

# The Hammer of Witches

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**Abstract:** In the book *The Hammer of Witches*, I extract some discussions on demons' possession, which are transformations of animals, harmless conjuration, inhabitation with sorceresses, and reflect on connections of societies at present. As for the initial part, the author answers the doubt of knowledges men in transformation and relates a mysterious story with detailed explanations. I argue on the status of Canon, origins of imperfect animals, gender preference, and the bodily presence of angels. Then comes the discussion of locations of demons in human bodies, reasons for painless work and opinions of such work in order to fully illustrate an unpainful existence of demons. I demonstrate on the God's permission of such misdeed, connections with illness, and pacts with demons. The ultimate part is about methods of possession and reasons for permission with a story about a certain Bohemian and his son. I elaborate on reasons of belief and intellectual abilities of demons.

**Keywords:** possession; witchcraft; demons; sorceress; apparition; exorcise

## 1. Introduction

*Malleus Maleficarum*, also known as *The Hammer of Witches*, was published in the German city of Speyer in 1486. During that period, Germany had one of the largest number of witch-hunts all over the Europe due to the country's geopolitical conditions and tradition of persecution. For the former, Germany was a fragmentary country with different religious and cultural traditions. Under such condition, witch-hunt was both a way to reaffirm Catholic values and a means of justifying Protestant views, resulting in its increment [1]. As there were old superstitions and tendency against minority groups in Germany, such as the Jews and heretics, witchcraft was seen as the ultimate heretics, indicating the two were treated badly in the same way. Then, since my discussion on this book is mainly about demons, I think there is a need to illustrate the origin of demons. In the very first, there was a wholly good God created angels. These angels were created good and endowed with free will to choose actions. Instead of worshipping and obeying God, one-third of them flew to the pit of Hell or a lower atmosphere as rebellion with a loss of fleshly bodies. The leading angel of rebellion became Devil and his followers became demons[2].

## 2. Methods of transformation from humans into wild beasts by demons

The author claims that the transformation from humans to other shapes need to have more detailed explanations. Firstly, learned men argue that such transformations are impossible to happen, whose beliefs in Canon do not fit in with this circumstance. In Canon, it says, "Whoever believes that some creatures can be made or changed for the better or for the worst or transformed into another variety or into another likeness, except by the Creator Himself, Who made all things, is without a doubt an infidel." Two fundamental points are made here, "be made" and "into another likeness". The former should be interpreted as "created", meaning making perfect creatures in an instant, while the latter has two changes, including in substance, a form inherent to visible things and inherent viewers' organs, and in an incidental trait.

The author then mentions a report from Augustine. It states that a female magician turned people into wild beasts, certain girls turned customers into beasts of burden, companions of Diomedes were turned into birds, and Diomedes's father had been a house[3]. Accordingly, the author gives several reasons to explain these stories. Firstly, the wild cat was merely an imaginary vision, and it was strong impressions on organs that lead to the estimation of such belief. Secondly, the beasts of burden and house were arts of conjuration with demons conveying those carries. The same scene of becoming an animal was also happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Thirdly, the Diomedes case is because of superstition. Such case could be assumed as way of bringing back picture of perception as well, supported by St. Thomas. In the *Commentary on Pronouncements*, he suggested that no angels would assume bodies and all the things were done in the form of conjuring tricks or with reference to the imagination's vision. However, The

Holy Doctor disagreed with it since Saints did believe angels in bodily vision, preferring more on bodily apparitions. In conclusion, the reason behind the third story was more preferable as flying demons than imaginary vision.

As the author mentions that learned people doubt transformation because they narrowly understand the meaning of Canon, I realize the importance and authority of Canon. As we know, the definition of Canon is the law of church, then why law makers in churches won so much credence at that time. It was probably due to the formation of law in churches, which congregated the wisdom of church councils, popes, and church fathers like Augustine. These people were highly respectable in the society, treated as supporters of people's spiritual life. Then, when reading the way to define an imperfect animal, generated from the process of rotting, I try to connect the definition with the birth of human. Like animals, people are classified into different groups as soon as they are born. Nobles in middle ages were born with high status and paupers had no way to reach the splendid life. Also, in relation to the reports of Augustine, people who were assumed to conjure transformations were female. This gendered character was a kind of stereotype of witches and it was originated in the fifteenth century, exactly the time this book was written. Such severe prejudice stemmed from the misogyny was inherent in the medieval church as it served to keep women away from powerful and respected socially position[4]. Then, when the author discusses the assumed bodies for good and evil angels, I wonder the reason for the presence of bodies because their power has already exceeded any corporeal power. I think it contributes to a need for superstitious people to have a clear picture of God when they were praying.

### **3. Demon harmless existence inside bodies and head**

It mainly focuses on painless existence of demons in bodies and head. The content is divided into four parts respectively: demons, humans, internal faculty, and miraculous deeds.

To start with, the author argues that only the external senses can happen without the demons entering the external faculties, which is supported by John of Damascus and St. Thomas. The reason is the superiority and nobility of angels' nature, the act of angels in entire structure, and the movement of souls in all human bodies. The author then states that since demons can glide into human's body and make impressions on the internal faculties in the following, they are able to create pictures stored in one faculty. The author then continues the illustration on the way demons create illusion without imposing pain. There are three points to state here. Firstly, the action is merely a move of pictures. Secondly, demons are without active qualities. Thirdly, they do not make harmful transmutation. For the question of two spirits cannot share the same place, it can be solved by suggesting heart is the center instead, meaning the soul is assigned by the heart and demon is in the head. Thus, places for soul and demon are not contradictory.

In reference to the fourth part, the specific method of control for demons in sorcerers' body should be discussed first. It can be considered as miraculous works since it extends the created nature. However, in the way of surpassing the order of entirety of created nature, it is not miracle. Admittedly, some people consider it as works of Devil because of Faith and Antichrist. For the first reason, the author refutes it by stating that miracles can happen through evil humans and performers are easy to be distinguished between good and bad from disparate effectiveness, usefulness, and purposes. For the second reason, it can indeed be called lying signs since demons create wonders to any extent and since wonders are for the purpose of deceiving. At this point, the author explains the distinction of wonder and miracle by listing four requirements for a miracle. They are from god, contrary to nature, obvious, and contributing to the strength of faith. As a result, the work of sorceresses is only wondrous work because of missing two requirements above. In contrast, the work of demons is miracle as they surpass, violate, and contradict natures.

Next, the author mentions a related event to explain a little. The event was three large cats harasses a laborer and the man fought back for self-protection but he was instead accused of wounding three matrons. It better presumed to be the bodily presence of sorceresses. In addition, instead of innocent women, they are more likely to be revenged by demons especially with the image of a cat. Such affair reflected three features. Firstly, demons importuned sorceress. Secondly, demons transferred their bodies. Thirdly, demons did not defend against the blow.

I am puzzled on God's permission of demon's behaviors as demons stand in opposition to God, and then I find clues in a book. Those adversities are to test faithful people as well as to strengthen the belief, eventually enabling people to gain greater merit from God. Otherwise, the world might become overly sweet to us[4]. Moreover, the New Testament claimed that when God created innumerable angels, he immediately created one third of failing angels as evil, which could testify the preceding saying[5].

Besides, I think painless possession of demons relates to the difficulty of discerning the possession. Behaviors like dementia, frenzy, trances, convulsions, and episodes of strange bleeding are hard to distinguish from illness and possession of demons without advanced technology on medical check. Otherwise, if someone felt uncomfortable with their heads and accompanied by preceding behaviors, they would easily be seen as possession other than illness. Additionally, the author mentions in this part that hurting women were not innocent for they were bound to demons by an agreement. Agreement with demons also explained why normal people were able to gain mastery over demons while only exorcists were capable to expel demons through rites. Successful expulsion of demons in the end also demonstrated the power of clergy over demon, representing the good winning the bad. This taught people to be faithful to God and do goods.

#### **4. Demons Inhabitation in substance through the work of sorceresses**

This part mainly discusses methods of possession with and without sorceresses and related acts and deeds. Firstly, the general method of inhabiting a human is doubtful on the connection of sin. At this time, inhabitation in a human can only happen in human body in a way of sin and Grace because only God can glide into the mind. Secondly, demons take the possession of humans in the same five ways with and without sorceresses except for external goods of fortune. They are in own bodies, in own bodies and internal faculties, inside and outside, the use of reason, and unreasoning wild beasts.

Before discussing preceding points, reasons for the permit by God should be carefully elaborated. Permission was due to own merit, other's trivial misdeed, own venial sin, other's serious sin, and own great crime. The author then quotes examples and stories to illustrate each reason in detail. The first one is demonstrated in the *Dialogue* of Severus, a Father possessed by a demon for being tempted by vainglory. The second one is supported by St. Gregory who said that a boy was harassed by the Devil for another man's misstatement. The third one is confirmed by Cassian, when he mentioned Moses. The fourth one is made clear by the Blessed Gregory when he saw a boy attacked by the Devil for his father misunderstandings. The fifth one is stated in both Holy Scripture and Saints' Passions.

After discussing five reasons, the author cites an event concerning the methods of possession. The event is about an ill priest possessed by a demon but he acted composedly. Only when he was passing through a church, the demon controlled his organs and stuck his tongue. Regarding such event, the priest was possessed both in the second and fourth ways according to God's saying, which are in body and internal faculties and the use of reason respectively. For the second way, the images of the fantasy formed by daytime thoughts result in illness on Job. For the fourth way, it is because the demons can slide into the body. The author further contends that demons use reason temporarily as they can only work within the boundaries of the body. Assumed angels work in soul, each sort of them aims differently. Evil angels lead to temptation of evil desires indirectly while good angels lead to enlightenment of fantasy directly. Therefore, all angel cannot slide into the soul. Apart from that, another event of a claim of demon hiding in a priest's tongue for seven years. After that, the author focuses on three respects of occupying the priest's body. The demon occupies his head and harasses him in loss of reason while always aware of the words in the same time.

I realize the five methods of possession are quite similar to various kinds of illness in modern world. Precisely, possession in own bodies like bruise when getting hurt. Possession in own bodies and internal faculties like a hit on head. It will not only leave a mark but also cause pains from time to time. Then why even educated people perceived illness as possession in medieval times? Because of the conflicted society between science and teachings of the church. Through the spread of demons' possession, people feared its existence and got motivation for avoiding sin, leading a chance for the church to keep pennies coming into pockets. But even with wide spread of demons, people could still disobey those rumours. In this case, the church at that time represented the most powerful entity in existence and most of the population was not educated, resulting in an intense preference for the belief[6]. Apart from this, why a person's trivial misdeed or serious sin resulted in someone else's possession? I believed it may relate to the disorder of society in later medieval age. Different religious beliefs in Germany lead to battles and chaos in the society. Under such possibility, people would be kinder and nicer to each other for the fear of possession, creating a more harmonious atmosphere. In addition, why the demons stuck the victim's tongue fat out of his mouth when he did not want to come out? The answer is that since he entered from mostly mouth and other senses like ear, eye, and fingernail, he need to come out from the same place[7]. More intriguingly, demons could go into the mouth through ingestion. In that way, people at that time may need to be extremely careful to make sign of the cross before eating. At the end, the author states that the possessed priest was in Italian tongue, which he did not know before. This reflects the higher

intellectual abilities of demons as they are created by God, and since God is much more superior to demons, this also evinces the paramount status of God.

## 5. Conclusion

Indeed, demons and sorceresses are now perceived as improbably and unlikely in contemporary, but such belief should never be defined as ridiculous or ignorant. On interpretation of historic event, instead of limiting on related social background in the past, we should broaden our view to think of present day and more importantly, make connections. In this essay, I combine the classification of demons with the birth of human and methods of possession with types of illness, which leads me to find out so many similarities between two eras. Among them, to keep pennies in, the fundamental reason for the widespread belief in demons' possession, can also explain the existence of fake news in social media. Such brand-new mindset may alter negative attitudes towards history, acting as driving force for people to embrace past glories and shames with a peaceful and genial mind.

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