which is left unclear in the *Chronicon*—theologians sought to identify the limits of demonic power in relation to the divine will. With this in mind, the so-called miracles of the spirit *Hutgin* introduce theological error into the account, perhaps in order to reflect on popular storytelling as a source of entertainment.

By and large, Trithemius’ two *Hutgin* narratives are not so much contradictory as they are revealing of varying degrees of demonological erudition. This is most evident where Trithemius describes how the spirit punished the young boy and master chef in the kitchen. In both texts, we are told that *Hutgin* worked with humans in the prelate’s court and kitchen. In the *Chronicon*, after incessant harassment and having “repeatedly asked the master chef to stop the boy's wrong-doing,” the spirit retorts: “because you are loath to correct your boy at my request, I shall show you in a few days hence how I am afraid of him.” Thereafter, the spiritual creature enacts his exaggerated retaliation on the boy and chef:

not long after, when the weary boy was sleeping alone in the kitchen one evening…[*Hutgin*] strangled him, tore him into pieces, put him into a pot, and began to cook him over the fire. When the master chef had seen this, he began to curse the spirit, who became further enraged and on the following day squeezed some hideous toads over a roast which had been set above the fire on spits for the bishop and the members of the court. He sprinkled the meat with the toad’s poison and blood. Being reviled once again by the chef, he hurled him down from some planks concealing a pit. Then, keeping nightly watch most diligently upon the city walls and the castle walls, he constrained all the guards
to remain awake.\textsuperscript{384}

Generally speaking, both the *Chronicon* and *Annales* depict Hutgin’s spiritual vengeance in this particular scene as inhuman (i.e., demonic). The boy’s incessant teasing of the spirit, as well as the master chef’s failed intervention, trigger a wild reversal of how Hutgin is presented in the introductory remarks as “familiar.” This contrast between a helpful spirit at the entry’s start and a violently vengeful demon in the second episode complicates the depiction of Hutgin as a helpful spirit.

The same uncanny tone and explicit horror are evident in the *Annales* version but with far more detail on how these events come to pass. In the later redaction, Trithemius repeats that the spirit caught and killed the boy while sleeping, but then adds how:

When this had been done, he called out to the cook in a great voice, and said to the cook, “come down quickly, and see the broth that I have made for you on the fire.” The cook, frightened by the sound of the fire and the spirit’s voice, got out of bed, came downstairs, and found the boy all cut up in the pot. He was struck with horror and rage and began to curse the spirit. The spirit replied to him, “cease from curses lest anything similar happens to you, since I asked you so often, that you should refrain from insults against me and you would not: see, now I have been forced to take revenge on these offences to me.” A few days later, while a roast of meat was being turned, and when the cook was distracted from his work, as tends to happen, the spirit took out from the bag that he was wearing some exceedingly great, fat and horrible toads: squeezing them hard with his hands he poured out their fat with its poison on to the roasts, saying “because of your curses, cook, I give you this fat from my hunting”. Turning round at his voice, the cook saw what he had done, and greatly distressed he seized the spit with the roasts on it, and beat the spirit fiercely with it. He, pretending to be angry, said to the cook, “be well aware that I shall not pass over this insult that you have given me without vengeance: I shall pay you back in my own time.” The spirit had the habit at night of watching on the towers and walls of the bishop’s castle in the manner of a watchman, and waking the watchmen who were sleeping on guard, and by his shouts to force them to keep watch. One night, shouting out in his usual way, he called the sleeping cook to come to him, promising that he would show him something

\textsuperscript{384} Trithemius, *Chronicon Monasterii Hirsauensis* (Basileae, 1559) 160-61: “non multo post, cum die quadam post uesperam puer solus in coquina fatigatus dormiret, venit spiritus & suffocatum in frusta conscidit, ollaeque; impositum ad ignem coquire coepit, quod magister coquinae cum percepisset, spiritui maledicere coept: qui exacerbatus, assaturam postero die pro episcopo & curialibus ad ignem in uerubus positam, compressis desuper bufonibus horrendis, ueneno & sanguine eorundem aspersit: rursusque; contumelijis affectus, per pontem illux foriem in foueam de alto illum praeceptavit, supra muros civitatis & castelli vigilias nocturno tempore diligentissime peragens, omnes custodes vigilare coegit.
fine. The cook got up, and thinking that an imaginary bridge that had been constructed by
the spirit’s craft was real, he walked on to it without fear, fell into a ditch, and broke his
leg. The cook wept from the extreme pain, the spirit laughed, and rushing to the man as he
lay said to him: “cook, are you going to beat me with a spit in your kitchen again? Now, as
I promised I would, I have taken pleasure in avenging the insults that you heaped on me.”

As in the *Chronicon*, this second version remains a didactic spectacle. *Hutgin* repeatedly calls to
the master chef to “see” and “be well aware” of the events orbiting the spirit. These frightening
events are also implicitly contrasted with the entry’s introduction in which the spirit is described
as cordial and even helpful up until the point of blatant harassment. As Trithemius notes at the
start: “He did not hurt or offend anyone unless he had been injured first. However, he remembered
insults and resented mockery, paying back those who inflicted abuse upon him.” While *Hutgin’s*
spiritual vengeance thus accentuates inhuman or demonic retribution, the tale also exemplifies an
eccentric conception of “love thy spiritual neighbor as thyself,” or else. It communicates how
*Hutgin* will “show” what is ostensibly not self-evident to the master chef: that the spirit should be
treated as an equal, lest horrible reaction take place. That is, the creature’s cruel reprisal originates

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385 Joannis Trithemii [. . .] *Annalium Hirsauigiensium*, 2 vols. (St Gallen, 1690), 1:395–97: “Quo facto,
magnis vocibus cocum inclamitans dixit, veni cocce descende velociter, & vide pulmentarium, quod tibi ad
ignem composui. Territus cocus ad cerpitum ignis & vocem spiritus, surrexit, descendit, puerum sectum in
olla reperit. Qui stupor concussus &furore commotus spiritui maledicere coepit. Cui ille cessa iniquit a
maledictis netibi simile contingat, quoniam saepius te rogavi, ut ab injurijs meis compesceres illum &
noluuisti: Ecce nunc vindicavi contumelias meas necessitate compulsus. Paucis exinde diebus elapsis cum
assatura cranium verteretur ad ignem intravit spiritus, & coquo in suo ministerio, ut fieri solet, mente
aliorsum distratum, Spiritus è pera, quam ad latus portare videbatur, magnos, pingues, & horribiles nimium
bufones extraxit: & minus fortiter compressos putredinem eorum cum veneno assaturis instillavit dicens:
Pro maledictionibus tuis coce, do tibi hanc pinguedinem venationis meae. Ad cujus vocem cum ille
conversus vidisset, quod agebatur per spiritum animo turbatus veru cum assaturis arripuit, & in spiritum
fortiter cum impetus vibravit. Ille se finges iratum dixit ad cocum: sciens scito, quod hand irrogatam nunc
per te mihi contumeliam non transibo inultam, sed opportune vindicabo. Consueveratatem spiritus noctu
in turribus & muris castelli Pontificis more vigilum consistere & clamare, ipso
sue dormientes in guardia
custodies excitare: & suis clamoribus ad vigilandum compellere. Quâdam igitur nocte more suo clamitans
cocum juxta dormantem ad se vocat: pulchrum se quidpiam pollicens ostensurum; furgit cocus pontem
illusorium spiritûs arte fabricatum putans esse verum, nihil metuens ascendit, in fossatum cecidit, tibiam
fregit. Ex doloris vehementia cocus flevit, spiritus risit, & improperans jacenti dixit: Iterumme veru me in
tua culina percuties coce? Jam ut pollicitus fueram, irrogatas mihi contumelias laetus vindicavi. De caetero
negotijs tuis prospiiciens me non injuriabis.”
from and hyperbolically mirrors the neglect endured by the company hosting the spiritual presence.

In addition to the tale’s didacticism, Hutgin’s actions in the Annales evince more acute demonological queries in a way that is generally lacking in the Chronicon. In the shorter Chronicon, for example, Trithemius recounts that the master chef witnessed the aftermath of the boy’s murder, immediately cursed the spirit, and then fell down into a mysteriously concealed pit. We are then told that Hutgin kept the guards of the city awake—an addition that seems out of place within the broader discussion. The Chronicon thus moves quickly through the series of circumstantial events with little explanation.

The Annales, on the other hand, provides the rationale and details behind Hutgin’s actions, making the entire episode far more legible from the perspective of Christian demonology. Specifically, the audience is now given several additional narrative elements in order to make sense of the passages from the Chronicon. We are now told that Hutgin hunts for toads, that he is beaten by a spit, and that the spirit furtively lures the master chef with “something fine.” The city guards are also mentioned in order to explain the manner in which Hutgin calls to the chef and throws him into a pit. Thereafter, the pit itself is explained as being illusory. With these additional details, the Annales entry is given more logical consistency. From the point of view of premodern demonology, these are important additions. Concerned with questions of metaphysical causation, demonologists were especially keen to discern the effects of demonic illusions and the perverse motivations behind demonic actions. Thus, Hutgin is now said to manufacture an “imaginary bridge” concealing the ditch; the spirit also feigns anger in order to punish the chef. These supplemental components all help to register the spirit Hutgin as a demonic spirit through events that are consistent with demonological assumptions about metaphysical causation.

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The two accounts of Hutgin and their different portrayals of the spirit of Hildesheim thus create an interesting intertextual tension. On the one hand, the second episode (in both) suggests that Hutgin is a demonic spirit that inflicts grotesque suffering on the community. On the other, Hutgin repeatedly features in each as a familiar presence that acts as moral witness to human misdeeds. Theologians and preachers sought to dissuade their congregations from sinful behavior with exempla similar to Trithemius’ story. Late medieval audiences would have, no doubt, immediately recognized the tale as a didactic anecdote. Yet the literary dimensions of the tale—its didactic character, tone, and message--also complement traditional lore about household spirits. And in light of the archeological evidence for and theological condemnations against household spirits, the story of Hutgin can serve to cultural perceptions, feelings, and observations about these elusive spiritual beings.

To this end, the tale of Hutgin contains several motifs that were common in late medieval and early modern literature about these ambiguous creatures. For one, the spirit’s activities ascribe political meaning to the community surrounding Hildesheim.386 Trithemius narrates how the neighboring county of Winsenburg was experiencing political turmoil on account of murder. Said to don “rustic garb” in the first episode, Hutgin’s red cap and corresponding sobriquet (Pileatus) are contrasted with the Bishop of Hildesheim’s own cranial dressing (presumably his tonsure): the spirit forcefully designates Bishop Bernard as “bald plate” (o calve), commanding the holy man to “Get up...and summon an army, because the county of Winsenburg is empty and abandoned on account of a murder, and it will readily obey your authority!” This naming strategy effectively

386 Caroline Walker Bynum’s discussion of the werewolf of Ulster makes a similar claim. See Metamorphosis and Identity (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 16ff. See also, Richard Firth Green, Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 22-23, which gives a number of examples in which fairies could be used to justify civil disobedience.
reifies the bishop's ecclesiastical status and episcopal responsibility—in effect, his household. It also affirms Hutgin's own role within Hildesheim. As Gabriela Signori has shown, medieval headgear was of great importance as “a marker of age, office, rank, dignity,” where hats in particular often helped communicate social relation and status.\(^{387}\) In the chronicle of Hirsau, we are told that the bishop promptly arose, invaded the county, and successfully joined it to the county of Hildesheim “with the consent of the Emperor.” The first episode thus places a fictive claim on Hildesheim’s expansion into a larger corporate body. By alerting the bishop Bernard to his episcopal authority, Hutgin apprises his audience to his participation in the religious and political history of the diocese.

Secondly, household spirits were generally thought to occupy premodern homes, often requesting some form of reward for tidying the house or threatening punishment to those who failed to do so. For example, in the ninth century Notker the Stammer told of a mischievous “hobgoblin” that promised a local blacksmith: “if you will agree not to stop me amusing myself in your smith, put your drinking-pot here and each day you will find it full.”\(^{388}\) Of course, reciprocity between household spirits and humans typically functioned the other way around: humans leave offerings for spirits in order to appease them and sustain domestic tranquility. In contrast to the sudden fear and unseen distraction of poltergeist demons, household spirits exuded characteristics of familiarity and cautious approach, often requiring varied forms of ritual propitiation. In the passage recorded by Trithemius, Hutgin is never given a ritual offering \textit{per se}. Yet the motifs of


communal prosperity and social exchange are evoked, and a gift economy of reward and punishment is repeatedly made evident.

In particular, the spirit helps sustain the normal workings of the town as long as he is never wronged by the community. Midway through the second narrative, we recall that the boy begins insulting *Hutgin* and pours kitchen-refuse on the spirit. At this point in the story, *Hutgin* requests that the master chef reprimand the boy, but the chef then also takes part in ridiculing and beating *Hutgin*. The scene evinces the idea that an equilibrium in the home or community has been established and is then disrupted by the actions of the boy and master chef. In this way, the episode literally turns the practice of offering food or drink to spirits on its head: the boy dumps rotten waste and trash on *Hutgin*. This behavior galvanizes the spirit to horribly punish his hosts. In the *Chronicon* version, the misconduct of the boy and chef even lead *Hutgin* to exact his revenge on the larger community: *Hutgin* poisons a roast with toad fat “for the bishop and the members of his court.” The episode communicates that treatment of the spirit will result in either reward or punishment—the community’s prosperity or demise. From these perspectives, Trithemius’ story draws upon the idea that rural communities engaged with certain spirits as if they welcome participants in communal life.

The third theme is that these spirits were shrouded in conceptions of premodern magic. By the twelfth century, orthodox demonology held that while demons were limited to the laws of nature, they nevertheless worked deeds through occult processes which exceeded human understanding. The feats of demons were thus frequently associated with theological descriptions of natural magic. In the later Middle Ages, they were also increasingly aligned with the activities of purported witches and conceptions of necromancy. Importantly, a fine line always existed between the diverse beliefs and practices labelled as “magical,” and it is crucial to acknowledge
that these traditions were by no means uniform in literature throughout premodern Christian history. But as Stuart Clark and others have argued, the skill and knowledge afforded the Devil and his demons in the later Middle Ages presented infernal spirits as exceptionally adept practitioners of natural magic.\textsuperscript{389} Small wonder, that we also find descriptions of domestic demons working wonders and magic within premodern homes.

A prime example of this is found in the fourth episode where Hutgin fashions a laurel signet that converts a “simple and uneducated cleric…into a great scholar.” The infusion of worldly knowledge and improvement of the intellectual faculties by means of occult processes was a well-known (and widely condemned) necromantic practice called the \textit{Ars Notoria}. Typically associated with learning the seven liberal arts, this “holy art”—often traced back to the fourteenth-century monk John of Morigny—granted eloquence, memory, and understanding to its practitioners through angelic aid. By gazing at a series of geometric figures and characters, students were able to grasp knowledge more quickly and efficiently via angelic operations on behalf of their human counterparts.\textsuperscript{390} The brief allusion to this practice in Trithemius’ account, however, has \textit{Hutgin} perform this magical function. Specifically, the scene exhibits the inversion and performance of intellectual transformation by using elements of nature. Instead of a laurel wreath signifying scholarly accolade, \textit{Hutgin} imbues the leaves of a laurel tree with spiritual potency and transforms the priest’s intellect.


It is admittedly difficult to adduce to what extent tales like Trithemius’ reflect the actual experiences of premodern European people. For churchmen like Trithemius, the tale of Hutgin was an entertaining anecdote—the 1599 edition contains the marginal comment “ridiculosa historia”—to be shared among his companions at Sponheim, but also an effective means to demonstrate for others that demonic deceits existed within domestic situations as well.391 As mentioned above, later authors, such as Johann Weyer and Petrus Thyræus, also cited the tale of Hutgin and thus continued the practice of reporting what they claimed were foolish vernacular traditions. These men feared that some communities failed to appropriately discern the Devil’s work in the home; they sought to absorb erroneous beliefs and customs into an orthodox cosmology. Significantly, the accounts and experiences reported in this chapter illuminate that late medieval folk were aware of non-human entities as a potential cause of household disturbances. This does not mean that all premodern Christians lived in constant fear of such spirits, nor that these occurrences were universally experienced by all premodern people. Rather, the appearance of an unseen noise or motion could trigger an awareness of some spiritual presence which produced differentiated emotional and behavioral responses. In the following, final chapter we will see that these perspectives would come under further scrutiny during the Protestant Reformation.

391 Trithemius, Chronicon Monasterii Hirsauensis (Basileae, 1559) 161.
CHAPTER 4: Haunting the Reformation: The Protestant Demonology of Ludwig Lavater

Introduction

In 1569, the Reformed theologian Ludwig Lavater (1527-86) published a lengthy work on troublesome spirits and strange marvels haunting Europe. Entitled Von Gespaenstern, unghüren, faeln, und anderen wunderbaren dingen, Lavater’s treatise was first disseminated in German as Das Gespensterbuch (The Book of Spirits). It was then immediately translated into Latin (1570) and French (1571). Under the title Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght, and of strange noyses, crackes, and sundry forewarninges, the text also obtained an English translation in 1572, enjoying considerable influence in Elizabethan England. For the purpose of this dissertation, Das Gespensterbuch represents a robust examination of how demonic mischief disrupted premodern Christian communities. As we move further into the sixteenth century, it also contains

392 The full title is as follows: Von Gespaenstern, unghüren, faeln, und anderen wunderbaren dingen, so merteils wenn die menschen sterben soellend, oder wenn sunst grosse sachennd enderungen vorhanden sind, beschachend, kurzter und einfaltiger bericht (Zurich: C. Froschauer, 1569). The text has been printed in an English translated edition by J. Dover Wilson and May Yardley (Oxford: Printed for the Shakespeare Association at the University Press, 1929). In this chapter I use both the German and translated editions. For longer and difficult passages, I use the English but also cite the German in footnotes.

393 De Spectris, lemuribus et magnis atque insolitis fragoribus, variisque praesagationibus quae plerunque obitum hominum, magnas clades, mutationes imperiorum praecedunt, liber unus (Geneva: J. Crespin, 1570); Trois livres des apparitions des esprits, fantosmes, prodigies et accidents merveilleux qui precedent souventfois la mort de quelque personage renommé, ou un grand changement es choses de ce monde...traduit d’Aleman en franćois, conferez, reveus et augmentez sur le Latin...Plus trois questions proposes et resolves par M. P. Martyr...lequelles conviennent à cette matiere (Geneva: F. Perrin for J. Durand, 1571).

a historically significant formulation of sixteenth-century Protestant arguments concerning household demons. Earlier evangelical and Protestant writings contain piecemeal perspectives on the topic.\textsuperscript{395} Das Gespensterbuch, however, was considered seminal for its collation of ancient and modern sources proving that fallen angels remained pastorally relevant in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. It was widely recognized among second generation reformers as the authoritative Protestant position on haunting spirits.\textsuperscript{396} It also precipitated influential Roman Catholic responses to the subject.\textsuperscript{397}

If it is well-known that the Protestant Reformation provoked debate over the purpose and function of late medieval ritual in general, Das Gespensterbuch reminds us that an important component of the debate eventually turned on beliefs and practices associated with spiritual beings in particular. In the latter half of the sixteenth century specifically, Lavater’s treatise emerges as a discursive flashpoint for Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians concerning demonic and ghostly apparitions. It juxtaposes an extensive catalogue of spirit-lore alongside Protestant

\textsuperscript{395} The Articles on the Conjuration of the Wandering Dead (Articuli de coniuratione mortuorum migrantium) is the first public renunciation of the existence of purgatory and ghosts. See Vincent Evener, “Wittenberg’s Wandering Spirits: Discipline and the Dead in the Reformation” Church History 84:3 (Sept. 2015): 531-555. Lavater himself credits the Saxon humanist and Lutheran reformer Johannes Rivius of Attendorn (1500-53), presumably in De spectris et apparitionibus umbrarum seu de vetere superstition liber (Leipzig, 1541), as the first to write on the subject. See the dedicatory epistle in Das Gespensterbuch.


\textsuperscript{397} The French lawyer Pierre Le Loyer responded to Lavater in his III. Livres des spectres, ou apparitions et visions d’esprits, anges et démons se monstrans sensiblement aux homes (Angers: G. Nepueu, 1586). Perhaps the most famous riposte came from the French Capuchin Noël Taillepied in his Traité De L'Apparition Des Esprits. A Scavoir, Des ames separees, Fantomes, prodiges, & accidents merveilleux, qui precedent quelquefois la mort des grands personnages, ou signifient changemens de la chose publique (Rouen: Romain de Beuuais, 1588). Taillepied’s treatise recapitulates, often times word for word, Das Gespensterbuch but from a Roman Catholic perspective.
exegesis of the bible and pastoral advice on how to deal with domestic haunting. Before and after
the Reformation, Catholic authorities maintained that ghosts and angels could visit humanity. The
former were souls from purgatory that might revisit earth to request prayers or petition for quicker
entry into heaven; the latter constituted spiritual intelligences sent among humanity to provide
varying degrees of solace or despair. Protestant theologians also agreed that angelic beings existed
and behaved according to Catholic tradition, although reformers disputed tales of ghosts on the
grounds that purgatory itself was contrary to scripture.398

Scholars of early modern Europe have long acknowledged the relevance of Das
Gespensterbuch within the Protestant tradition. Lavater’s writing is often referenced in scholarship
dealing with doctrinal issues orbiting purgatory, as well as Western histories of the premodern
ghost.399 It is also a favorite in literary studies of the intersection between sixteenth- and
seventeenth-century theater and spectrality, especially concerning Shakespeare’s Hamlet.400 All

398 On medieval and early modern conceptions of purgatory and ghosts, see Peter Marshall, Beliefs and the
Dead in Reformation England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall,
eds. The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The
Living and the Dead in Medieval Society, trans. T. L. Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994);
R. N. Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages,” in The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate
of the Soul: Papers read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical

399 See, for example, Reginald Davies, Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp.
30-31; Euan Cameron, Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750 (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2010), pp. 188-89; Euan Cameron, The European Reformation, 2nd Edition (Oxford:
Modern England, ed. by M. Harmes and V. Bladen (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 141-162; Diarmaid
and Ministering Angels” (2000), pp. 87-109; Timothy Chesters, Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France:

Ghosts and Spirits Walking By Night: A Joint Examination of the Ghost Scenes in Robert Garnier’s
Cornélie, Thomas Kyd’s Cornelia, and Shakespeare’s Hamlet in the Light of Reformation Thinking as

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this makes good sense. The Swiss theologian argues that purgatory lacked biblical precedent, existing instead as a spurious invention of the Catholic church. From this conclusion the author claims that the sights and sounds typically associated with wandering spirits (e.g., the apparition of Hamlet’s father) were never what they appeared to be. Without purgatory, Lavater asserts, ghosts were denied the possibility to request intercession from humanity. Instead demonic spirits manufactured apparitions of departed souls. On this view, the living and the dead existed in absolute isolation from one another, and fallen angels were the primary culprits for manifesting illusions of ghosts and purgatory.

The following examination takes a slightly different approach to Lavater’s magnum opus, focusing instead on the author’s concern that premodern homes, unbeknownst to their inhabitants, were haunted exclusively by demons. My reading calls attention to the ways in which Das Gespensterbuch describes fallen angels as the primary manipulators of the sixteenth-century household, rather than focusing on the treatise’s Protestant polemic against Catholic ghosts. In many ways, these two arguments were inseparable for Lavater (as will be discussed). Yet where many scholars tend to locate the Swiss minister on the fringe of early modern demonology, I demonstrate that his argument offers more than a critique of ghosts and the doctrine of purgatory.401 At the heart of Das Gespensterbuch lies a compelling exposition of how evil spirits exploited heterogeneous signs of domestic disorder.

401 One notable exception to most scholarship on Lavater is Timothy Chester’s work. See his article “Demonology on the Margins: Robert Du Triez’s ‘Les Ruses, finesse et impostures des espritz malins’ (1563)” Renaissance Studies, 21.3 (June 2007): 395-410, as well as his Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France (2011), pp. 64-87.
In what follows I delineate, first, the most basic contours of Protestant demonology and what reformers wrote about fallen angels. Second, consideration is given to Lavater’s pastoral context and some of the linguistic and semantic challenges involved with interpreting Das Gespensterbuch. Thereafter, I show how Lavater’s writing is informed by late medieval discussions of minor devils, but also how it informs Reformation debates on the basic causation of and meanings ascribed to demonic apparitions. The idea that Christians experienced otherworldly interventions and wondrous events in and around the house was a commonplace in the Latin Middle Ages. Drawing from late medieval theology and popular-vernacular conceptions of spiritual creatures, early modern authors shared this cultural worldview. Yet while Das Gespensterbuch exhibits sundry continuities with theologians like Johannes Nider, Geiler von Keysersberg, and Johannes Trithemius, it also firmly breaks with late medieval tradition and theology. Lavater reveals a Protestant agenda that seeks to discredit beliefs about spirits emanating from philosophical systems of thought, folk belief, and especially Catholic theology.

This chapter also attends to an oft-neglected rhetorical quality of Das Gespensterbuch: the treatise assumes the form of a protracted disputation wherein Lavater endeavors to heighten and then reorient his audience’s awareness of the types of intellectual and emotional relationships Christians have with popular spirit-lore. The reader is thus supposed to identify the false nature of these relationships, which involved demons rather than ghosts, elves, kobolds, and others. As I show, the dialectical structuring of Lavater’s tome instantiates a long, didactic act of show and tell: it initially entertains the pretense of ghostly existence in order to pastorally manage conceptions of the demonic. Significantly, this process of recognizing the spectral dead as fallen angels culminates in the broader recognition that both demonic hauntings and rival theologies had potentially deafening effects on the Christian believer. The Swiss theologian repeatedly calls
attention to the auditory distractions created by corrupt angels in a way that equates secular philosophies, popular “superstitions,” and Roman Catholic theology with demonic noise. For Lavater, this meant that demons and rival preaching constituted equivalent threats to hearing the biblical word.

**Sixteenth-Century Protestant Demonology**

We saw in earlier chapters how medieval and early modern theologians tended to proscribe the idea that minor spirits—helpful demons, fairies, and poltergeists, *inter alia*—existed as such. In so doing Christian authorities sought to discourage belief in and engagement with seemingly ambivalent spiritual creatures. In Augustinian and Thomist theology, immaterial intelligences were never morally neutral; they typified blessed or corrupted angelic messengers that provided humanity with respective feelings of divine comfort or estrangement. This strict binary of good and evil spirits served as a discursive means for appropriating accounts of spiritual encounter that resisted conventional Christian teachings on the subject. Where representations of spiritual ambiguity cropped up in Latin and vernacular storytelling or folklore, theological writers repurposed such accounts as didactic examples in which devilish temptation and illusion were at play.

Akin to orthodox theologians and preachers of the later Middle Ages, Protestant authors echoed many of the same ideas about demonic mischief. From scripture reformers affirmed that solely good and evil angels constituted extant spiritual creatures. Demons, in particular, instantiated spirits that were permitted by God to manufacture disorder, sow confusion, and generally tempt Christians into sin. Sebastian Fröschel (1497-1570), a Lutheran preacher in Wittenberg, published a sermon on blessed and wicked angels in 1563 that exhibits conventional
Protestant ideas about the subject. Fröschel began by considering the Devil’s created nature and the sins perpetrated by fallen angels. In the first place, the Wittenberg preacher explained that the word “Teufel” communicates an evil spirit that was created good but chose to rebel against the will of God. Fröschel then remarked that “des Teuffels Wesen” was spiritual rather than elemental, noting that this aspect “of the Devil’s being” explained how demons moved freely “wie ein Blitz” through closed doors, walls, and all physical spaces. Broadly speaking many Protestant theologians perceived angelic spirits as “inventors of virtual worlds”—able to perform complex sensory illusions and distort the ordinary workings of nature. For Fröschel, this truth was pertinent given the ways in which fallen angels employed their speed, intelligence, and invisibility to nefarious ends. With reference to the Gospel of John he declared “that the Devil was, indeed, the Father of all Lies,” (das der Teuffel sey...ja ein Vater aller Lügen), and that all falsehoods (e.g., lies, heathenism, murder, thievery, robbery, sins) stemmed from the unseen work and illusions of demons. Fröschel also duly warned that hostile spirits poisoned the air “with pestilence and other more poisonous sicknesses” (mit Pestilentz vnd andern mehr vergiftigen kranckheiten) and perpetuated stories to make Christians believe they were pagan gods.

Like many Protestant authors, Fröschel shared the same basic demonological assumptions as scholastic theologians: demons were malicious, incorporeal spirits that perverted Christian lives and perception of the known world. The precise metaphysics of demonic agency, however, interested reformers less than their medieval predecessors. Instead, Protestants authorities tended

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404 *Von dem heiligen engeln* (1563), pp. 59v.-60v (for specific citations above).
to elucidate the role of hostile spiritual encounters according to two related explanations: one providential and the other didactic. The first held that nothing in the created universe happened without divine ordinance. The disavowal of chance or accident was a hallmark of the Protestant worldview, and reformers insisted that the events of this world and the next were governed absolutely by God’s sovereign will. Early Christian and medieval Catholics voiced this idea as well, although Protestant authorities were far more emphatic about providential order. Where Thomas Aquinas had maintained that fortune and chance were compatible with providence—in so far as the former were always subordinate to the latter—John Calvin would argue in the sixteenth century that the “Providence of God, as taught in Scripture, is opposed to fortune and fortuitous causes.” Antagonistic toward any hint of cosmic randomness or ontological autonomy from God, reformers averred that the divine will permeated every aspect of existence, from the mundane happenings of daily life to the movement of celestial bodies.

Unsurprisingly, spiritual intelligences, too, fell under providential control. Here, reformers insisted that, although demons (and wicked humans) caused mayhem, they did so in fulfillment of God’s benevolent oversight. Fröschel invoked the biblical figure Job on this point, commenting that the Devil’s work unfailingly achieved pious ends and, for this reason, Christians were compelled to patiently endure whatever unfolded around them. The Swiss Reformed theologian Heinrich Bullinger also cited the “history of Job” adding that were the Devil’s power left

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407 Von dem heiligen engeln (1563), pp. 58v-58r.
unrestrained, “all things had been overthrown and perished long ago.”

Like all other events, reformers reasoned that demonic assaults occurred according to divine ordinance, which was fundamentally good even if that which carried out God’s will was inclined to evil.

Following directly from the first explanation, the second held that demonic infestation was an occasion for moral reflection. Protestant demonologists clarified that since fallen angels manifested by benevolent hand of God, their purpose must be to guide Christians to the better life. “And through awareness of the Devil’s very own pride” (Vnd durch verachtung desselbigen stolzen Teuffels), writes Fröschel, will Christians recognize their heavenly “calling” or “Beruf.”

Also imploring vigilance against the Devil’s pride, Bullinger counseled that the hostile intrusion of spirits happened in order to exercise Christian patience “and to hasten…salvation.”

Depending on one’s moral disposition, however, demonic assaults portended radically different outcomes. As Ludwig Lavater explained, “GOD doth suffer Spirites to appeare vnto his electe [den glöubigen] vnto a good ende, but vnto the reprobate [den verworffnen] they appeare as a punishmente.” Where pious believers were confirmed in their faith by weathering infestation, sinners incurred ongoing suffering as punishment for their moral failures. As Keith Thomas once remarked, there was a “self-confirming quality” to the doctrine of providence: it allowed reformers

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409 Von dem heiligen engeln (1563), pp. 57r-58v.


411 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 175; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 96v: “Gott der Herr laßt die geist sinen ußerwelten zuo guotem / unnd den verworffnen zur straaff erschynen.” The English translation notably hints at the doctrine of predestination (i.e., “the elect”), although Lavater never broaches the theme in his treatise.
to proclaim divine judgment against their enemies and celebrate the mercies of God bestowed upon allies.\footnote{Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 82.} In any case, Protestant theology sought to explain demonic haunting as proof of God’s ongoing involvement in human life, meaning the emergence of malevolent spirits marked an opportunity for strengthening Christian faith through patience, humility, and self-knowledge.

In many ways, then, Protestant demonology hardly evinced a clear break with the assumptions and arguments of the Latin Middle Ages. By and large reformers tended to place greater emphasis on precepts already in place since the church fathers. Yet, one intriguing facet of Protestant theology held that the Devil and his demons existed as minor nuisances of the household poltergeist variety. As seen in previous chapters of this dissertation, some Catholic theologians speculated that lesser evil spirits existed on the lowest rung of a demonic hierarchy, whereas others suggested that minor devils were different from, say, \textit{incubi} and \textit{succubi} in their capacity to enact relatively trivial disturbances.\footnote{On the notion of an “anti-order” of demons, see “Nine Angry Angels: Order, Emotion, and the Angelic and Demonic Hierarchies in the High Middle Ages,” in \textit{Ordering Emotions in Europe, 1100-1800}, ed. by S. Broomhall (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 14-31.} These wicked spirits were often said to cause little or no harm except in fomenting distractions and proliferating erroneous ideas and traditions. They were also commonly mistaken for human ghosts returned to the living.

In the wake of the European Reformation, reformers rarely preoccupied themselves with detailing angelic hierarchies; nor did they argue for different moral categories of demonic manifestation.\footnote{Reformers uniformly rejected Pseudo-Dionysius’s \textit{The Celestial Hierarchies}. See Euan Cameron, “Angels, Demons, and Everything In Between: Spiritual Beings in Early Modern Europe,” in \textit{Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period}, eds. C. Copeland and J. Machielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 35.} For fear of speculating beyond what was contained in Scripture, Protestant writers accounted for the array of devilish apparitions by insisting that demonic potency was
uniform in its hatred of creation but multifaceted in its applications against created life. Sebastian Fröschel noted this idea with reference to the Gospel of Luke 8:26-39 and the so-called Gerasene devil. In the biblical passage, Jesus famously commands a wicked spirit, which had possessed an anonymous man, to give its name. The demon elusively replies: “My name is Legion for we are many.” The demon’s response confusingly suggests that either a single spirit (“my name”) speaks in many voices (“we are many”) or possibly that several demons speak as a collective. Fröschel elucidated that while “terrifying” (erschrecklich) and “unbelievable” (schier ungleublich), the demon’s response was nevertheless a trustworthy and comforting claim laid down “through the holy Gospels” (durch die heiligen Evangelisten).\textsuperscript{415} Thereafter the German preacher listed all the murderous and duplicitous intentions of fallen angels, but flatfootedly concluded that it was well-known (so ist das auch gewis) the Devil caused very little actual harm (nicht grössern schaden thut). According to Fröschel, fallen angels primarily amused themselves with foolish antics in order to lead people astray (den Leuten ein Wichsene Nasen drehe).\textsuperscript{416} On this view, devilish chicanery might well lead to murder, robbery, and further sins, but the Devil’s power lay primarily in suggestive disruptions rather than acts of physical harm.

Roughly two decades earlier, Martin Luther took a similar approach in describing the Devil as a perennial threat and minor prankster. Dated to the year 1538, Luther included a story in his Table Talk about how a pastor from Süptitz bei Torgau had contacted him to request personal advice. The German reformer recalled that the pastor was plagued by a noisy spirit which threw kitchen utensils around the house. In response Luther counseled:

Dear Brother, be strong in the Lord and firm in your faith. Do not give into that murderer, the Devil. Suffer the outward game and noises, as well as the minor damage that comes

\textsuperscript{415} Von dem heiligen engeln (1563), pp. 52v-52r.

\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., p. 58v.
from the breaking of pots, for it cannot harm you in body and soul, as you have found, for the angel of the Lord is with you. Let Satan play with the pots. Meanwhile pray to God with your wife and children [and say], “Be off, Satan I am lord in this house, not you...By divine authority I am head of this household, and I have a call from heaven to be pastor of this church...Who invited you into this house? In this way you should sing him his litany and legend and let him play for a bit.”

The account proffers several points that help elucidate the character of Protestant demonology. For one, Luther (much like Fröschel) presents two contrasting images of the Devil’s presence. On the one hand, the wicked spirit is considered an imminent and dangerous enemy—“that murderer, the Devil”—and, on the other, is said to revel solely in a “the minor damage that comes from the breaking of pots.” As the late Heiko Oberman has shown, Luther sought in such stories to provide Christians with a practical means to combat demonic infestation. Akin to many Protestant thinkers, Luther consoled audiences by foregrounding how harmless apparitions of the Devil typically were. Though rightly understood as a spiritual menace to humankind, in the account above the reformer rhetorically diminishes the threat posed by the Devil, which “cannot harm you in body and soul.” While no explicit reference is made to divine providence, the reader is left to infer that the demon has no real power—“let Satan play with the pots”—over the pastor and his family. In Luther’s estimation, once the afflicted Christians came to this realization, the spirit’s

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immediate purpose and identity would be revealed, and the family would no longer suffer confusion in the home.

Secondly, Luther’s account advocates for the deliberate disregard of infesting demons in the home. To the question of how Christians were to protect the homestead, Protestant authors consistently broke with Catholic tradition, maintaining that prayer (individual or communal)—as Luther advises “meanwhile pray to God with your wife and children”—was the sole means by which believers should ignore, never avert, the disruptions of fallen angels. At the heart of the Protestant critique of medieval Catholicism lie the role of ritual and its purported misuses. Reformers reduced the number of sacraments to just two (i.e., baptism and the Eucharist), insisting that humanity could in no way influence the purposes and intentions of God. As an extension of this idea, they also condemned the use of apotropaic rites meant to ward off demons. The Lutheran preacher Andreas Althamer (c. 1500-c. 1539) neatly rhymed this sentiment: “für den Teißel und sein gespenst...der glauben muß thun / und nit der weichprun.”

Althamer explained that what faith does (der glauben...thun) is place trust in the providential will of God: the Christian is ultimately left to endure suffering alone, according to divine plan, and without recourse to remedial ritual actions (der weichprun).

Where Christians of the medieval Church (and early modern Roman Catholics) possessed a cornucopia of consecrated objects and pious rites for warding off the Devil’s presence, Protestant theologians argued that families could pray to God for help but

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419 Eyn predig von dem Teißel, das er alles Unglück in der Welt anrichte (Nuremberg, 1532), sig. Aviii: “with regard to the Devil and his illusions, faith does what holy water cannot.”

420 The Bayerisches Wörterbuch, von J. Andreas Schmeller (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1872-77) indicates that “weichprun” is synonymous with “Weihwasser” (holy water). Althamer employs the term as a synecdoche that means all Catholic consecrated objects.
with no assurance that affliction would cease. Because demons were divinely-wielded agents—shepherded among humanity to test the faithful—spiritual haunting had to run its prescribed course.

Thirdly, Luther’s anecdote highlights how, once the Devil gained access to the domestic sphere, the household would become a site of social disorder and chaos. The language of authority and etiquette in Luther’s entry are prominent, as the pastor is urged to question the spirit: “who invited you into this house?” Furthermore, the demon is presented as childish, with Luther counseling to “let him play for a bit” with “game and noises.” As we have seen, this was a common trope in demonological literature. In the previous chapter Johannes Trithemius, for example, compared minor demons with children that play wicked games of “hide and seek” (verbergen/lauffen) in the home. In Luther’s account, and for many Protestant demonologists, the effects of demonic assault commented upon domestic authority and wellbeing; they revealed how human residences and social interactions were transformed into spaces rife with unrest. Hence, Luther rhetorically emboldens the pastor to identify the proper social relationship between the spirit and the household—the idea that belonging to or possessing the home will grant the man authority and power over the home’s spiritual wellbeing. For this reason, Luther instructs the pastor to assert himself as the “head of the household”—the Hausvater or paterfamilias—in order


423 On the larger theme of “social discipline” and the Reformation, see R. Po-chia Hsia, Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550-1750 (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) and Joel Harrington, Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
to re-establish collective stability. By recognizing his position as the head or father of the house, Luther concluded that the pastor would regain authority over the poltergeist and home itself. As I will show in this chapter, Das Gespensterbuch affirms these three broad points demonstrated in Luther’s account. Lavater posits that Christians can survive disruptive encounters with the Devil once the family appropriately hears the biblical word transmitted through the authoritative figure of the Protestant preacher.

Many Protestant writers thus evinced an awareness that the Devil could work minor nuisances that might lead to larger calamities. To some extent, authors like Fröschel and Luther responded to how the phenomenon was presented in traditional lore and popular storytelling. As seen in previous chapters, exemplary literature provided countless reports of unexpected hauntings across Europe. Yet, Protestant demonologists also consistently emphasized the providential idea that God would always restrain the Devil’s power. One way in which reformers made sense of this restraint was by reducing demonic potency to lesser temptations and illusions. From this perspective, the Devil seduced people into wrong forms of belief by displacing faith in God with irksome distractions. Another argument was that minor nuisances constituted part of the grander illusion that fallen angels could do more than they claimed. The English scholar and theologian William Tyndale poked fun at the papacy and doctrine of purgatory with reference to popular legends of a household demon: “the pope is kynne to Robin good fellow which swepeth the house and purgeth all by nyght. But when day commeth there is nothyng found cleane.”

Ludwig Lavater similarly noted how “It hath many times chaunced, that those of the house haue verily thought, that some body hath ouerthrowne the pots, platters, tables and trenchers, and tumbled thē

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downe the stayres: but after it waxed day, they haue found all things orderly set in their places againe."

Demons thus created illusory conditions wherein the household contained obscure sights and sounds demanding the attention from inhabitants of the home. Protestant preachers reminded their congregations that their intellectual and emotional concentration was better served by strengthening their faith in God’s loving grace. As Lavater proclaimed at the end of *Das Gespensterbuch*: “When such things happen in deede, they ought to put vs in mynd, that we casting from vs al these things which displease God, should wholly consecrate oure selues vnto God, and so frame our selues, that at what houre soeuer he come, and please to call vs out of this lyfe, we shoulde bee ready for him.”

Where demons tempted humanity to act in dangerously superstitious ways, Protestant authorities sought to reveal demonic illusions as a tactic of diversion.

Before turning to an extended analysis of *Das Gespensterbuch*, it should be stressed that, although Protestant demons were frequently described as plaguing humanity with minor tricks and temptations, there were diverse ways in which demonic mischief might be represented. A range of German literature called *Teufelbücher* (devil books), for example, emerged in the mid-sixteenth century that explicitly moralized social maladies, including such as magic, dancing, drinking, *inter alia*. In this corpus of writings, the language of relatively harmless devils mirrored Protestant pastoral concerns about fallen angels, but did so in an overtly satirical manner. The *Teufelbücher* constituted a particular Lutheran genre that playfully advocated for moral reformation, rather than

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425 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 73; *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 38r: “So ist vil beschähen / dz volck in einem huß nit anderst vermeint hatt / dann es seye etw..."  

426 Of Ghostes (1929), pp. 216-17; *Das Gespensterbuch*, pp. 122v-123r: “wenn sómliche ding warlich beschähend / sollend sy uns bewege / fallen lassind / und uns sines willens dester trüwlicher beflyssind / uns auch rüstind / wie der her runs sunst leert.”
Protestant theological teachings about demons. Here, the Devil was read more as a metaphor for social evils.427

At the same time, there were many Protestant authors that warned the Devil’s presence was absolutely threatening in its relation to magic, witchcraft, and other forms of heterodox Christian practice. Bullinger broadly exhorted Christians to beware that “Satan hurts men in their minds, in their bodies, and in their goods…he miserably vexeth, torment, and dispatcheth them.”428 As “instruments of God’s wrath,” he warned, demons constituted formidable enemies of humanity but also tools of the Christian divinity. More vividly, Johann Weyer rehearsed perhaps the most violent story of demonic attack at a convent in Wertet (in the Spanish Netherlands, 1550).429 The passage begins by noting how cloistered nuns were harassed by demons after a poor woman borrowed salt during Lent. Following the seemingly anodyne act, the women experienced “torture [that] took many forms”:

Sometimes when they took a chamber pot and tried to urinate in it, it was violently snatched from them and they defiled the bed with urine…some had pieces of flesh torn from their bodies, while others had their legs, arms, and face wrenched totally backwards. Still others were carried up higher than a man’s head and then cast down again. Some were tormented in such a way that, although they had nothing for fifty-two days save turnip soup without bread, they still vomited quantities of black liquid like writing ink, which was said to be so sharp and bitter that it took a layer of skin off their mouths.430


429 Admittedly, Weyer’s confessional leanings remain somewhat equivocal, although his frequent condemnations of Catholic priests, miracles, exorcisms, and general “superstitions” have been read as an expression of Protestantism. See Erik Midelfort, A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 199-200; Cameron Enchanted Europe (2010), p. 179.

Weyer included the account in his *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563) to exhibit that the women at Wertet were afflicted specifically by the Devil rather than a witch (who borrowed the salt). For our purposes, the anecdote descriptively demonstrates that not all Protestant demonologists reduced demonic activities to trivial disturbances. Akin to late medieval and early modern Catholic authors, reformers and lay Protestant theologians diversely associated the Devil with violent manipulation of the natural world and those alleged to have entered into demonic pacts. This is to say that Protestant demonological interests were myriad and in no way limited to minor spiritual afflictions. Nevertheless, the poltergeist demon had a prominent place in Protestant writings. For the Reformed minister Lavater, in particular, the Devil haunted Christian homes by means of subtle misdirection rather than corporeal torment.

**The Pastoral Context and Language of *Das Gespensterbuch***

Ludwig Lavater’s *Das Gespensterbuch* represents one of the most influential Protestant explanations for how fallen angels haunted domestic spaces. The treatise not only enjoyed numerous translations and editions, its provenance in the Swiss Cantons would have piqued the interest of European intelligentsia. As Bruce Gordon has shown, Zurich emerged in the mid-sixteenth century as an influential center for disseminating Reformed theology under the direction of Heinrich Bullinger—Ulrich Zwingli’s successor. Alongside Oswald Myconius, Bullinger lead the Swiss church in implementing Reformed practices and doctrine; he also spearheaded a movement to educate Protestant ministers in administering pastoral care to lay Christians throughout Western Europe.\(^{431}\)

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\(^{431}\) Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 228-82. On Bullinger’s general educational approach to reform in Zurich, see also Pamela Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy, 1535-1575* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991),
In this context, Lavater had been privy to the city’s innermost circle of leaders at least a decade before publishing *Das Gespensterbuch*. After participating in the disastrous Kappel War (1529-31), his father Hans Rudolf Lavater was elected Bürgermeister of Zurich in 1547. Three years following the election of his father, Lavater himself was elected archdeacon of the Zürcher Grossmünster. In 1550, he also married Margaretha Bullinger, the daughter of the Heinrich Bullinger. Lavater was thus son to the mayor of Zurich and related by marriage to one of the most influential figures of the Swiss Reformation. In 1559, he notably championed Bullinger’s vision of the Zurich Church in the influential book *De Ritibus et Institutis Ecclesiae Tigurinae*—a work that systematically documents the practices of Swiss Reformed Christianity. As Gordon indicates, *De Ritibus* served as a model for preaching the basic tenets of Protestant faith to local practitioners; it also functioned as an invitation for Protestant communities throughout Europe to follow Zurich’s example.

In a similar manner, *Das Gespensterbuch* offers pastoral advice to Protestant Christians across Western Europe. Addressed to Johann Steigerus, “Cōsul of the noble cōmon wēlth of Berna,” the dedicatory epistle begins by declaring a Swiss political colleague as his intended audience. After invoking Steigerus by name, the letter immediately becomes more inclusive, encouraging Protestant leaders to edify their congregations by delivering Christians “from error, superstition and doubt” (*uß yrrthumm / aberglauben unnd zwyfel*). Lavater mentions “the ministers

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433 *The Swiss Reformation* (2002), 244-46.

434 *Of Ghostes* (1929) without pagination in “The Authours Epistle.”
of Gods Churche” (die diener der kirchen Christi) twice in the epistle and exhorts Protestant pastors to instruct Christians plainly in such necessary matters pertaining to the Word of God like “a candle that illuminates our path” (wie...ein kertzen..das ein leicht unserem wäg zünden sol).

The rapid translation of Das Gespensterbuch into Latin also intimates that Lavater expected his treatise to travel further than German-speaking lands. Commenting in the English translation, which was translated from the Latin, the author admits: “I for my parte had once written thys my treatise in the vulgar tong, and now because I trust it shal be also profitable to other men, I haue translated it into latine, adding certayne things thereto.”

By translating the work into Latin, Lavater envisioned his work as “profitable” to readers outside the immediate vicinity of Zurich and Bern. The publication history of Das Gespensterbuch also suggests that the treatise was widely read abroad up through the seventeenth century.

Given the admission that “certayne things” were added to the German edition, important nuances crop up across the various translations of Das Gespensterbuch. In terms of what one will find throughout the different editions, some notably include an extra chapter. The German edition (1569) and its French translation (1570), for instance, commence with a chapter on melancholic and insane people (schwärmütig und unsinnig lüt) that imagine false apparitions. In this first chapter, Lavater lists infirmities of the body, such as the madness called “Lycanthropia” and the nocturnal “disease of Ephialtes”--in the former, men imitate the ferocity of wolves and in the latter some people imagine a monstrous creature suffocating them while they sleep.

Lavater then

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435 Of Ghostes (1929), without pagination in “The Authours Epistle.”


437 The association of demons with disease has a long history in the Latin West. See Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider, ed., Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
recalls how certain philosophical systems of thought (e.g., Epicurean and Sadducee) have repudiated bizarre visions and spiritual visitations altogether.\(^{438}\) He also mentions Catholic monks and priests claiming to have witnessed false miracles and divine apparitions. In so doing, Lavater distances himself immediately from both spiritual atheists and Catholic preachers, maintaining that while many people (the melancholic and mentally unfit) may be mistaken in their discernment of certain astonishing events, spirits of a particular type do regularly appear to humanity. In brief, the German and French versions of \textit{Das Gespensterbuch} begin with a chapter that introduces philosophical and theological positions at odds with Lavater’s own, while demonstrating how certain illnesses may give the false appearance that spirits haunt human habitations.\(^{439}\)

The Latin (1569) and English (1572) translations include the same chapter on melancholic folk, philosophical skepticism, and Catholic clergymen, although it has been moved up to “Chapter 2.” In its place, Lavater includes a new, introductory chapter with the heading: “Concerning certaine vvordes vvhiche are often vused in this Treatise of Spirits, and diuers other diuinations of things to come.” After the publication of the German text, Lavater apparently foresaw difficulty in the audience’s ability to wade through his vast array of tales about haunting spirits and marvelous phenomena. To alleviate this burden, “Chapter 1” in the Latin and English translations serves as an orienting linguistic guide and explanatory key for the numerous Latin terms employed throughout the book.\(^{440}\) To this end, Lavater instructs his readers to observe the difference, for


\(^{439}\) Timothy Chesters also acknowledges these variations; see \textit{Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France} (2011), pp. 67-71.

\(^{440}\) Chesters suggests that, given its highly technical theological and philosophical language, the Latin edition was likely written for a learned readership, whereas the vernacular editions were intended for a far broader audience. \textit{Ibid}, pp. 69-70.
example, between a “Spectrum” (a spirit or “substance without a body”) and “Visum” (“an appearance or sight of a thing with is not”). The chapter also garners a host of Latin names for diverse spirits and monsters found in ancient and medieval literature. Noting that the reader will encounter diverse terms for human souls and domestic gods, such as “Lares,” “Lemures,” “Manes,” and “Penates,” there is mention of devils called incubi, succubi, and ancient monsters of the sea like “Tritones, Nereides, and Syrenes,” among many others. Over roughly eight pages, the author enumerates a sizeable list of learned designations for marvelous events and creatures. This linguistic addendum presumably alerted sixteenth-century readers and listeners to the inherent difficulty involved with interpreting stories about spirits and sought to provide authorial guidance on what these historical terms communicated.

The addition of a new (first) chapter on demonological terminology exemplifies some of the lexical challenges that crop up when reading Das Gespensterbuch in different cultural contexts. In particular, the multiple translations contain varied names for spirits that depend on the language in use. Where the Latin text, as we have seen, rehearses meanings for terms like Lares and Lemures, which could indicate good or evil spirits, the English text includes mention of “bugs & Elues” as instances of these same spirits. The qualification no doubt extended Das Gespensterbuch into a specifically vernacular English context, helping anglophone audiences comprehend what ancient Latin names for certain spirits typically conveyed. The same mechanism of cultural association is featured at various points throughout the German, Latin, English, and

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442 Scholars have noted the complex ways in which translating demonological treatises of this period potentially carry different cultural valences in different contexts. See, for example, Jonathan Schüz, “Bodin’s Démonomanie in the German Vernacular” in The Reception of Bodin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 237-255.
French editions. In the chapter on melancholics, for instance, we recall how Lavater referenced the disease called *Ephialtes*. The German text, however, reads: “Ephialtes or *Incubus* is a sickness commonly called *Schrättele*.” Unsurprisingly, the Latin, English, and French translations exclude the original passage on “*Schrättele*”—a word with specific connotations for German-speaking people concerning minor spirits of the home (discussed in Chapter 3). Numerous other examples could be listed here to the same effect: there are multiple linguistic and semantic variations informing the translations of *Das Gespensterbuch*. While these differences are relatively minor, they nevertheless demonstrate that Lavater and his translators sought to establish associations for haunting spirits across a range of cultural contexts.

With this in mind, the several editions of *Das Gespensterbuch* confront modern readers with provocative questions: As Lavater endeavors (in German and Latin) to delineate haunting phenomena across Europe, how are we to interpret the different vernacular names for haunting spirits? To what extent do these designations reflect alternate conceptions of what haunting could mean? In what ways do these terms and their received traditions resist the orthodox theological assumption—voiced by both Catholic and Protestant authors alike—that all such apparitions were demonic in origin? In many ways, these questions animate Lavater’s treatise and the attempt to account for haunting as a universal occurrence, but one that also evinced distinctive characteristics across several cultural and linguistic settings.

**The Book of Spirits: Book One**

*Das Gespensterbuch* is divided into three “parts” (*Teile*) or books. The first is comprised of inherited wisdom about spirits. It commences with accounts of specious hauntings and delimits
occurrences often falsely ascribed to spiritual beings. Lavater then concludes Book One by identifying similar accounts wherein rumbling spirits have genuinely manifested themselves. Thereafter Book Two performs an exegetical deconstruction of the doctrine of purgatory in which Lavater famously refutes the existence of ghosts. Relying on biblical and anecdotal evidence to substantiate his claims, the author asserts that visitations from departed souls are the direct result of demonic illusions. Book Three explains why such wicked spirits appear and “Hovv Christian men ought to behaue themselues vvhen they see spirites” (Wie die Chriten denen unghür begägnet / sich halten).\textsuperscript{444} In this final section, Lavater advises Christians on how they can protect themselves against the disruptions of fallen angels.

As seen in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, late medieval theologians and preachers addressed many of the issues raised by Lavater. We recall that historical figures, including Johannes Nider, Geiler von Kaisersberg, and Johannes Trithemius, adduced cases of household “gerümpel” in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These Catholic authors identified both questionable and authentic instances of domestic disturbances, discussing spiritual creatures that at once heightened and muddled human sense-perception of the natural world. Typical of late medieval pastoralia and exemplary literature, these earlier queries responded to anxieties over marvels and spirits in an \textit{ad hoc} manner. Juxtaposing scholastic definitions of natural and supernatural phenomena alongside the broader theological problem of diabolical illusion, the discourses of Nider, Geiler, and Trithemius offer relatively short analyses of haunting ghosts and angels alongside discussions of, say, the night flights of women, the appearance of werewolves, and changeling children.

In \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, the potency of demonic deception is primary as well but with particular attention to stories about domestic spiritual assaults. Moreover, in length (over 200

\textsuperscript{444} Of Ghostes (1929), p. 190; \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, p. 105r.
pages) and scope, Lavater’s treatise dwarfs prior discourses on the subject. It registers a massive inventory of spirit-lore which dwells on and in the ways in which demons imposed emotional suffering on Christian individuals and communities. Lavater also rarely mentions the figure of the witch and completely ignores the technical problems of magic, sorcery, and transvection. When he does make brief reference to werewolves and other monstrous creatures, these serve rather to buttress the larger issue of how Christians ought to discern demonic infestation. This not only distinguished Lavater from late medieval authors we have seen, but also from many contemporaneous thinkers. As Timothy Chesters explains, Lavater’s was a “demonology on the margins,” a subgenre of premodern demon-theory that “extended beyond the infamous sphere of the witch trials.”

Johann Weyer and Martin Delrio, among numerous others, also discussed a plurality of diabolical assaults, but their primary focus lie in the discursive terrain of magic and witchcraft, not domestic hauntings as such. More proximate to Lavater’s purposes, Pierre Le Loyer, Noël Taillepied, and Petrus Thyraeus wrote at length about demonic infestation. The difference, however, is that these men followed in what Lavater initiated, meaning Le Loyer, Taillepied, and Thyraeus closely mirror Lavater’s analysis and respond directly to it.

In terms of Lavater’s own intellectual indebtedness, the first book of Das Gespensterbuch draws heavily from and in many respects recasts late medieval demonology. Akin to Nider and Geiler specifically, Lavater begins Book One with an analysis of mundane happenings and natural marvels. Here, the Swiss minister demonstrates that what many people take to be wondrous apparitions often have nothing at all to do with spiritual creatures. He notes how noises made by quotidian animals (e.g., the crying sounds of rats, cats, and birds) were erroneously thought to originate from spirits at night. Likewise, the sound of horses banging on the stable at midnight or

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the ticking of woodworm beetles in one’s walls and furniture could give the impression that spirits play with anvils. “Also the wind,” Lavater affirms, “may throw things around the house” (Item der wind wirfft etwas im huß umb) and aroused fear that a home was haunted. In Lavater’s estimation, such examples were proof that untrained laity too often ascribed spiritual significance to the vagaries of premodern life.

Book One also recapitulates the premodern commonplace that some hauntings were regrettably manufactured by humans for fun and profit. Young men sometimes disguised themselves with devilish costumes (töfelskleider), for instance, wearing masks to provoke enough fear as to make people believe think they have seen a wicked spirit (böß geist). At inns, travelers played tricks on one another by either dressing up in white sheets or constructing more or less elaborate hauntings. In one contemporaneous account, Lavater tells of young men in Zurich who dressed up as spirits dancing through the city at night. The municipal guards apparently raised the alarm, warning that “some plague or pestilence” (ein grosse pestilentz) was likely to follow. Thereafter, Lavater cautioned that spectral imitations were not always mere play, for thieves too employed fraudulent haunting to their advantage. By making calculated noises in the dark, robbers sometimes engendered enough fear—under the pretense that wandering spirits exist—to keep their victims paralyzed in bed.

In addition to human ingenuity, other factors contributed to misguided fear of spirits. Lavater logically deduced that poor eyesight and hearing were major causes of misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Alternatively, reduced cognitive faculties due to illness or disease could give rise to imagined apparitions. Excessive drinking produced temporary deficits in the human

446 Das Gespensterbuch, p. 25r; this sentence is not in the English edition.

447 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 22; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 10v.
sensorium as well. Regarding sex and age, Lavater maintained that the mere mention of “grümpels” at the dinner table (wenn man von Gspänsten und ungehūren ob einem tisch redt) frightened women and children so intensely that they refused to venture outdoors at night.⁴⁴⁸ On this point, Lavater intoned the medieval Catholic critique that there were those who imagined spirits, such “herdmenli” and “hußvolck” or “elues and fairies,” which furtively resided in the natural world. These spurious tales, Lavater chided, were “heard of their grandmothers and mothers, howe they haue appeared vnto those of the house” (von jren müteren und großmüteren gehört / wie sy dem hußvolck erschinen).⁴⁴⁹ Like late medieval preachers, early modern reformers wrestled with inherited traditions for which rumbling demons in the home were considered non-angelic beings. In line with orthodox perspectives on spiritual beings, Das Gespensterbuch consistently equates narratives about elves, fairies, and kobolds with demonic apparitions.

Less pernicious in Lavater’s view were natural marvels reported from natural philosophical literature. While individuals and communities might mistake obscure happenings in the natural world for malevolent spirits and monstrous beings, wonders could be instructive in disproving spectral apparitions.⁴⁵⁰ The Swiss minister thus explained that sounds and intelligible speech could travel and reverberate in certain environments, rather than from spiritual intelligences. In forests, valleys, and hollow places especially, “many would be afrayd” of echoes or a resounding voice “but especially in the night season, except he knew very well it were a

⁴⁴⁸ Das Gespensterbuch, p. 4r.

⁴⁴⁹ Of Ghostes (1929), p. 49; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 25r.

⁴⁵⁰ In this Lavater shares with his contemporary compatriot and pastor of Zurich, Johann Wick, an appeal to marvelous sights and omens; see, Die Wickiana: Johann Jakob Wicks Nachrichtensammlung aus dem 16. Jahrhundert: Texte und Bilder zu den Jahren 1560 bis 1571: mit Transkription ins Neu-Hochdeutsche (Künsacht-Zürich: Raggi-Verlag, 1975).
No less astonishingly, the eyes of animals at night, like gemstones and the luminescent glowworm, naturally radiate light in darkness. In some places, including Sicily, Naples, and Iceland, volcanoes and geysers burst forth fiery stones that are nothing more than sulfur burning in the open air. Lavater advised while extraordinary events regularly triggered wonder, this need not portend interference from spiritual creatures.

Most forcefully, Book One attributed pervasive ignorance regarding spirits to events in Catholic history and especially the papacy. Over several chapters on how “Preestes and Monckes fained themselues to be Spirites” (München und Pfaffen habend sich für Geister und Gspänst ußgeben), Lavater rehearsed accounts of clerics, monks, and popes involved in deceiving pious Christians. In this, Das Gespensterbuch begins its radical departure from late medieval pastoralia. The writings of Nider and Geiler discussed ubiquitous misconceptions of spirits, although they never indicated that misunderstanding occurred as a direct result of ecclesiastical history and the precepts of the Catholic church. Lavater, however, denigrated both medieval and contemporary Catholic miracle tales, insisting that Rome disseminated the most egregious ignorance into the Christian imaginary. He thus repudiates hagiographical stories claiming “that Frauncis and Catherin of Sena, bare the markes of Chrystes fyue woundes in their body,” as well as ecclesiastical promises of satisfaction for sin or the diverse uses of holy water. According to Lavater’s philosophy of history, miraculous narratives of this sort derived from necromantic pontiffs. Lavater gleefully related that the Life of Pope Gregory VII, as recorded by Beno of Santi Martino e Silvestro, evinced how the bishop of Rome “was thoroughly seene in the blacke arte of

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451 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 50; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 25v: “wurde vil sonderlich nachts übel darab erschrecken / wenn man nit so wol wüßte daß es ein natürlich ding wäre.”

452 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 36; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 17r: “daß Franciscus oder Catharina von Senis die wunden Christi an jrem lyb gehebt.”
Negromancie” (*mit verbotnen tūfels künsten umgange*). Equally condemning, the Italian humanist Bartolomeo Platina (in his *Vitae pontificum*) provided proof for Lavater that the pontificate of Pope Silvester II had been attained through propitiating the Devil himself. In raising these initial critiques, Lavater primed his audience for what emerges as a much larger polemical issue in Books Two and Three—namely that a substantial portion of lay misunderstanding about spiritual creatures emanated from Catholic institutions.

The first eleven chapters of *Das Gespensterbuch* thus make a strong case against haunting spirits. For a work purporting to expose demonic illusions, the way in which Book One begins from this rather oblique angle is remarkable. In the previous chapter we saw that Nider, Geiler, and others also discussed natural explanations for “Gerumpel” in the home. Yet these earlier authors commenced their discussions with the broader theme of demonic influence, first, and then enumerated the vagaries of human sense perception as subordinate causes. Lavater turns this approach on its head and with a subtle twist. He begins with an exposition of how confusing the material world appeared to untrained laity and then leaves the reader to infer the role that diverse spirits played in manipulating the mundane and marvelous workings of nature.

To this end, Chapters 11-18 uncover abundant evidence for historical and modern accounts of genuine spiritual encounters. By and large these narratives amount to standard demonological

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454 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 47; *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 24r. On Bartolomeo Platina’s *Lives of the Popes* (printed first in 1479), see Helen Parish, *Monks, Miracles and Magic: Reformation Representations of the Medieval Church* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), p. 129-131. As Parish notes, medieval chroniclers repeated the claim that Gerbert of Aurilla, later Pope Sylvester II, had been a magician, meaning this was not a particularly Protestant claim, although it was widely used in Protestant polemics.
exempla punctuated by commentary from Lavater on when, where, and in what form spirits typically appeared. The reader is instructed that some spirits manifest visibly while others are only heard. While conspicuous apparitions may manifest during the day or at night, Lavater logically concluded that those which are seen will do so before midnight and those which are heard emerge during the darkest of hours. Equally reasonable, he claimed that certain folk were more liable to experience spectral visitations: due to the nocturnal and diurnal activities of specific professions like travelers, watchmen, hunters, carters, and mariners were among the most likely to perceive apparitions.

Although Lavater argues that some people were more prone to haunting, the wide range of anecdotal examples in the first book intimate that all of humanity was vulnerable to such visitations. This was true even across the confessional divide. Lavater relates how the humanist reformer Philip Melanchthon “writeth in his booke de anima, that he himself hathe seene some spirites, and that he hath knowne many men of good credite, whiche haue auoutched not only to haue seene ghostes them selues, but also ÿ they haue talked a great while with them.”455 Likewise, the Reformed theologian Johannes Willing reportedly perceived “a walking spirite in the night season, [and] was so much altred, that at his returning home, his owne Daughters knewe him not.”456 The same logic was then applied to where hauntings occurred. Lavater warned that spiritual creatures were drawn to places of battle, slaughter, execution, and woodlands, or locations

455 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 70; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 36r: “schrybt in sinum buoch ‘De Anima’ / er selbs habe etliche unghühr oder gspänst gesähen / und kenne vil glaubwirdig lüt / die hoch und thür bezüget / sy habind nit allein gspänst gesähen / sonder auch lang mit inen geredt.” The original quotation is found in Liber de anima, Corpus reformatorum, Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia, eds. C.B. Bretschneider et H.E. Bindseil, 28 vols., (Halle and Brunswick, 1834-60), XIII, 175: “Vidi ipse quaedam, et novi multos homines dignos fide, qui adfirmabant, se non tantum vidisse spectra, sed etiam diu cum eis collocutos esse. Existimabat autem vetustas pleraque hominum animas esse.”

456 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 96. This anecdote is missing from the German edition and first appears in the Latin translation.
where devils have been conjured. Churches, monasteries, tombs, prisons, houses, and the ruins of castles, too, constituted rife locations for spirits to appear. The sheer breadth of locations mentioned in these passages suggest that every space in this world was susceptible to haunting. In this sense, Lavater calls attention to so many familiar spaces in order to affirm that specters were found virtually anywhere in the early modern landscape.

The concluding chapters of Book One thus thoroughly demonstrate that the mischief caused by spirits had both visual and auditory dimensions. Regarding the former, Lavater confirmed that spirits manifested in myriad visible forms: “The maner of apering of spirits, is diuers & manyfold as it apereth by those things which haue aleaged before. For they shew themselues in sundry sorte: sometimes in the shape of a man whom we know, who is yet alyue, or lately departed: & otherwhile in the likenesse of one whom we knowe not.” Likewise, ethereal figures were seen “riding on horsebacke, or going on foote, or crawling vppon al foure. At another time hath appeared a man al burning in fire, or berayde with bloud: and somewhat, his bowels haue seemed to traile out, his belly being as it were rypped vp.” Different beasts and monstrous beings also populate numerous narratives found in Das Gespensterbuch. According to Lavater, the range of visible images and forms conjured by wicked spirits was beyond reckoning. Depending on situation and circumstance, demons attempted to manipulate human optics to their own

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457 As Bruce Gordon remarks, “Lavater’s account of the attachment of ghosts to particular locations has clear echoes of late medieval ideas of Purgatory.” See his “Malevolent Ghosts and Ministering Angels” (2000), p 96.


advantage. For this reason, faithful Christians had to be on guard against the emergence of both familiar or foreign apparitions.

No less troubling were the auditory distractions fomented by spirits. Where visible apparitions looked like friends, strangers, and monstrosities, the “noisiness” of spirits often entailed muffled sounds and incomprehensible speech. To a considerable degree, the majority of Lavater’s narrative accounts suit late medieval conceptions of poltergeist demons. In his influential chapter on “daily experience” (täglich erfahrung), for example, Lavater detailed afflictions of what are unmistakably poltergeist phenomena: “It is reported, that some spirits haue throwne the dore of from the hookes, and haue troubled and set all things in the house out of order, neuer setting thē in their due place againe, and that they haue maruellously disquieted men with rumbing and making a great noise.”

While relating narratives of minor spiritual racket, Lavater regularly situates human observers as passive participants in domestic disorder: doors are thrown off their hinges, clothing is violently pulled off, and general disorder ensues as a result of some unseen spiritual presence. In these multiple cases, where “in the nyght season, there haue beene certaine spirits hearde softlye going, or spitting, or groning” (vil hatt man nachts gehört), the sense of an unspecified origin of action help depict something external to the home which has been uncannily imposed on the physical location itself.

Supporting the sights and sounds associated with apparitions, Lavater cautioned finally that spirits could manifest in subtler terms. Some disrupted the tranquility of the home by turning the

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460 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 73; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 38r: “Dargegen sagt man von etlichen unghüren / die ein thüren uß dem angel glupfft / dört ußhin gworffen / ein ding im huß ummkeert / aber also haend ligen lassen / und der wält vil plaguen angethon.” On the importance of Lavater’s chapter on “daily experience,” see Chesters Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France (2011), pp. 79-84.

461 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 72; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 37v.
leaves of a book, playing dice, and engendering clapping noises. Others gently grabbed people by
the arm, woke men from sleep, or made dogs go lame. In many ways, the latter half of Book One
revels in those minute details which expand on how spiritual creatures were not merely seen or
heard but also sensually felt. As Lavater describes, invisible presences made people’s hearts
unexpectedly flutter and their heads swell, engendering “suche greate feare, that sometimes they
become grayheaded in one night”; they also “oftentimes awake men out of their sleepe, and cause
many to forsake their owne houses.” In another passage Lavater vividly describes how spirits
trafficked in the emotional weight of another person’s death: “Sometimes we thinke the house will
fall on our heads, or that some massie and weightie thing falleth down throughout all the house,
rendring and making a disordered noise: and shortlie within fewe months after, we vnderstande
that those things happened, the very same houre that our friends departed in.”
A great deal of
Book One’s content catalogues what haunting descriptively looks and sounds like; yet, it also
demonstrates that spirits were responsible for the slightest of bodily disturbances. In Book Three,
Lavater will further elaborate on how these minor disturbances were often accompanied by much
greater changes (grosse enderungen), including great wars and the violent institution of new
kingdoms. In such instances—where one hears whispers in the night, feels an icy atmosphere of
death when waking, or intuits the fall of an empire—Das Gespensterbuch contends that spiritual
creatures were manipulating human understanding of the world. Where subtle and seismic bodily
reactions demanded attention from the afflicted, Lavater argues that, in reality, spirits exploited
the human sensorium and cognitive faculties, seeking to confuse Christians, to draw their attention

462 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 96; Das Gespensterbuch, 50v: “‘erschreckend und plagend sy / daß sy etwan einer
nacht tubgraw werdend / machend daß die liit nachts nit rüewig schlaaffen könnend.’

463 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 77; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 40r: “einer nit anderst meint / dann es falle etwas
schwärz durch das ganz huß nider / etwan thönt es gar wunderbarlich / hernach findet sich dz die ding der
stund ghört und bschähen sin dals sy verscheiden.”
away from God and Protestant preaching. This point is given more precise definition in Book Two, to which we now turn, where Lavater explains that obscure and confusing sensations occur as a result of demonic illusions.

Forging a Protestant Perspective: Book Two

Where Book One delineates specious and genuine accounts of haunting spirits, Book Two introduces a Protestant framework for interpreting such accounts. As seen in the previous chapter, several late medieval preachers and theologians maintained that human souls could not appear in this world because they were occupied in heaven, hell, or purgatory. As authors like Nider and Geiler explained, sinful souls were never permitted to leave hell, those in heaven would never want to depart God’s grace, and those in purgatory were too busy in the afterlife atoning for their sins on earth. Lavater rehearses the arguments and assumptions from this tradition but arrives at a radically different conclusion: in Book Two he contends that ghosts never appear before humanity, because purgatory itself was a Romanist fabrication.

In forwarding this argument, Lavater furnished readers and listeners with a scathing attack on the doctrine of purgatory:

Wherefore saith holy scriptures, as the Fathers understand & interpret them, teache that the soules of men, as soone as they departe from the bodies, do ascende up into heaven if they were godly, descende into hell if they were wicked and faithlesse, and that there is no thirde place which soules should be delivered, as it were out of prison, & that soules can neither be reclaimed out of heaven or hell. Hereby it is made evident, that they cannot wander on the earth & desire aide of men.464

464 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 118; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 62v: “Diewyl nun die heilig gschrifft leert wie es die heiligen vättter auch verstanden / daß die seelen der menschen / so bald sy vom lyb scheidend in zwen teilt verordnet seyend / der ein teilt / namlich der glöubigen in Himmel / der ander teilt / namlich der unglöubigen in die verdammnuß / und daß kein mittel ort oder stand seye / da den seelen möge als uß dem Himmel oder uß der Hell nit wider kommind / so könnend sy ye uff erden nit wandlen / noch der hilff begären.”
The passage champions the idea that “when it has departed from the body, the soul immediately enters heaven or hell.”\footnote{Evener, “Wittenberg’s Wandering Spirits” (2015): 536.} Contrary to late medieval and early modern Catholic theology, Protestant theologians insisted that no intermediate space existed for human souls after death. Because there was mention of purgatory in scripture, Lavater reasoned “therefore there is no Purgatorie” \textit{(deßhalb kein Fägfhür syn könne)}.\footnote{Evener, “Wittenberg’s Wandering Spirits” (2015): 536. See also MacCulloch, \textit{The Reformation} (2004), pp. 580-81; Craig Koslofsky, \textit{The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 34-39.} Vincent Evener has shown that evangelicals favored similar arguments as early as 1522. In a collection of 48 articles under the title \textit{Articles on the Conjuration of the Wandering Dead}, commonly attributed to Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt but likely the product of Luther himself, both purgatory and the wandering dead are considered distractions from faithful pursuits. Eight year after the publication of the 48 \textit{Articles}, Luther would publish his \textit{Renunciation of Purgatory} in 1530, insisting that neither purgatory nor prayer for the dead had any scriptural basis.\footnote{Evener, “Wittenberg’s Wandering Spirits” (2015): 532. See also MacCulloch, \textit{The Reformation} (2004), pp. 580-81; Craig Koslofsky, \textit{The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 34-39.} Following in this early Reformation tradition, Book Two holds that the souls of the dead have only two viable destinations in the Christian afterlife, heaven or hell.

For Lavater and other Protestant reformers, the whole issue of wandering spirits from purgatory fed into a disastrous parade of false Catholic beliefs and practices. “By these apparitions of spirits,” the Swiss minister bemoaned, “masses, images, satisfactiò pilgrimages for religion sake, reliques of saints, monasticall vowes, holiadaies, auricular confession, and other kinds of worshippings and rites, and to be shorte, al things whiche have no grounde in holy scripture, by
little and little grew into authority and estimation.”

Lavater pointed out how the growth of Catholic institutions paralleled a commensurate neglect of Christian lives and livelihood. On the one hand, donations given to the institutional church (on behalf of perished associates) served to proliferate unnecessary material excesses. Chapels, altars, monasteries and other physical extremities were fraudulently built “to release their friends out of the torments of Purgatorie” (uβ der pyn unnd not des fägfhürs möchte erlösen).

According to Lavater’s logic, Roman Catholic belief in ghosts and purgatory constituted a foundation upon which the ecclesiastical elite (i.e., popes, monks, and clerics) benefited from worldly vanities.

On the other hand, Lavater denounced the ways in which these Catholic oblations and institutions perpetuated the pernicious teaching that “men attained vnto salvation, by their owne, and by other mens merits” (einer durch sin eigne and ander lüten wreck und verdienst / daruß möge erlößt warden).

Intoning the central Protestant critique of Catholicism, Lavater condemned systems of belief and practice that promoted promises of ritual purification to alleviate the burden of sin. As is well-known, the sixteenth-century Reformation challenged the economy of salvation proposed and debated by theologians of the medieval West. The principal theological message of mainstream reformers held that the saving work of God’s grace never depended on the merits and ritual performances of humanity. This meant that divine grace was never responsive to human actions and intentions; instead, it existed solely as an aspect of God’s providence and constituted a freely given gift unencumbered by human requests or behavior. In Book Two,
Lavater adopts this argument and stresses that “puritie and cleannesse consisteth not in our woorkes, or in the paynes which we endure, but that God through faith in his sonne Iesus Christe (who is our only redemption, iustification, satisfaction, and raunsom for our sinnes).”

Where the material excesses associated with belief in purgatory were detestable for Lavater, the Catholic theology accompanying these excesses were far more harmful, because they encouraged a merit-based relationship with the Christian divinity.

Book Two thus constitutes a crucial turning point in Das Gespensterbuch. It denounces Catholic doctrine and expatiates on the harm caused by beliefs, practices, and institutions associated with the notion of purgatory. It also addresses the issue of haunting spirits in manner different from Book One. In particular, Lavater ascribes metaphysical definition to spiritual creatures by way of scriptural exegesis. The most important passage in this regard is found halfway through the treatise (Chapter 7 of Book Two), where Lavater discusses the Witch of Endor and how the dead prophet Samuel appeared before King Saul (1 Samuel 28). The biblical episode posed considerable problems for Protestant exegetes. As canonical scripture, it recounted the story of a purportedly human ghost returning to the world of the living. Pointing to inconsistencies in Gentile, Jewish, and patristic interpretations of passage, Lavater concludes that “the spirit of Samuel was not truely, & in deed rysed vp from his rest, but rather some vayne vision & counterfet illusion” (es seye nit der recht Samuel / sonder deß tüfels gspänst gsyn). The author then rehearsed a number of demonological commonplaces to support this conclusion, contending that demons appear in myriad forms to confuse the faithful and bid them to do those things which...

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471 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 156; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 84v: “die reinigkeit komme nit uß unserem läben oder lyden / sonder Gott mache uns allein durch den glauben an sinen Sun – der unsere einige erlösung / gerechtigkeit / gnuogthüeng und bezalung für unsere sünd is.”

472 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 131; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 71r.
are good or even avoid things that are evil. Lavater also acknowledged—by way of Thomist metaphysics—the subtle celerity and knowledge afforded to fallen angels, as well as the ways in which demons “may easily deceyue the eye sight, and other senses of man” (die gsicht der menschen und andere empfindnussen betriege).⁴⁷³

The contention that Samuel’s apparition was demonic in nature had a number of ancient and modern precedents. As Lavater himself boasted, early church fathers including Eustathius, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine (in his early works) believed that “the Deuill dyd there represent Samuels soule” (Der tüfel habt sich für Samuels seel ußgäbe).⁴⁷⁴ In the later Middle Ages the Malleus Maleficarum reasoned the same, as did several other authors.⁴⁷⁵ Likewise, Lavater’s Protestant contemporaries, including Heinrich Bullinger, Jean Calvin, Guillame Farel, and Pietro Martire Vermigli, voiced this conclusion. The publishers of the French translation made the connection between Lavater and Vermigli, in particular, explicit to readers: the French edition was often printed with Vermigli’s Latin commentary on the biblical episode of Samuel’s apparition to Saul.⁴⁷⁶ As such, the primary focus and argument of Book Two would have been relatively familiar to many learned readers.

The novelty of Lavater’s approach lies, then, not in his conclusion that ghosts and purgatory did not exist, but in the unexpected transition between the first two books. Significantly,

⁴⁷³ Of Ghostes (1929), p. 167; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 91v.

⁴⁷⁴ Of Ghostes (1929), p. 131; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 71v.


⁴⁷⁶ Note the title in French: Trois livres des apparitions…Plus trois questions proposes et resolves par M. P. Martyr…lequelles conviennent à cette matiere (1571).
the argument that demons appeared before humanity as ghosts emerges only gradually over the course of the entire treatise. The author dedicates half of the first book to discrediting tales of spiritual distress. Here, human misunderstanding and mistake, rather than demonic trickery, explain faulty accounts of spirits. Thereafter, the concluding chapters of Book One relate evidence for what the Swiss minister deemed to be authentic spiritual encounters. Notably, in these chapters Lavater never indicates whether the creatures he describes are ghosts, demons, or something else. He only affirms the pervasive effects of fallen angels, as such, midway through the second book (after discussing the Witch of Endor). As a result, initial entry into *Das Gespensterbuch* appears to substantiate, rather than subvert, conceptions of ghosts and purgatory.\(^477\)

One way in which Lavater manages this narrative tension is by employing ambiguous narratives concerning spirits. To take one memorable example, Chapter 11 (of Book One) tells the story of the “spirit of Athens,” originally recorded by Pliny the Younger. Among the lengthiest of Lavater’s *exempla*, Pliny details how a large house in Athens was haunted by “an image or shape, as it were an olde man, leane and lothsome to beholde, with a long beard and staring haire: on his legs he had fetters, and in his hand caryed chains which he always ratled togethier.”\(^478\) We are told that the inhabitants of the home perished from the experience, and as a result the habitation was left vacant. After some time the Stoic philosopher Athenodorus rented the home at a cheap price, knowing the reason for its availability. While writing a book on philosophy one night, the apparition appeared to Athenodorus and beckoned him to come to the courtyard. There, the philosopher discovered some skeletal remains bound with chains. Immediately leaving the

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\(^{477}\) Catherine Stevens argues that Book One actually demonstrates Lavater’s failure to remove ghosts from the early modern Christian imaginary. See “‘You shal reade marvelous straunge things’” (2016), pp. 141-162. I give a more substantial account of Stevens’ position below.

\(^{478}\) A longer German translation is provided below.
residence, Athenodorus asked and received permission from Athenian magistrates to unearth the body, which was carried out, and finally the bones were buried in some anonymous place. The anecdote concludes that once this was done, “the house...was euer after cleare of all suche ghostes.”

Pliny’s anecdote, like several others recorded in Book One, is at once appropriate and awkward in a treatise that seeks to disprove the existence of ghostly apparitions. On the one hand, it demonstrates the type of uncanny haunting Lavater desired to descriptively foreground for his audience: humans inhabit a residence, discover a spectral presence, and finally evacuate (or perish in) the location due to fear associated with the apparition. The opening lines of this anecdote contain rousing language suited to this purpose:

There was in Athens a goodly and very large house, but evill reported and counted as an infortuniate and vnluckie house. For about mydnight, there was hearde the noyse of iron, and if one marked it wel, the ratling of chaines, as it were a farre off at the firste, and so, neerer and neerer: shortly ther appeered an image or shape, as it were an olde man, lean and lothsome to beholde, with a long beard and staring haire: on his legs he had fetters, and in his hand caryed chains which he always ratled togither. By means wherof, those that inhabited the house, by reason of their fear, watched many heauie and pitifull nights; after their watching folowed sicknesse, and soon after, as feare increased, ensued death. For in the day tyme also, albeit the image were departed, yet the remembrãce thereof, was euer presente before their eyes, so that theyr feare was longer than they had cause to feare. Vpon this house stoode desert and solitarie, wholly lefte vnto the monstere which haunted it.\footnote{Of Ghostes (1929), pp. 72-73; Das Gespensterbuch, pp. 30r-31v: “Zuo Athen ist ein hüpsch groß huβ gsyn / das was verschreit und ungesund. By nacht hort man erstlich von wytnuß neßwas als ob einer ein kettinen nahin zuge / bald kame s noch näher zuoßin. Darauf sach man einen alten mageren mann / mit einem langen bart und schuderächten haar / der truog an sinen schenklen fuoßband / und ein kettinen an er hand / welche er erschutt. Daher beschach daß die so in disem huß wonetend / schwärmüetig unnd trurig warend / zuo nacht kondtend sy nit schlaffen / wurdend kranck unnd sturbend. Dann auch by tag wenn glych das bild oder das ungehür nit mer vorhanden / beduocht sy / sy sähind unnd hortind es noch / forchtend inen übel. Also wolt niemant mer in das huß zühen / und stuond lang ledig.” Pliny the Younger, Letters, trans. by W. Melmoth, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1915), II, pp. 67-77 (Book Seven, Letter XXVII). The tale was, as Timothy Chesters notes, “probably the most often-cited ghost narrative in the period.” See Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France (2011), p 153-54.}
The passage is not only dramatic in its depiction of the visible apparition, it also deftly displayed haunting as a process of subtle and then violent displacement. The first sentence sets the adjectives “goodly and very large” (hüpsch groß) in tension with the inverse qualities of an “evill” and “infortunate” (verschreit und ungesund). Likewise the staging of the specter’s appearance is overtly climactic: at first the sounds were “farre off” (erstlich von wytnuß neißwas) but gradually creep up “neerer and neerer” (bald kame sy noch näher zuohin) until the spirit is visibly seen. Thereafter, Pliny’s account renders the deconstruction of the human body and mind as a tidy equation: the culmination of auditory and visual terrors incited “fear” (schwärmüetig unnd trurig), “sicknesse” (wurdend krank), and “death” (sturbend). The temporality of haunting is equally compelling, for the loss of human life is explained by “remembrãce” (bedoucht) of the apparition—a presence that is continually felt even after the specter itself has “departed” (nit mer vorhanden). In effect, the anecdote displays a process of displacement whereby haunting transforms human lives and the domestic setting. Just as the original inhabitants no longer have life, so too the solitary house no longer constitutes a proper “home” (das huß…stuound lang ledig).

On the other hand, Pliny’s story suits late medieval stories of ghosts and purgatory in which the dead communed with the living. It includes vivid description of an anthropomorphic apparition (“an olde man, leane and lothsome”) whose materiality mysteriously demands physical human response: as Pliny recalls, “the image shaketh his chaines ouer his head,” at which point Athenodorus rose “vp without delaye, taketh the candle in his and foloweth [the apparition]…the

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480 While Pliny precedes the late medieval doctrine of purgatory by more than a millennium, earlier ghostly tales were often retrospectively employed to reinforce its invention. See Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages” (2009), p. 154. For dates concerning the doctrine of purgatory, see Chesters, Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France (2011), p 21. With this in mind, Lavater anachronistically employs the tale in a way that presupposes an intermediate space of the afterlife suited to the Catholic imaginary of purgatory.
next day he [Athenodorus] goth to the rulers of the citie, and willett them to commaunde the place
to bee digged up, which donne, they fynde boanes wrapped and tyed in chayns...those boanes
beeing gathered together, were buryed solemnely." The tale thus appears to establish a
reciprocal, if mysterious, relationship between the philosopher and ghost wherein the former is led
to complete some task on behalf of the latter. More strikingly still, the narrative seems to explain
the spirit’s release from some vague form of past and present torment: “the house, after they [the
bones] were orderly layde in the grounde, was ever after cleare of all suche ghostes.” The specter
is ostensibly set free or influenced by the actions of the human agent Athenodorus—something
Lavater vehemently derides throughout the second and third books. Without any guidance from
the Swiss author in Book One, except that the story is included in a chapter entitled “A profe out
of the Gentiles histories, that spirits and ghosts do often times appeare,” Pliny’s account appears
to undermine rather than underscore the broader conclusion of *Das Gespensterbuch.* There is
no immediate indication that Lavater disapproved of any aspect of the story; nor does he designate
the spirit as “a demon.” Rather the reader is left, at least in Book One, to infer that Pliny’s spirit
exemplified something closely approximating a human ghost. Numerous other narratives in this
book follow the same confusing pattern of describing spirits as Catholic revenants.

481 *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 31r: “Do erschutt e sim die kettinen ob sinem haupt / und als er aber umbsich
sach / wanck e sim wie vor. Do name r das liecht und gieng im von stundan nach...Deß volgenden tags kart
er für Radt / zeigt an man sölle daselbst graben. Do fand man todtenein daran kettinen warend / der
lychnam was verwäsen / die bein laß man zuosamen und vergruobs. Von der zyt an hatt man das unghür
nit mer gespürt.”

482 *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 27r: “Daß geister und unghür gespürt werdind / und andere wunderbare ding
warlich beschähind / wirt bewärts uß den historien der Heiden.”

483 These points are also made in Stevens, “‘You shal reade marvelous straunge things’” (2016), pp. 141-162.
Compounding the issue further, Lavater’s language in Book One is consistently colored by ambivalent terminology. As the title suggests, *Das Gespensterbuch* favors the term “Gespenster”; it also frequently employs words like “Geister” and “Ungehür” for would-be ghosts. The Latin, French, and English translations respectively employ intentionally vague terminology, such as “spiritus,” “esprit,” and “spirit,” among others. This choice of vocabulary is significant, for it evoked conceptions of both human ghosts and angelic creatures. At the close of Book One, Lavater gathers this loose range of appellations, noting that “*dise gspänst / unghûr / geister / oder wie man sy nennen wil*” will appear in many forms before humanity.⁴⁸⁴ The point is that *Das Gespensterbuch* rarely employs descriptive terms like *Teufel* or *bose Geist*. With few exceptions, the author proceeds by emphasizing the significance of haunting in Western Europe but without naming the type of offending spirit. There are a handful of exceptions to this rule, as when Lavater clarifies that, despite the witless tales of grandmothers and mothers, “If suche dwarves or elues [hußvolck] haue bin seene at any time, surely they were euill Spirits [*böß geist*].”⁴⁸⁵ These “euill Spirits”, accordingly to Lavater, were once thought to be household gods and given reverence for their protection of the home. Or when demystifying geysers, the effects of an echo, glowworms, and the like, he admits that “*der tüfel*” can just as easily delude early modern folk with similar marvels of nature. For the most part, however, the first book maintains an open-ended question of whether haunting was perpetuated by ghosts, fallen angels, or another kind of spiritual being.

As literary scholars have commented, early modern theatre would creatively exploit this cultural ambiguity. Most famously, the apparition of Hamlet’s father represents an ambiguous

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⁴⁸⁴ *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 50v. The English simply reads: “These walking spirits…”, p. 96.

⁴⁸⁵ Of Ghostes (1929), p.49; *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 25 v: “Hatt man sy warlich also gesähen / so ist es der böß geist gsyn.”
spiritual being suited to Lavater’s discourse. Upon first sight of the spirited figure, Hamlet attempts to interpret the visitation:

Angels and Ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn’d,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com’st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I’ll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane. O answer me,
Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
Why thy canoniz’d bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements, why the sepulcher
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn’d
Hath op’d his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou, dead corpse, again in complete steel
Revisits thus the glimpse of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do (I.iv.39-57)

J. Dover Wilson was the first to argue that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* invited the audience to consider the Danish king’s appearance as a human ghost sent from purgatory or a demonic messenger urging Hamlet to commit murder and suicide. Wilson draws from Lavater’s argument and suggests that, for a Protestant audience, because human souls could not (at least in theory) appear to the living, the apparition must have been an illusion manufactured by a fallen angel. At the same time, Roman Catholic viewers could have easily seen the spirit’s description of the afterlife as consistent with the doctrine of purgatory. Part of the appeal of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, on this reading, lies in the play’s invitation to speculate on what the spirit is.\(^{486}\)

Despite the narrative and linguistic ambiguities of *Das Gespensterbuch*, we know that Lavater considered virtually all apparitions to be demonic in origin; he makes this clear in Book

\(^{486}\) See the “Introduction” by J. Dover Wilson in *Of Ghostes* (1929).
Two. Yet, as modern scholars have argued, Lavater’s writing can be confusing in the way it “creates a shifting framework of interpretation that provides little means by which his audience might accurately assess spectral phenomena.”  

Catherine Stevens contends that the work is ultimately unsuccessful in its endeavor to banish the ghost from the sixteenth-century imaginary. She writes that “[a] haunting occurs within the text itself, as ghosts repeatedly emerge within the discursive structures that delineate their absence and, in doing so, create the possibility of their presence.” Stevens highlights how Lavater commences his dedicatory epistle with a concise declaration that demons, not ghosts, haunt the affairs of the living and then drops this argument until relatively late in *Das Gespensterbuch*. Her broader point is that Lavater too often leaves open the interpretive possibility that what people have felt are specters of the dead. Accordingly, she concludes that Lavater’s writing is inadvertently “haunted by that which he seeks to exclude.”

Bruce Gordon has similarly shown that *Das Gespensterbuch* retains an uncertainty about the existence of premodern ghosts. Gordon comments on how “[t]he fine lines of the Protestant denunciation of revenancy become obscured in the anecdotes collected by Lavater. He was well aware that the people remained persuaded of the reality of wandering spirits and that the dead still dwelt among the living. This might be decried by Protestant preachers as the work of the Devil, but that did nothing to diminish the force of this belief.” Both Stevens and Gordon appropriately describe elements of uncanniness that pervade much of Lavater’s work. Their analyses suggest that Lavater intentionally frustrates the reader’s ability to firmly locate ghosts and angels in the

487 Stevens, “‘You shal reade marvelous straunge things’” (2016), p. 149.

488 Ibid., p. 162.

489 Ibid., p. 152.

lives of sixteenth-century Christian individuals and communities. On this view the selection of stories rehearsed by Lavater in Book One appears to subvert the primary conclusion of the text as a whole. Where Stevens perceives an inherent haunting of Lavater’s writing, Gordon acknowledges the complexities involved with explaining away ghostly encounters to make room for Protestant theology.

It is a truism that Protestant reformers struggled to extirpate the ghost from the early modern Christian imaginary. Those uncanny elements of Das Gespensterbuch identified by Stevens and Gordon are a testament to Lavater’s part in this history. Yet, as both Stevens and Gordon identify, the Swiss minister is firm in his denunciation of purgatory and ghosts. This begs consideration of why the author formatted his treatise in a way that initially foregrounds ambivalence concerning ghosts and angelic beings.

The crux of Lavater’s method of argumentation lies in the text’s disputational form—a dialectical structuring that culminates in a gradual disclosure of ghostly apparitions as demonic creatures.491 Adopting the discursive form of scholastic methodology, Das Gespensterbuch issues contrary evidence in the first two books and then provides a synthesis or resolution in the third book. Scholastic disputatio typically exhibits the formula of asking: 1.) does the subject exist (an sit)?, 2.) what is the subject (quid sit)?, and 3.) does the subject have specific characteristics (quia sit) and to what end (propter quid)?492 Lavater follows this line of reasoning and presentation but

491 Both Stevens and Gordon point out the disputational structuring of Das Gespensterbuch, although neither author provides sustained analysis of what effect this has on the reader. Timothy Chesters, on the other hand, writes that the tension between Books One and Two “constitutes an arresting narrative reversal.” Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France (2011), p. 73. Here I expand on the point Chesters has made in passing.

492 Bullinger similarly relied on this scholastic formulation, but far more explicitly, in his series of sermons known as Decades. See Mark J. Larson, Calvin’s Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and its American Trajectory, the Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2009), pp. 28-29.
without offering formal scholastic “quaestiones.” Rather, he posits in Book One what could be called a widely accepted cultural “thesis”: he implicitly asks (and answers) whether wandering spirits haunt the living (i.e., *an sit?*). Lavater then proffers his “antithesis” in Book Two, demonstrating by means of biblical exegesis what these apparitions of the returned dead really are (*quid sit?*). Finally, the third book marshals a pastoral response to the first two parts in which Christians are counseled to recognize (*quia sit?*) and how to survive (*propter quid?*) the presence of infesting demons. Lavater, in other words, structurally mirrors Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* in each question in order to make the point that the vast majority of apparitions are demonic in origin.

By framing *Das Gespensterbuch* in this way, Lavater stages the problem of haunting as a process of measured revelations. He seeks in Book One to awaken his readership to the range of activities purportedly enacted by wandering souls, writing under the pretense that ghosts exist in order to delineate what they are said to do, where they habitually emerge, and in what form they may appear. Once this awareness has been established, demons are then given theological definition in Book Two and shown to be capable of exploiting all signs of ghostly haunting. Coupled with Lavater’s deconstruction of the doctrine of purgatory, the reader is meant to understand that ghosts can never haunt the living. The last book (examined below) then concludes with Lavater’s own authoritative instructions on how to identify and deal with the event of demonic haunting in the home.

Crucial to this dialectic are the historical narratives populating Book One. While these tales can be read as a foil against which Lavater’s biblical exegesis will prevail in Book Two, with more subtlety they portray haunting as a shared experience of unexpected excitement and terror. On this perspective, Book One mobilizes ghostlore to broadly provoke premodern audiences. Convinced of the pervasive reality of spirits and haunting, Lavater was conscious of and intently focused on
the fact that narratives about *Gespenstern* could move or arouse readers. As we have seen, it is in the first book that Lavater describes the sounds of animals, the wind, and natural marvels confuse and excite early modern folk. There are also diverse accounts of houses animated by creaks and moans, unseen voices that rumble and cry, and various images that suddenly appear from nowhere.

At first glance, the marvelous and demonic *exempla* of the first book dovetail with what Jan Machielsen describes as “the entertainment factor of demonology.” Examining the writings of the Jesuit Martin Delrio and the French lawyer and poet Pierre le Loyer—both contemporaries of Lavater—Machielsen contends that early modern readers would have enjoyed didactic narratives featuring demons for their wondrous and often humorous narrative value.⁴⁹³ Timothy Chesters and Margaret McGowan have likewise shown that demonological authors deliberately evoked elements of readerly delight, amusement, and theatricality.⁴⁹⁴ Some of Lavater’s remarks in the dedicatory epistle support this perspective.

Referencing the “learned and unlearned” (*gleerten unnd ungleerten*), for example, Lavater intones the hope that his sundry stories will “not be tedious to the reader” (*damit der Läser nit verdrüssig*) and that the book “will not seeme vnpleasaunt vnto you [Steigerus] and others in the reading” (*zeläsen nit unlustig oder langwylig syn*).⁴⁹⁵ Such claims to pleasurable reading were a staple of early modern literature. Yet while the Swiss minister initially gestures towards the

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⁴⁹⁵ *Of Ghostes* (1929), without pagination in “The Authours Epistle”; *Das Gespensterbuch*, without pagination in “Vorred.”
Horatian ideal of pleasure obtained through reading, he also maintains that the real profit derived from storytelling should be in service to Christian ministry. Memorably, in Book One, Lavater personalizes his collated stories by exhorting: “whosoever readeth this booke, may call to their remembraunce, that they haue seene these and suche like things them selues, or that they haue heard them of their friends and acquaintaunce and of such as deserue sufficient credit.” The statement in many ways exemplifies the pastoral program of Das Gespensterbuch. The audience is told to call forth memories of their own haunting encounters, to interpolate personal knowledge of what haunting feels like. Lavater hoped his readership would internalize his anecdotal material, adopting the narratives as representative of their own experiences with the demonic. Even for those fortunate few to have never encountered a spirit, Lavater assumes they will be able to recall similar tales heard from reputable sources. The efficacy of storytelling and pastoralism in Das Gespensterbuch operates along these lines. Lavater adeptly locates the problem of haunting in the immediate context of Christian experience and memory. By urging the reader to “call to their remembaunce” different spiritual encounters (real or imagined), he sought to engender didactic connections between experiences with ghosts (in Book One), his own theological authority (in Book Two), and finally pastoral counsel (in Book Three).

The Pastoral Approach to Hearing Things: Book Three

The third and final book details methods by which Christians were to make their stand against demonic assaults in the home. As Lavater announced early in the dedicatory epistle, Book Three explains “howe men ought to behaue themselues when they happen to meete with such

496 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 80; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 41r: “Ein yeder aber der dises lißt / wird sich deren eilicher und anderer derglychen dingen vol wüsse zuo erinnern / die im selbs / sinen fründen / bekanntten und verwandten begägnet / oder Darvon er sunst etwan von anderen glaubwridigen lüten gehört hatt.”
things [Spirits]" (wie sich die menschen söllind halten so jnen etwas derglychen erschynt und begägnet).\textsuperscript{497} The same guideline is announced as the heading for Chapter 5 in the final book: “\textit{Hovv Christian men ought to behauve themselfes vwhen they see spirites, and first that they ought to have a good courage, and to be stedfast in fayth}.”\textsuperscript{498} In general, the laity are told never to accept or attempt communication with spiritual creatures, lest the Devil beguile them. Because the majority of spectral visitations were demonic in character, social exchange of any sort with a spirit would end in duplicity or worse. In exceptional circumstances, blessed angels or some obscure portent might be sent from God, but one could never be sure. Given humanity’s proclivity for sin, and because the humans were easily manipulated by the Devil, an approach of non-engagement was always safest. Should the Christian intuit a heavenly spirit, deliberate disregard would never offend the divine messenger, for “they will lyke it well, that thou wilte heare nothing but the woorde of God” (so gefalt im wol wenn du nichts anderst hören wilt dann Gottes wort).\textsuperscript{499} In most cases anyway, demonic encounters would entail obsequious flattery, the posing of seemingly innocuous questions, and a general attempt to establish contact by means of rumbling nonsense. Against all such communication, Lavater proclaims (twice) that the best defense is simply to “\textit{not giue eare vnto them}” (\textit{nit losen}).\textsuperscript{500}

In many ways, the directive to “\textit{not giue eare vnto them}” is the central message of Book Three and retrospectively informs the entire treatise. It intimates that the reader and listener must

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{497} \textit{Of Ghostes} (1929), without pagination in “The Authours Epistle”; \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, without pagination in the Vorred.
\item \textsuperscript{498} \textit{Of Ghostes} (1929), p. 190; \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, p. 105r.
\item \textsuperscript{499} \textit{Of Ghostes} (1929), p. 196; \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, p. 108v.
\item \textsuperscript{500} \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, p. 108v; \textit{Of Ghostes} (1929), p. 197.
\end{itemize}
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not only cultivate an ability to close one’s ears to the noisiness of demons but also learn to appropriately and actively hear the Word of God. The point is worth emphasizing because sound, more than any other sense, operates as a didactic representation of how fallen angels threatened Christian wellbeing—whether by means of haunting events or posing obstacles to the goals of Protestant preaching. Several examples from Book Three demonstrate this menace of demonic cacophony. Chapter 3 focuses exclusively on the noises associated with demons and the broader question of “VVhy God doth suffer straunge noyses, or extraordinarie rumblings” (Warumb Gott der Herr seltzame fäl...sunt beschähen lasse). Likewise, Chapter 5 counsels that if patient Christians allowed spirits to “rumplet” and “poldern” without much notice, demons would eventually become tired (müed) and cease (so wirt er sich trollen) their racket. Chapter 7 thereafter also warns of the contaminating effects of speech wherein some demons persistently attempted to establish auditory contact. The faithful, however, are told never to listen (nît losen) to apparitions because God (via scripture) had strictly forbidden communication with the alleged dead.

To be clear, Book Three does refer to visual torments attending ghostly apparitions. As we have seen throughout Lavater’s treatise, sight of a ghost or natural marvel could have potentially debilitating or even deadly effects on those unfortunate souls who perceived them. In the vivid account of Pliny’s “spirit of Athens,” for example, the initial inhabitants of the haunted house

501 Stuart Clark has importantly commented on the optical dimensions of Das Gespensterbuch in Vanities of the Eye (2007), pp. 87-109. My point is not to refute Clark’s convincing analysis but to draw attention to a neglected and prevalent aspect of Das Gespensterbuch. I note the importance of the visual illusions in Book Three below.

502 In this particular passage Lavater does not give a specific biblical reference, although throughout Book Two he repeatedly cites Deuteronomy 18:11 (“To seek truth from the dead is a transgression and abomination before God”) and Luke 16:31 (“The truth must be sought from Moses and the prophets, that is, from sacred scripture, not from the dead.”). Unsurprisingly the Articles on the Conjuration of the Wandering Dead also emphasized these biblical passages; see Evener, “Wittenberg’s Wandering Spirits” (2015): 538.
“watched many heauie and pitifull nights…and soon after, as feare increased, ensued death.” And even when spirits were not culpable for domestic disturbances, Lavater reminded readers that the astonishing effects of the glowworm, gemstones, and the eyes of animals at night aroused misplaced fear of nature and its marvels. In like manner, Book Three recapitulates the sudden alarm arising from “an idle sight [ein whon] objected vnto our eyes,” and how “in deed it is naturall vnto vs, to be amazed with feare [schuderet] when we see such things.”

Stressing the visible dimension of haunting, Lavater commented that the appearance of spiritual creatures was often so disorienting that many Christians attempted physical combat with demons:

> There haue bin some who when they would haue stricken [gehauwen] a Spirit with their sword, haue thought they haue stricken the fetherbed [ein lind küsse], the Diuel so mocked them. Others supposing they had throwen a spirit out the window, by and by thought they heard shingles falling and ratling amongst the trees.

At the same time, the sounds associated with haunting spirits were given special attention for the disruptive effects they had on Christian concentration and wellbeing. Invisible creatures persistently rattled, hummed, knocked, cried, and moaned, often times mimicking the voices of the dead and speaking in indiscernible languages and rumblings. The wonders of nature, too, vexed the ear with strange echoes, just as the quotidian noises of horses, birds, and other rural animals were confused with the activities of spiritual intelligences. Even in the longer passage quoted above, we are invited to overhear the alarming sounds of a “stricken” featherbed and the soft whispering of “shingles falling and ratling amongst the trees.” Such instances certainly registered visual illusions as disturbing events; they also undoubtedly resonated as audible tricks meant to lead Christians astray.

503 *Of Ghostes* (1929), p. 191; *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 105r.

By making fallen angels a matter of sonorous affliction, Lavater reinforces the idea that the early modern soundscape was permeable to noise as an invasive presence. Indeed, a close reading of Das Gespensterbuch shows that haunting evinced a profound aural dimension.\(^\text{505}\) In contrast to visible apparitions, which might be ignored by turning away or closing one’s eyes, sound becomes an especially intrusive and coercive force. It tenaciously finds its way through windows and doors, penetrating through hands held over the ears. In forwarding this argument, Lavater recalls instances wherein individuals have attempted to visually locate a source of disturbance only to find themselves further plagued by noxious sounds. Thus Book One affirms that “[m]any vse at this day to serch and sifte, euery corner of the house before they go to bed, ſ they may sleep more soundly: & yet neuerthelesse, they heare some scrying out, and making some lamētable noise.”\(^\text{506}\) Book Three addresses the same issue, although Lavater corrects the foregoing account and states that the intention to perceive the Devil must be resisted at all times. Referencing 1 Peter 5:8, he explains that while “Sathan raugeth euery where, in houses, fieldes, water and fyre: and yet he is not alwayes espied of men, neyther can he so be.” In every case of haunting, when demons produced “trouble and disquiet [ rumplen] our houses, we must not think therfore ſ they were neuer in our house before.”\(^\text{507}\) Implicated here is the Protestant understanding of God’s


\(^{506}\) *Of Ghostes* (1929), pp. 72-73; *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 38r: “vil in kammern ershinen sind die verschlossen gsyn / da mancher vorhin mit dem liecht under alle better und kästen zündt / und gsehen ob yemant in der kammer sye / wie noch vil lüt wenn sy schlaffen gond / im bruch habend.”

\(^{507}\) *Of Ghostes* (1929), p. 193; *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 106v: “wie S. Peter züget / allenthalben umhin laufft / verstand in hüseren / in holtz und fäld / in wasser und fhür / aber er laßt sich nit allweg sählen / und mags auch nit…Laßt uns aber Gott zur zyten den bösen geist erschynen / ode rim huß umhin rumplen / so ist es nit die meinung daß er vorhin nit daselbst gsyn seye.”
providential order and omnipotence. As in the pastoral advice of Sebastian Fröschel and Heinrich Bullinger, Lavater instructed the faithful to remain steadfast like the figure of Job.\textsuperscript{508} In the face of demonic clamor, the Christian was offered an occasion to reflect on moral imperfection.

With a broad view of \textit{Das Gespensterbuch}, haunting turned on seen and unseen spiritual presences that obstinately made themselves felt in everyday life. And it was this uncanny back and forth between familiar places and unfamiliar sights or noises which caused the Christian to anticipate, fear, and behave in unexpected ways. In forewarning the reader against the sudden irruption of fear, Lavater relies heavily on Johannine language and imagery for readerly guidance.

As Chapter 2 begins:

\begin{quote}
The clere light of Gods worde driveth away al such spirits, which vse to worke their feates in the darke. The cleare light approaching, the shadowe and darknesse vanisheth. The prince of darknesse shunneth light, and hath nothing to do where men worship God the father, only through Iesu Christ, believing only on him, and committing them selues wholy vnto his protection. If men esteem the word of God, and haue it in price, he will in no wise suffer them to be so ouerseene and deceyued, as they are whiche do all things without warrant of his word.\textsuperscript{509}
\end{quote}

Where the above passage begins with words of comfort—the clarity and constancy of scripture are contrasted with the darkness and disorder of demonic being—it notably ends with the warning that demons “do all things without warrant of his word.” According to Lavater, Christian communities suffered emotional and physical torment through misunderstanding and misapprehension, lost in the threatening and disorganizing powers of demonic noise, otherness, and falsehood. He also notes, in Chapter 1, that this threat was compounded by those “whose eares itche” (\textit{oren krätzlind})

\textsuperscript{508} Lavater also wrote on the Book of Job specifically: \textit{Das Buch Job aussgelegt undd erklärt}, in \textit{CXLI Predigen} (Zurich: C. Froschauer, 1582).

and “withdraw their eares from the truth” (*werdend die oren von der waarheit abwenden*) through false preachers. In contrast to “godly and constant preachers” (*der rechten prediger*) (like Lavater) ministering God’s message, demons and “false teachers” (*falsche leerer*) deafened the untrained Christian ear, drawing wary folk away from the biblical word.\(^{510}\)

As is well-known, Protestant reformers encouraged faithful Christians to seek truth in scripture alone. By means of individual and collective readings of the bible or by hearing a trained pastor speak, the Christian collective cultivated faith through access to the Word of God. Magisterial reformers espoused this idea across the board. Martin Luther asserted that the “Gospel is not really that which is in books and composed of letters, but rather an oral preaching and living word, and a voice which resounds through the whole world and is shouted forth abroad.”\(^{511}\) Likewise, John Calvin claimed that “all of Scripture is to be received as if God were speaking.”\(^{512}\)

Lavater too, emphasized that appointed pastors established contact between the biblical messages and fallen humanity: “some men, whiche bothe by lyuely voice, and also by their writings, shoulde

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\(^{510}\) *Das Gespensterbuch*, p. 98r. The reference to itching ears is biblical: “For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires” (2 Timothy 4:3).


interprete his woorde, and enfourme others of his will.”

It is in Book Three that the Protestant minister emerges as the primary means for mitigating against demonic afflictions in the form of invasive noise.

With this in mind, the problem of haunting constituted a dramatic contest of voices—between the community of believers, armed with the Word of God, and wicked forces aligned with infernal din. By framing demonic haunting in this way, Das Gespensterbuch accentuates the idea that noise itself could potentially corrupt the transmission of Protestant pastoral counsel. We are perhaps accustomed to an understanding of noise as non-discursive interference, like the confused sounds of traffic in a metropolitan city or the superposition of static noise on an electronic device (e.g., television or telephone). In his sixteenth-century context, Lavater also described atmospheric sounds and how “the noyse of boystrous winde, or violent tempeste, the sparkling of fyre, the roaring of waters sodenly increased” could be so perplexing that “a man supposeth hee seeth, heareth, feeleth, or is felte of some spirite.” Yet far more disruptive for Lavater were spoken languages which operated like noise, as when speech obstructs the communication of a particular message. Think, for instance, of two parties simultaneously speaking over one another and how the delivery of information is hindered by multiple voices. Lavater intentionally elaborates on this understanding of noise by equating rival preachers with demonic disturbances. In particular, he

513 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 198; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 109v: “Zu dem/ hatt er auch den dienst sines heiligen worts yngesetzt / das alwägen biß zum end der wält lüt wärind / so die ehlig gschrift ußlegtind / unnd sin heilsam wort mundtlich und gschrifftlich furträegind / und uns sins heiligen göttlichen willens berichtetind.”

514 Of Ghostes (1929), p. 19; Das Gespensterbuch, p. 7v: “als wenn es windete / er höre ein flühr flacken / er höre ein tosen der wilden waldwasseren...daß einer meint er sähe unghür / habe es gehört / habe es angrüert.”
shows how competing religious ideologies and devilish mischief functioned to impede lay Christians from hearing Protestant teachings.

Brief examples of this can be found at the start of Book One. For example, Lavater firmly disallowed philosophical skepticism concerning the existence of spirits, describing the disruptive “jests and laughing” (verlachet und für gedicht ghebt) of Epicureans and Sadducees, who denied that spirits exist at all. Noël Taillepied also commented on the Sadducees of Act 23:8 and the Epicureans of ancient Greece, adding Aristotelian peripatetics to the mix of dubious voices on spirits. The Capuchin friar admitted that while many natural things were mistaken for spirits, ghosts and angels absolutely existed. Hence Lavater and his critic united against voices of ancient and modern skepticism, exemplified by figures like Machiavelli and Rabelais. Another obnoxious discourse associated with demonic noise was the fanciful storytelling “heard of their [simple men’s] grandmothers and mothers (von jren mütener und großmütener gehört). With uncharacteristic clarity for Book One, Lavater openly repudiated vernacular traditions presupposing the existence of non-angelic spirits (e.g., fairies and elves). Citing Olaus Magnus and Georgius Agricola, historical authors referenced in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Lavater appropriates popular folklore as evidence of demonic deception and widespread hearsay. While Lavater only briefly glosses philosophical skepticism and vernacular beliefs, he is nevertheless invested in exposing the inconsistencies of these traditions with Protestant theology and preaching. In the context of Das Gespensterbuch’s message, their continued influence in Europe functions as a type of conceptual noise disguising and disrupting godly ministry.

515 This point is raised twice: Of Ghostes (1929), pp. 9 and 177; Das Gespensterbuch, pp. 1r and 96v.


517 Das Gespensterbuch, p. 25r.
Far more substantial in its symbolic resonance with demonic clamor was Lavater’s diatribe against Catholic preaching and the history of the papal office. The author reviled the ways in which “Monkes and Priests, which desire to be aloft, indeuor now a days to purchase vnto themselues authoritie by false miracles, vayne apparitions, and suche other lyke trumperie.” With dramatic effect, the controversial abdication of Pope Celestine V in 1294 helped make this point. Drawing from popular legend, Lavater recalled:

The Historiographers report that Bonifacius the 8. Deceyued his predecessor Celestinus, by a voyce sent through a cane reede, as though it had come frõ Heauen, persuading him to gyue ouer hys office of popeship, and to institute therin, one Bonifacius a woorthier man than he, except he woude be thrust out of the kingdom of heauen. The poore simple Pope obeying this voyce, ordeyned Bonifacius Pope in his steade, in the yeare of our Lord. 1294. who first brought in the yeare of jubile. Of this Boniface, the common people wold say, He came in lyke a Fox, he raigned lyke a Wolfe, and died lyke a Dog. If the very vicar of Christ, who hathe all knowledge as it were fast lockt in the Coffer of his brest, could be deceyued, lette no man maruel any more if simple credulous husbandmen and citzens haue ben deceyued.

Modern scholars of the medieval papacy have noted that Celestine’s abdication was both unexpected and unprecedented. The resignation gave rise to an array of theological debates about the implications of a pontiff’s resignation and the legitimacy of his successor Boniface VIII’s papal election. For Lavater, however, the story reverberated as Catholic noise: “[i]f this man [Boniface]


519 Of Ghostes (1929), pp. 47-48; Das Gespensterbuch, pp. 24r-24v: “Vom Bonifacio dem achten bezügend die historien daß er sinen vorfaren Celestium also betrogen habe. Er habe durch ein rhor als ob ein stim von himmel käme mit Celestino geredt er sölle das Bapsthum ufgebe und an sin statt Bonifacius ordnen wolle er acht sälig warden. Diger einfalt Bapst sye ghorsam gsyn und habe im jar 1294. Den eercyten Bonificium welher das erst Jubeljar hatt gehalten an sin statt gewelt und geordnet. Von jm was ein gmeine sag er wäre hinyin geschlichen wie ein fuchs, hette gereiert wie ein wollf, wäre gestorben wie ein anderer hund. Hatt man den Statthalter Christi können betriegen der alles wussen in scrinio pectoris hatt solte man einfaltige puren und burger nit auch können betriegen.”
coulde counterfeite the voice of God, coulde he not also faine the voice of dead men?”

In Lavater’s telling, the anecdote thus simultaneously rejected the existence of ghosts and undermined the pontiff’s religious authority, while also aligning ecclesiastical Catholic speech with the types of distracting sounds performed by demons.

Small wonder that the same general statements about Catholic clergy and pontiffs are consistently levied against demonic spirits. Mirroring the claim that ecclesiastics “purchase vnto themselues authoritie by false miracles,ayne apparitions, and suche other lyke trumperie,” Lavater witnessed fallen angels “purchase credite and authoritie, unto those things whiche haue no grounde of Scripture.” In this sense, the distractions performed by demons and Catholic teachings were a testament to why the banner of sola scriptura was so important. Since demons regularly impersonated representatives of the Christian religion, dead or alive—mimicking the appearance, voice, and feelings associated with Christian authorities and personas—an awareness of the conceptual affinities between demonic trickery and Catholic theology were crucial: both threatened and potentially compromised lay interpretation of the bible. Most egregiously, demonic spirits and Catholic preachers promised to reveal the secrets of salvation by means of biblical authority, often speaking of a third, intermediate space (i.e., purgatory) from which wandering souls would come to commune with the living. Given this feigned, extra-biblical knowledge, Lavater warned that both regularly posited impossible knowledge and secrets of the afterlife. In posturing themselves as would-be ghosts, unclean spirits requested that masses be sung for them, or that the pilgrimages would deliver the faithful from suffering and sin. Catholic authorities, in

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turn, perpetuated diabolical ruses by adhering to seemingly miraculous intercessions between the living and the dead.

This narrative is given further definition at the close of *Das Gespensterbuch*, where Chapters 10 and 11 disqualify Roman Catholic rituals of protection against spirits. Chapter 10 discredits religious ceremonies, including prayer for the dead, holy water, candles, palms, smoke from burning grass, and bells. Here, Lavater lambasts consecrations as inefficacious ritual protections against demonic invasion.522 Chapter 11 then elaborates on popular notions of exorcism and how “spirits are not to be driuen avvay by cursing and banning” (*man sol nit mit fluochen und schwarzen wenn unghür erschynt.* ) The underlying message in each is that haunting could not be located in or understood by Catholic practices and beliefs, and any attempt to do so served as futile noise. Worse still, Lavater urges that maledictions attracted, rather than repelled, the Devil: “Nothing can be more acceptable and pleasing to the Diuel, than when anyman vseth cursing and banning. He feyneth that he is hereby driuen away, but in ý meane season he crepeth inuisibly into their bosoms.”523 In effect, the vocalization of cursings and bannings was commensurate with Devil-speech: it further confirmed for Lavater that Catholic theology and its attendant rituals prevented accurate understanding of and response to demonic infestation.

**Conclusions**

In a compelling chapter on Protestant and Roman Catholic pastoral demonology, Timothy Chesters concludes that Lavater’s writing ultimately left Christians with “an ever-present, and only

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522 One of the fullest responses to this familiar Protestant critique was marshalled by the Jesuit Martin Delrio, who enumerated an extensive inventory of efficacious ecclesiastical remedies against demons. See, *Disquisitionum Magicarum* (1599), iii. 235-96.

imperfectly mastered, fear” of the Devil’s presence in the home. According to Chesters, the pastoral message of Das Gespensterbuch is that “the haunted house is one that we must tackle alone.” Having displaced Catholic rituals against demons with faith in God’s providential order, the most Protestant ministers could do to help Christians cope with haunting was diagnose demonic infestation as a divinely ordained occurrence. The laity were, then, left to fend for themselves and prepare for an uncertain end to the Devil’s work. From this perspective, the early modern home and landscape remained spaces rife for demons to haunt the living according to divine ordinance.

This conclusion, in part, captures Lavater’s desire to place sixteenth-century readers and listeners themselves within premodern spirit-lore. As already noted, Das Gespensterbuch invites the audience to emotionally and intellectually inhabit the multiple stories of ghosts-revealed-as-demons. To do so would have entailed many terrifying realizations: that spectral apparitions of, say, a relative or loved one from purgatory were inhuman perversions of what could be seen or heard; that ancient and medieval tales of haunting spirits mirrored accounts and experiences in Lavater’s own context; that once demonic infestation was appropriately identified, there were no ancient rites or trained priests to exorcize devils from the home. Sixteenth-century Roman Catholic authors were keen to nuance and, in many cases, contradict these points.

The first to respond directly was the Spanish Jesuit, Jean Maldonat (Juan Maldonado). In 1571-72, Maldonat presented a series of Latin lectures at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont (in the city of Paris) on orthodox demonology, attacking Lavater’s arguments against the existence of ghosts and sacramental rites to ward off demonic afflictions.\textsuperscript{524} Then, in 1586, the French lawyer

and scholar Pierre Le Loyer confronted the Swiss minister point-for-point in his erudite *Quatre livres des spectres*. Like Maldonat, Le Loyer insisted that human souls could genuinely return to the living and that Catholic ritual practices against demonic infestation were unquestionably efficacious.\(^{525}\) Two years later Noël Taillepied, a Capuchin friar, penned his *Traité de l’apparition des esprits* (1588), which draws extensively from *Das Gespensterbuch*.\(^{526}\) Roughly 80% of Taillepied’s tome repurposes anecdotal examples and commentary found in Lavater’s text, but situates the material in such a way so as to reinstate Catholic theological teachings.\(^{527}\) Compelling references and allusions to Lavater are also found in the influential demonologies of Jesuit authors, including Martin Delrio and Petrus Thyraeus at the turn of the seventeenth century.\(^{528}\)

Thyraeus, in particular, produced what is often considered the most influential Roman Catholic treatise on “haunted locations” or “loca infesta”—the same broad theme broached by Lavater some thirty years earlier. His long work, entitled *Loca infesta* (1598), sets out to confirm haunted spaces exist, describe exorcistic practices against demonic haunting, and provide a rigorous typology of spectral apparitions. Employing a variety of both ancient and medieval *exempla*, as well as those in his own century, the Jesuit theologian affirms and refutes different theses presented on the subject. Most importantly, his discussion of the purposes of ghostly and demonic communication speaks broadly to issues raised in *Das Gespensterbuch*. For example, Thyraeus notes early on how spiritual apparitions “insinuate their presence, shaking the wind

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\(^{525}\) *III. Livres des spectres* (1586).

\(^{526}\) *Traité De L’Apparition Des Esprits* (1588).

\(^{527}\) This statistic is taken from Chesters, *Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France* (2011), p. 97.

\(^{528}\) Thyraeus, *Loca infesta: hoc est, De infestis, ob molestantes daemoniorum et defunctorum hominum spiritus, locis, liber unus* (Cologne: Cholinus, 1598); Delrio, *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex*, 3 vols (Venetiis: Apud Ioan. Antonium & Iacobum de Franciscis, 1599).
slightly; here they make noise, there they simulate footsteps; here they emit sighs and moans; here they shout and fill places with cries; there they speak quietly or sing, etc.”

As we have seen, Lavater draws the same general conclusion but contends that all such forms of communication were intended to misdirect observers; they served to confuse and lure Christians into investing time and energy in trifling thoughts and activities.

By contrast, Thyraeus observed certain distinctions with regard to the type of offending spirit and its corresponding capacity for intelligible discourse. The Jesuit theologian maintained that the sounds emitted by human souls from purgatory aimed primarily at effectiveness in speech, especially when requesting prayers and suffrages in pursuit of salvation of the soul. Alternatively, human ghosts could weep, groan, or moan (gemitus, fletus, eiulatus) as vehicles of expression in order to emotionally move Christian audiences and reminding them of human qualities acquired at the moment of death. These facets of ghostly haunting not only proved the existence of purgatory, they also distinguished human specters from fallen angels. While Thyraeus admits that demons could produce similar sounds and speech described above—thus mimicking the human dead—the noises associated with demonic spirits were typically devoid of genuine sadness and contrition. In general, the discursive capacity of demons lacked eloquence and emotional appeal; their apparitions also appeared vengeful in character and aggressive (furialis) in attempting contact with humanity.

Against Lavater’s contention that all apparitions were demonic, Thyraeus

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529 *Loca infesta*, 1.19.7: “Nunc Spiritus solum præsentiam suam, agitato quasi aere et ventulo levi, insinuant: nunc strepitus excitant, nunc simulant incessum; nunc cacchinos edent et risus, nunc promunt suspiria et gemitus, nunc vociferantur et clamoribus loca implement, nunc suavius loquuntur, nunc cantillant, etc.”

530 *Ibid.*, 2.28.4-10. Thyraeus does also note that wicked human ghosts are difficult to distinguish between inhuman apparitions.
endeavored to demonstrate multiple origins for unsettling sights and sounds in the premodern home.

For Roman Catholic theologians, then, encounter with either a demonic or human spirit was proof that purgatory existed, and that the afterlife included multiple paths to salvation. In fact, Noël Taillepied remarked that “the devil presents himself, indeed, pretending to be a ghost, because he knows that ghosts actually appear to men.”

For these authors, the benefits and successes of apotropaic rituals were a testament to the holiness of the Catholic Church.

While Roman Catholic authorities boasted an arsenal of ceremonies against demonic invasion, Protestant teachings on the matter were by no means bleak. As Keith Thomas has shown, when hardship fell on humanity, “Protestant reformers believed that God might of his own volition intervene in earthly affairs so as to help his people.”

One primary way in which such intervention might take place was through individual or communal prayer—something Lavater also

531 A treatise of ghosts; being the Psychologie, or Treatise upon apparitions and spirits, of disembodied souls, phantom figures, strange prodigies, and of other miracles and marvels, which often presage the death of some great person, or signify some swift change in public affairs, trans. by M. Summers (London: Fortune Press, 1933), Bk 1, Ch. 11, p. 66.

532 Taillepied counters Lavater’s discussion of Catholic rituals in Book Three of Das Gespensterbuch point for point: see A treatise of ghosts (1933), pp 166-74. Delrio and Thyraeus extend this discussion into historical and contemporary instances in which faith, the sacraments, priestly aid, exorcism, invocation of Christ or the saints, the sign of the cross, relics, church bells, and blessed angels, among others, have proven efficacious against demonic infestations. See Delrio, Disquisitionum Magicarum, 3.296-320; Thyraeus, Loca infesta, 3.54-55.

acknowledges. In *Das Gespensterbuch*, prayer is mighty; it is what God wants the Christian to do. Though it would not banish the Devil, prayer directed faithful Christians to the importance of the soul, rather than afflictions of the body. According to Lavater’s logic, to pray is to do the right thing, even though it might not feel as empowering as the rituals of Catholicism. Far more important for Lavater was that the Christian “gyue God thankes for that greate and vnspeakable benefite, whereby he dothe dayly delyuer them out of greate errours and feares.” God’s love of humanity would always triumph over wicked spirits. As horrifying as the experience of haunting was, the Swiss minister reminded his audience that they were never alone, that having bad things happen in the home was not the worst experience one would ever have.

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CONCLUSION:

Spiritual creatures were an intense locus of intellectual and emotional efforts to make sense of how, why, and in what form unsettling phenomena occurred in and around the premodern home. As this dissertation has shown, visible and invisible forces operating in the physical world of premodern Europe informed the lives and behavior of virtually every person. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries specifically, theologians increasingly argued that demonic spirits were adept disruptors of the domestic sphere: fallen angels transformed households into spaces replete with disorder and insecurity; they appeared as apparitions of perished loved ones and associates; they spoke and could give (often misleading) counsel; at times, their presence might be felt by hair suddenly standing on the back of one’s neck. This is not to say that all ancient, medieval, and early modern communities constantly (or even frequently) worried about the presence of demons, but that reports and descriptions of spiritual encounters broadly permeated the Christian imaginary. Across numerous theological treatises, sermons, poetic compositions, and widespread stories, premodern authors contemplated the ways in which haunting spirits animated the world with mischief and misfortune.

Abundant textual evidence demonstrates that representations of demonic affliction were hardly static. Orthodox theologians, from Augustine to Aquinas, and throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, increasingly demonized the manifestation of benign domestic spirits. These scholars debated whether demons existed as corporeal or strictly immaterial beings, whether they were capable of repentance or forever inclined to evil, and whether they worked illusions or produced physical transformations. At the same time, vernacular and folkloric narratives often portrayed fairies, kobolds, and their differentiated kin as spiritual presences with whimsical personalities and ambiguous moralities. These creatures often exhibited characteristics that did not
easily conform with orthodox theological teachings: some demonic spirits were said to be immune to holy water, some never harmed humanity, and some were neither purely benevolent nor malevolent. In the former (orthodox) tradition, the Devil and his fallen angels exemplified created beings that sought to pervert established systems of Christian thought and practice; in the latter, demons and angels existed among a constellation of possible haunting phenomena reported in popular storytelling.

Representations of unclean spirits from the Christian Bible, as mediated through patristic sources, formed much of the basis for later medieval and early modern interests in the demonic. An array of narratives from antiquity involving pagan deities and the Devil led early Christian authors to define demonic affliction in terms of moral tribulation and salvation: fallen angels represented instrumental obstacles that enticed humanity with diverse temptations and illusions but were always subject to divine ordinance. Alongside Augustinian demonology, Thomist metaphysics heavily influenced late medieval and early modern perspectives of the Devil and the notion that demons constituted a species of being informed by both theological precepts and natural processes. This “theologically informed biology” invited unprecedented study of demonic spirits as intermediate spirits that behaved according to principles of nature—akin to animals, plants, and minerals.535 And yet, Christian communities in different places and times would also produce their own perspectives of spiritual encounters. Where Augustine, Aquinas, and learned authors wrote copiously about demons and demonic illusions, abundant evidence suggests that men and women of all sorts could expect variegated interactions with hostile and benign spirits of the home. Poetic and imaginative accounts, in particular, rehearse how morally neutral angels,

penitent demons, and non-angelic entities were at the very least conceivable within the premodern Christian imaginary.

Confronted with a wealth of exemplary tales about spirits of different stripes, medieval and early modern theologians appealed to both orthodox and folkloric assumptions about the role of spirits, depending on their own pastoral and speculative theological needs. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries especially, narratives about demons expressed concerns over the home as a site of social contest. Late medieval exempla that relate minor poltergeist disruptions exhibit how demons fomented disorder within households by means of distracting noises. In this case, the designation “poltergeist” had functional value, meaning it helped describe a particular type of diminutive demon said to possess “less power from God.” Many other tales similarly relate how demons might appear as benign spirits in service of the inhabitants of a home itself. Preachers and theologians typically employed such narratives for didactic purposes, warning that spiritual noise and companionship were typically the province of demonic wiles. Accordingly, Christians were instructed to ignore the illusions produced by demons altogether, lest one neglect pious obligations (e.g., prayer) and the comfort of familiarity in the home.

In the sixteenth century, one author emerges as a seminal authority on the subject of haunting phenomena and demonic spirits. Ludwig Lavater’s writing has been widely researched in modern scholarship, although his demonology has received scant attention, except in relation to early modern ghosts and ghostlore. Das Gespensterbuch is undeniably interested in the figure of the ghost but also oriented towards explaining the role of demons in Christian lives. The Reformed minister’s demonology combines both Augustinian and Thomist teachings with his Protestant polemic and alternate vision of religious praxis, arguing that the noisy distractions of fallen angels

Chapter Three of this dissertation explains how Johannes Nider, Geiler von Keysersberg, and several others use this phrase to describe noisy spirits in the home. See pp. 1-5 of Chapter Three.
conceptually mirror Roman Catholic systems of thought and practice concerning human ghosts. This conclusion is all the more compelling, given the way in which Lavater situates his audience within his immense collection of historical anecdotes about spiritual encounters. That is, the author intimates that stories told about demonic haunting and rival Catholic “noise” center on the listener’s own life and experiences: they are not just anecdotes about other people; they immediately involve the audience as a participant in haunting narratives.

That this study ends with Lavater and sixteenth-century Protestant perspectives of the demonic invites further investigation into the role of lesser demons in other literature from the same century (and later). My examination does not evaluate Roman Catholic accounts and interpretations of poltergeist haunting. Lavater’s argument by no means ended debates about the Devil, nor did Europeans—Roman Catholic, Protestant, or otherwise—cease to invest emotive and intellectual energy in describing diminutive spirits (demons, ghosts, fairies, etc.). Much more work could be done to investigate the ways in which late sixteenth-century authors conceptualized household demons, the vernacular and Latin language used to describe them, and why lesser afflictions mattered so much to learned theologians and preachers. Moreover, only little attention has been given to the thorny problem of premodern “popular culture” and the extent to which ideations of the Devil were colored by multiple cultural lenses. On the whole, my approach has been to read the extant source material—overwhelmingly derived from learned authors attacking what they perceived as erroneous beliefs about demons—against itself, highlighting those textual spaces wherein theologians disagree with one another and posit conflicting notions of demonic presence.

Furthermore, my approach has been to emphasize that Western European demonology was not solely interested in the figure of the witch. Modern scholarship on the subject has tended to
focus on how the antics of wicked spirits and demonic magic persisted throughout the later Middle Ages, resulting in trenchant fears over witchcraft and *maleficium*. Here, notorious texts like Heinrich Kramer’s *Malleus maleficarum* and Jean Bodin’s *Démonomanie*, for example, have become staples of Western historiography on angels, demons, and other spiritual creatures. It is often assumed that, when focusing exclusively on the aforementioned texts, Christian demonology and persecuting witches went hand in hand. On this reading, late medieval and early modern authors who wrote about spirits sought primarily to expose and punish witches. While it is certainly true that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed the virulent persecution of witchcraft and an increased interest in the subject of demons, many theologians and lay demonologists also discussed spiritual creatures without reference to witch-trials and demonic magic. I have concentrated on those authors and narratives that call attention to minor disruptive spirits so as to show that poltergeist fears were widely shared among European intelligentsia and lay Christian communities.

As horrifying as this conclusion may sound, it is far from unique to Western European history. Many cultures, spanning different historical times and places, have reported strange encounters and inexplicable events involving indiscernible noises, hidden movements, and confusing physical activities. In our own century, a recent study from the academic journal *Neurocase* details the experiences of an anonymous woman (called “Ms. S”.) which bare resemblance to the concerns addressed by late medieval and early modern theologians. The study relates how the anonymous woman:

reports experiences of sounds, perceived as ‘taps’ that she estimates to be between 3 and 4 Hz with sound pressure equivalents between 40 and 60 db. Occasionally there may be a single louder sound. The duration of clusters are often between 3 and 10 seconds. The clusters are usually localized along her left side. The patient experiences luminous ‘discharges’ from her left hand. Small spatial displacements of objects as well as disruptions in electronic equipment (partially failed light bulbs) near her were also
reported. The incidence rates of the phenomena increase when she is ‘upset’ with her second husband. This husband and her friends have reported hearing the sounds. She reports lights of various colors and glows around individual according to their perceived mood and ‘personality’. Ms. S. reported she feels overwhelmed by a deep sadness after the occurrence of the phenomena and cries, even if nothing ‘bad happens’. Since the beginning of these phenomena she hears voices of multiple ‘imaginary’ friends who she has named; the two major ones are identified as male. They presumably help her minimize the distress of the experiences.537

The experiences described are notably expressed and quantified by means of modern scientific reasoning; namely, the authors of this study measure the afflictions of Ms. S. according to sound frequency, pressure, and duration. Via clinical observation and detailed measurements, they go on to indicate that the woman’s distress is the result of a “chronic electrical anomaly” in her right temporal lobes which began after she received a severe head injury several years ago. They also thereafter counsel patients like Ms. S., “who experience terrifying nocturnal-sensed presences subsequent to closed head injuries, to quickly activate an acoustic source and to listen to music containing lyrics. This simple temporal lobe stimulation eliminates the experience of a sensed presence.”538 In short, the learned diagnosis accounts for the patient’s afflictions in a manner completely different from that of Ms. S., who admits that she has been visited by “multiple ‘imaginary’ friends.”

As we have seen, premodern demonologists also considered the possibility that natural causes lie behind invisible occurrences and gerümpel. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Geiler von Keyserberg argued that humans might feel fear of a spiritual presence due to fraudulent hauntings or from infirmities in one’s bodily disposition. Drawing from classical antiquity, late


538 Ibid., 534.
medieval medical theory maintained that an imbalance in the Galenic humors (e.g., melancholic infection) commonly produced horrible or frightening images in the imagination. In the fourteenth century, Nicole Oresme similarly clarified that “sick people think that they see and hear demons…but all of these things arise from the defect of the interior sense organs and the corruption of the interior, apprehending, imaginative, or estimative power brought about by an abscess of the brain or some other cause.”

Likewise, Johann Weyer later denigrated the excesses of the witch-hunts and witchcraft trials, arguing that

rare and severe symptoms often arise in diseases that stem from natural causes but are immediately attributed to witchcraft by men of no scientific experience and little faith. This often happens in the case of various convulsions, melancholia, epilepsy, suffocation of the uterus, decaying seed, and the many varied effects of poison. But the prudent and circumspect physician, distinguishing among these conditions and accidents, will first weigh the evidence carefully, using the fairest possible criteria in a diligent search for natural causes.

For authors like Geiler, Oresme, and Weyer, not every inexplicable happenstance was attributable to demonic mischief. Many premodern theologians were careful to distinguish between natural and supernatural sources of noise and unseen movement.

Significantly, both modern and premodern perspectives of the so-called “poltergeist phenomena” exhibit a tension between unmediated claims to spiritual encounter and the authoritative interpretation of an expert. On the one hand, premodern people frequently reported frightening, wondrous, and ambiguous experiences with human ghosts, demons, and benign household spirits, just as some modern people now do in cases of paranormal encounters and haunted houses. On the other, medieval and early modern scholars expressed concerns about

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539 Nicole Oresme and the Medieval Geometry of Qualities and Motions (1968), Ixxix, p. 347.

misunderstanding the nature and purpose of spirits inhabiting the world, just as the learned authors in Neurocase warn that Ms. S.’s false “associations may actually exacerbate the psychological and sometimes psychiatric distress.” Acknowledging these similarities is important because they underscore a very human and historical concern for unsettling activities which exhibit no demonstrable cause.

Of course, today tales of poltergeists and the demonic have inundated popular culture through television series (e.g., Ghost Hunters, Paranormal Investigators, Haunted Highway), movies (The Exorcist, Poltergeist, Insidious), video games (Silent Hill, Alone in the Dark, The Evil Within), and other mediums that highlight a cultural fear of and intrigue for the genre of supernatural horror. These popular examples evoke modern wonderment but in a way that largely amounts to harmless entertainment. At the same time, several documented cases like that of Ms. S. remain remarkable to both specialists and the public. In 1993, the television program “Unsolved Mysteries” (NBC) featured a case of inexplicable events orbiting a young man granted temporary release from prison in order to attend the funeral of his recently deceased grandfather. Upon returning to his prison cell, the convict reported a series of unsettling events which policemen, jailors, and ministers all witnessed. As a populace, we are fascinated by representations and stories of mysterious and unknown spiritual causes. These cases, however, generally constitute a fringe anxiety and, as the authors in Neurocase argue, “anomalous” occurrences in contemporary culture.

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By contrast, the felt presence of spirits in medieval and early modern Europe was ubiquitous. One does find premodern skepticism toward belief in invisible spirits. Martin Luther recalled how an associate of his (Andreas Osiander) held opinions completely at odds with Geiler’s haunting demons. More forcefully, the English demonologist Reginald Scot (d. 1599) sardonically maintained that stories of “spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarifes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changlings” had been passed down by “our mothers maids.” While belief in spirits may not have been universal, this dissertation has revealed how widespread, variegated, and enduring such conceptions were. Angels, demons, ghosts, and household spirits were by no means marginal to the Christian household. They raised concerns about physical and metaphysical movements among both learned intellectuals and rural peasants, such that the vast majority of premodern people found solace in the guardianship of angels and terror in the real possibility of encountering a demon. Unlike what many today perceive as a relatively predictable material world, governed by fixed scientific principles and the technologies that offer access to them, premodern Europeans inhabited a cosmos in which spiritual creatures exercised various degrees of influence over nature, human behavior and sense perception, and the Christian imagination.


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