RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

The Devils of Loudun

Aldous Huxley

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DAVID BRADSHAW

In 1634 Urbain Grandier, a handsome and dissolute priest of the parish of Loudun was tried, tortured and burnt at the stake. He had been found guilty of conspiring with the devil to seduce an entire convent of nuns in what was the most sensational case of mass possession and sexual hysteria in history. Grandier maintained his innocence to the end and four years after his death the nuns were still being subjected to exorcisms to free them from their demonic bondage. Huxley’s vivid account of this bizarre tale of religious and sexual obsession transforms our understanding of the medieval world.

See also: *Grey Eminence*

About the Author

Aldous Huxley was born on 26 July 1894 near Godalming, Surrey. He began writing poetry and short stories in his early twenties, but it was his first novel *Crome Yellow* (1921), which established his literary reputation. This was swiftly followed by *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) and *Point Counter Point* (1928) – bright, brilliant satires of contemporary society. For most of the 1920s Huxley lived in Italy but in the 1930s he moved to Sanary, near Toulon.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Huxley's work took on a more sombre tone in response to the confusion of a society which he felt to be spinning dangerously out of control. His great novels of ideas, including his most famous work *Brave New World* (published in 1932 this warned against the dehumanising aspects of scientific and material 'progress') and the pacifist novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) were accompanied by a series of wise and brilliant essays, collected in volume form under such titles as *Music at Night* (1931) and *Ends and Means* (1937).

In 1937, at the height of his fame, Huxley left Europe to live in California, working for a time as a screenwriter in Hollywood. As the West braced itself for war, Huxley came increasingly to believe that the key to solving the world's problems lay in changing the individual through mystical enlightenment. The exploration of the inner life through mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs was to dominate his work for the rest of his life. His beliefs found expression in both fiction (*Time Must Have a Stop*, 1944 and *Island*, 1962) and non-fiction (*The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945, *Grey Eminence*, 1941 and the famous account of his first mescalin experience, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954).

Huxley died in California on 22 November 1963.

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With an Introduction by
David Bradshaw

Aldous Huxley

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894–1963)

ON 26 JULY 1894, near Godalming in Surrey, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born into a family which had only recently become synonymous with the intellectual aristocracy. Huxley's grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, had earned notoriety as 'Darwin's bulldog' and fame as a populariser of science, just as his own probing and controversial works were destined to outrage and exhilarate readers and non-readers alike in the following century. Aldous Huxley's mother was a niece of the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, and he was a nephew of the redoubtable Mrs Humphry Ward, doyenne of late-Victorian novelists. This inheritance, combining the scientific and the literary in a blend which was to become characteristic of his vision as a writer, was both a source of great pride and a burden to Huxley in his formative years. Much was expected of him.

Three traumatic events left their mark on the young Huxley. In 1908 his mother died of cancer, and this led to the effective break-up of the family home. Two years later, while a schoolboy at Eton, Huxley contracted an eye infection which made him almost completely blind for a time and severely impaired his vision for the rest of his life. The suicide of his brother Trevenen in August 1914 robbed Huxley of the person to whom he felt closest. Over twenty years later, in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Huxley's treatment of the death of the main character's mother and his embodiment of 'Trev' in the novel as the vulnerable Brian Foxe give some indication of the indelible pain which these tragic occurrences left in their wake. To a considerable degree, they account for the darkness, pungency and

cynicism which feature so prominently in Huxley's work throughout the inter-war period.

Within months of achieving a First in English Language and Literature at Balliol College, Oxford in 1916, Huxley published *The Burning Wheel*. Huxley's first collection of verse, and the three which followed it, *Jonah* (1917), *The Defeat of Youth* (1918) and *Leda* (1920), reveal his indebtedness to French symbolism and *fin de siècle* aestheticism. Also discernible, however, beneath the poetry's triste and ironic patina, is a concern with the inward world of the spirit which anticipates Huxley's later absorption in mysticism. These volumes of poetry were the first of over fifty separate works of fiction, drama, verse, criticism, biography, travel and speculative writing which Huxley was to produce during the course of his life.

Unfit for military service, Huxley worked as a farm labourer at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor after he left Oxford. Here he met not only D.H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Clive Bell, Mark Gertler and other Bloomsbury figures, but also a Belgian refugee, Maria Nys, whom he married in 1919. By then Huxley was working for the *Athenaeum* magazine under the adroit editorship of Middleton Murry. Soon after he became the first British editor of *House and Garden*, worked for *Vogue* and contributed musical criticism to the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* in the early 1920s.

Limbo (1920), a collection of short stories, preceded the appearance of *Crome Yellow* in 1921, the novel with which Huxley first made his name as a writer. Inspired by, among others, Thomas Love Peacock, Norman Douglas and Anatole France, Huxley's first novel incorporated many incidents from his sojourn at Garsington as well as mischievous portraits of its chatelaine and his fellow guests. More blatantly still, *Crome Yellow* is an iconoclastic tilt at the Victorian and Edwardian mores which had resulted in the First World War and its terrible aftermath. For all its comic

bravura, which won acclaim from writers such as Scott Fitzgerald and Max Beerbohm, *Crome Yellow* may be read, along with Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and Huxley's second novel *Antic Hay* (1923), as an expression of the pervasive mood of disenchantment in the early 1920s. Huxley told his father that *Antic Hay* was 'written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind'. He went on to say that it was intended to reflect 'the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch'.

Even as a schoolboy Huxley had been an avid browser among the volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and it did not take long for him to acquire a reputation for arcane eclecticism. Moreover, as his prestige as a debunker and an emancipator grew, so Huxley was condemned more roundly by critics of the old guard, such as James Douglas of the *Daily Express*, who denounced the explicit discussion of sex and free thought in his fiction. *Antic Hay* was burned in Cairo, and in the ensuing years many of Huxley's books were censured, censored or banned at one time or another. Conversely, it was the openness, wit, effortless learning and apparent insouciance of Huxley's early work which proved such an appetising concoction for novelists as diverse as Evelyn Waugh, William Faulkner, Anthony Powell and Barbara Pym. Angus Wilson called Huxley 'the god of my adolescence'.

From 1923 onwards Huxley lived abroad more or less permanently, first near Florence and then, between 1930 and 1937, at Sanary on the Côte d'Azur. In *Along the Road* (1925), subtitled 'Notes and Essays of a Tourist', Huxley offered a lively and engaging account of the places and works of art he had taken in since his arrival in Italy, and both the title story of his third collection of tales, *Little Mexican* (1924), and his third novel, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), are set in that country. According to Huxley, the

theme of *Those Barren Leaves* is ‘the undercutting of everything by a sort of despairing scepticism and then the undercutting of that by mysticism’. For W.B. Yeats, *Those Barren Leaves* heralded the return of philosophy to the English novel, but it was with his fourth novel, *Point Counter Point* (1928), that Huxley cemented his reputation with the reading public as a thought-provoking writer of fiction. *Point Counter Point* is Huxley’s first true ‘novel of ideas’, the type of fiction with which he has become most closely identified. He once explained that his aim as a novelist was ‘to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay’, arguing that the novel should be like a holdall, bursting with opinion and arresting ideas. This privileging of content over form was one of the many things he had in common with H.G. Wells; it was anathema to the likes of Virginia Woolf. Huxley was fascinated by the fact that ‘the same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc’, and one of his key aims in *Point Counter Point* was to offer this multi-faceted view of his principal characters.

Huxley’s more sombre mood in the late 1920s was epitomised by *Proper Studies* (1927), the most important of the four volumes of essays he published during the decade, and the one in which he first set himself unequivocally against what he regarded as the vulgarity and perversity of mass civilisation. Between September 1925 and June 1926 Huxley had travelled via India to the United States, and it was this visit to America which made him so pessimistic about the cultural future of Europe. He recounted his experiences in *Jesting Pilate* (1926). ‘The thing which is happening in America is a revaluation of values,’ Huxley wrote, ‘a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards’, and it was soon after visiting the United States that Huxley conceived the idea of writing a satire on what he had encountered. *Brave New World* (1932) may be read

as Huxley's contribution to the widespread fear of Americanisation which had been current in Europe since the mid-nineteenth century, but this humorous, disturbing and curiously ambivalent novel offers much more than straightforward travesty. Similarly, although *Brave New World* has become, with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the twin pillars of the anti-utopian tradition in literature and a byword for all that is most repellent and 'nightmarish' in the world to come, it was written with Huxley's gaze very much on the crisis-torn present of Britain in 1931. When placed alongside *Brief Candles* (1930), a well-received collection of short stories, *Music at Night* (1931), a typically energetic and wide-ranging volume of essays, and *Texts and Pretexts* (1932), a verse anthology with commentaries designed to show that even in the highly-charged political atmosphere of the early 1930s 'they also serve who only bother their heads about art', Huxley's polygonal appeal as a novelist, thinker and pundit is brought home. In 1934 he published *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, an account of his travels in the Caribbean and Central America, and in 1936, *Eyeless in Gaza*. Stimulated by his conversion to pacifism in November 1935, Huxley's sixth novel imbricates the fears, foibles, prejudices and dissensions of the age with a fictionalisation of his own history. A commitment to questions which are essentially religious, rather than political or philosophical, is evident in Huxley's work for the first time.

When Huxley left Europe for the United States in April 1937 he was at the height of his fame as a novelist and the Peace Pledge Union's leading celebrity. Ironically, he was by now far more concerned with the virtues of non-attachment, anarchism, decentralisation and mystical salvation than with the failings of contemporary society, the role of pacifism in national politics or the art of fiction. If Huxley had been intent on exposing the meaninglessness of life in the 1920s, from the mid-1930s he was preoccupied with seeking the

meaning of existence. *Ends and Means* (1937), in which Huxley tried ‘to relate the problems of domestic and international politics, of war and economics, of education, religion and ethics, to a theory of the ultimate nature of reality’, signalled his departure for the higher ground of mystical enlightenment where he would remain encamped for the rest of his life.

It was to lecture on the issues which dominate *Ends and Means* that Huxley and his friend and guru Gerald Heard had travelled to the United States. Huxley had every intention of returning to Europe, but his wife’s need to live in a hot, dry climate on health grounds and the lucrative prospect of writing for the movies contrived to keep the Huxleys in America until it was too unsafe to return. Huxley’s reaction to Hollywood and its cult of youth finds mordant expression in *After Many a Summer* (1939), the story of a Citizen Kane-like character’s life of grandiose illusion. The materialist excesses of Jo Stoyte are counterpointed by the ascetic convictions of Propter, a modern-day anchorite modelled on Heard. Huxley and Hollywood were not compatible, and his failure to write a popular play in the inter-war year was mirrored in his largely unsuccessful efforts to write for the movies. Walt Disney’s widely reported rejection of Huxley’s synopsis of *Alice in Wonderland* on the grounds that he ‘could only understand every third word’ was symptomatic of Huxley’s problem. His natural bent was for the leisurely and allusive development of an idea; above all else the movie moguls demanded pacey dialogue. His disenchantment with the world of the film studios is evident in the opening pages of *Ape and Essence* (1948), Huxley’s ghastly and graphic projection of Los Angeles as a ruinous, sprawling ossuary in the aftermath of the atomic Third World War. While the threat of global nuclear conflict has receded for the present, Huxley’s discussion of the rapid deforestation, pollution and other acts of ecological ‘imbecility’ which preceded the self-

inflicted apocalypse he describes in the novel, is still chillingly topical.

Huxley spent most of the war years in a small house at Llano in the Mojave Desert in Southern California. In 1926 he had dismissed meditation as ‘the doze’s first cousin’, but it was to a life of quietistic contemplation that Huxley now devoted himself. This phrase of his career resulted in the excellent *Grey Eminence* (1941), a biography of Father Joseph, adviser to Cardinal Richelieu; *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), a novel set in Florence in 1929 in which, to borrow Huxley’s words, ‘a piece of the *Comédie Humaine* . . . modulates into a vision of the *Divina Commedia*’; and *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), a profoundly influential anthology of excerpts and commentaries illustrating what Huxley called ‘the highest common factor of all the higher religions’. He went on to say with typical humour and humility, ‘The greatest merit of the book is that about forty per cent of it is not by me, but by a lot of saints, many of whom were also men of genius.’ *The Devils of Loudun*, a compelling psychological study of sexual hysteria in seventeenth-century France, which was subsequently turned into a successful film, appeared in 1952. In the same way that Huxley’s astringent social satires caught the mood of the 1920s, so, in the years during and following the Second World War and the enormity of the Jewish Holocaust, his personal concern with spiritual and ethical matters and his consternation at the accelerating arms race reflected both the tone and unease of the zeitgeist.

Huxley also acquired new readers through his support of the marginal and unconventional, and his detractors, hitherto exercised by what they saw as his immorality or preachiness, began to pour scorn on his alleged faddism. In 1942 he published *The Art of Seeing*, a passionate defence of the Bates method of eye training which aroused a storm of protest from the optometrist lobby. Even more outrageous, for many, was his suggestion in *The Doors of*

Perception (1954) and its sequel, *Heaven and Hell* (1956), that mescalin and lysergic acid were ‘drugs of unique distinction’ which should be exploited for the ‘supernaturally brilliant’ visionary experiences they offered to those with open minds and sound livers. *The Doors of Perception* is indeed a bewitching account of the inner shangri-la of the mescalin taker, where ‘there is neither work nor monotony’ but only ‘a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse’, where ‘the divine source of all existence’ is evident in a vase of flowers, and even the creases in a pair of trousers reveal ‘a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity’. Not surprisingly, *The Doors of Perception* became a set text for the beat generation and the psychedelic Sixties, the Doors naming their band after the book which also earned Huxley a place on the sleeve of the Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper* album.

Maria Huxley died in February 1955, shortly before Huxley published his penultimate novel, *The Genius and the Goddess*, in which John Rivers recounts the brief history of his disastrous involvement, when he was a ‘virgin prig of twenty-eight’, with the wife of his colleague Henry Maartens, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist. Not for the first time, Huxley’s theme is the havoc which ensues when a man with an idealistic misconception of life born of a cloistered and emotionally deprived upbringing experiences the full, sensual impact of human passion.

Huxley married Laura Archera, a practising psychotherapist, in March 1956. Two years later he published *Brave New World Revisited*, in which he surveyed contemporary society in the light of his earlier predictions. Huxley’s knack of keying in to the anxieties of the moment was as sharp as ever, and this touch is also evident in a series of lectures on ‘The Human Situation’ which he gave at Santa Barbara in 1959, published in one volume in 1977. Both books address problems which are no less pressing today, such as overpopulation, the recrudescence of

nationalism and the fragility of the natural world. Huxley's last novel, *Island*, was published in 1962, the year in which he was made a Companion of Literature, and the year after his Los Angeles home and most of his personal effects had been destroyed in a fire which, Huxley said, left him 'a man without possessions and without a past'.

Island is the story of how the offshore utopia of Pala, where population growth has been stabilised and Mutual Adoption Clubs have superseded the tyranny of the family, and where *maithuna*, or the yoga of love and *moksha*, an hallucinogenic toadstool, ensure that the Palanese have little reason to feel disgruntled, falls victim to the age-old menaces of material progress and territorial expansionism. *Island* is perhaps Huxley's most pessimistic book, his poignant acknowledgement that in a world of increasing greed, mass communication, oil-guzzling transport, burgeoning population and inveterate hostility, a pacific and co-operative community like Pala's 'oasis of freedom and happiness' has little hope of survival. Soon after *Island* was published Huxley commented that the 'weakness of the book consists in a disbalance between fable and exposition. The story has too much weight, in the way of ideas and reflections, to carry.' But, while some readers would agree with this criticism, for others *Island* exemplifies Huxley's particular contribution to twentieth-century letters. In his early days the highbrow incarnate and a reluctant lecturer for the Peace Pledge Union, Huxley became for many a companionable polymath, a transatlantic sage at large, whose unending quest for synthesis and meaning in an ever-more perplexing and violent world provided a paradigm for their own search for peace and understanding.

Before his eyesight was damaged, Huxley's ambition was to specialise in the sciences, and it is significant that in his last published work, *Literature and Science* (1963), he pleads yet again for a *rapprochement* between the two cultures, arguing passionately against the contemporary

stress on their dichotomy. The book begins by emphasising the wide-ranging erudition of T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold. Their descendant, one of the most stimulating and provocative writers of the twentieth century, proved himself a worthy inheritor of their abilities over the course of his long and varied career.

Huxley died of cancer at his home in Hollywood on 22 November 1963, unaware that President J.F. Kennedy had been assassinated earlier that afternoon in Dallas. In 1971 his ashes were returned to England and interred in his parents' grave at Compton in Surrey.

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1993

An engraving from *Urbain Grandier et les Possédées de Loudun* by Dr. Gabriel Legué

CHAPTER I

IT WAS IN 1605 that Joseph Hall, the satirist and future bishop, made his first visit to Flanders. “Along our way how many churches saw we demolished, nothing left but rude heaps to tell the passenger, there hath been both devotion and hostility. Oh, the miserable footsteps of war! . . . But (which I wondered at) churches fall, and Jesuits’ colleges rise everywhere. There is no city where these are not rearing or built. Whence cometh this? Is it for that devotion is not so necessary as policy? These men (as we say of the fox) fare best when they are most cursed. None so much spited of their own; none so hated of all; none so opposed of by ours; and yet these ill weeds grow.”

They grew for a very simple and sufficient reason: the public wanted them. For the Jesuits themselves, ‘policy,’ as Hall and his whole generation knew very well, was the first consideration. The schools had been called into existence for the purpose of strengthening the Roman Church against its enemies, the ‘libertines’ and the Protestants. The good fathers hoped, by their teaching, to create a class of educated laymen totally devoted to the interests of the Church. In the words of Cerutti—words which drove the indignant Michelet almost to frenzy—“as we swathe the limbs of an infant in the cradle to give them a right proportion, so it is necessary from his earliest youth to swathe, so to speak, his will, that it may preserve through his life a happy and salutary suppleness.” The spirit of domination was willing enough, but the flesh of propagandist method was weak. In spite of the swaddling of their wills, some of the Jesuits’ best pupils left school to

become free thinkers or even, like Jean Labadie, Protestants. So far as ‘policy’ was concerned, the system was never as efficient as its creators had hoped. But the public was not interested in policy; the public was interested in good schools, where their boys could learn all that a gentleman ought to know. Better than most other purveyors of education, the Jesuits supplied the demand. “What did I observe during the seven years I passed under the Jesuits’ roof? A life full of moderation, diligence and order. They devoted every hour of the day to our education, or to the strict fulfilment of their vows. As evidence of this, I appeal to the testimony of the thousands who, like myself, were educated by them.” So wrote Voltaire. His words bear witness to the excellence of the Jesuits’ teaching methods. At the same time, and yet more emphatically, his entire career bears witness to the failure of that ‘policy,’ which the teaching methods were intended to serve.

When Voltaire went to school, the Jesuit colleges were familiar features of the educational scene. A century earlier their merits had seemed positively revolutionary. In an age when most pedagogues were amateurs in everything except the handling of the birch, their disciplinary methods were relatively humane and their professors carefully chosen and systematically trained. They taught a peculiarly elegant Latin and the very latest in optics, geography and mathematics, together with ‘dramatics’ (their end-of-term theatricals were famous), good manners, respect for the Church and (in France, at least, and after Henri IV’s conversion) obedience to the royal authority. For all these reasons the Jesuit colleges recommended themselves to every member of the typical upper-class family—to the tender-hearted mother, who could not bear to think of her darling undergoing the tortures of an old-fashioned education; to the learned ecclesiastical uncle, with his concern for sound doctrine and a Ciceronian style; and finally to the father who, as a patriotic official, approved of

monarchical principles and, as a prudent bourgeois, counted on the Company's backstairs influence to help their pupil to a job, a place at court, an ecclesiastical sinecure. Here, for example, is a very substantial couple—M. Corneille of Rouen, *Avocat du Roy à la Table de Marbre du Palais*, and his wife, Marthe le Pesant. Their son, Pierre, is such a promising boy that they decide to send him to the Jesuits. Here is M. Joachim Descartes, Counsellor of the Parlement of Rennes. In 1604 he takes his youngest—a bright little fellow of eight, called René—to the recently founded and royally endowed Jesuit college of La Flèche. And here too, at about the same date, is the learned Canon Grandier of Saintes. He has a nephew, son of another lawyer not quite so rich and aristocratic as M. Descartes or M. Corneille, but still eminently respectable. The boy, called Urbain, is now fourteen years old and wonderfully clever. He deserves to be given the best of educations, and in the neighbourhood of Saintes the best education available is to be had at the Jesuit college of Bordeaux.

This celebrated seat of learning comprised a high school for boys, a liberal arts college, a seminary, and a school of advanced studies for ordained postgraduates. Here the precociously brilliant Urbain Grandier spent more than ten years, first as schoolboy, and later as undergraduate, theological student and, after his ordination in 1615, as Jesuit novice. Not that he intended to enter the Company; for he felt no vocation to subject himself to so rigid a discipline. No, his career was to be made, not in a religious order, but as a secular priest. In that profession a man of his native abilities, pushed and protected by the most powerful organization within the Church, could hope to go far. There might be a chaplaincy to some great noble, the tutorship of some future Marshal of France, some Cardinal in the bud. There might be invitations to display his remarkable eloquence before bishops, before princesses of the blood, even before the Queen herself. There might be diplomatic

missions, appointments of high administrative posts, rich sinecures, juicy pluralities. There might—though this was unlikely, considering that he was not of noble birth—but there conceivably might be some princely bishopric to gild and gladden his declining years.

At the outset of his career circumstances seemed to authorize the most sanguine of these expectations. For at twenty-seven, after two years of advanced theology and philosophy, young Father Grandier received his reward for so many long semesters of diligence and good behaviour. By the Company of Jesus, in whose gift it lay, he was presented to the important living of Saint-Pierre-du-Marché at Loudun. At the same time, and thanks to the same benefactors, he was made a canon of the collegial church of the Holy Cross. His foot was on the ladder; all he now had to do was to climb.

Loudun, as its new parson rode slowly towards his destination, revealed itself as a little city on a hill, dominated by two tall towers—the spire of St. Peter's and the mediaeval keep of the great castle. As a symbol, as a sociological hieroglyph, Loudun's skyline was somewhat out of date. That spire still threw its Gothic shadow across the town; but a good part of the townspeople were Huguenots who abhorred the Church to which it belonged. That huge donjon, built by the Counts of Poitiers, was still a place of formidable strength; but Richelieu would soon be in power and the days of local autonomy and provincial fortresses were numbered. All unknowing the parson was riding into the last act of a sectarian war, into the prologue to a nationalist revolution.

At the city gates a corpse or two hung, mouldering, from the municipal gallows. Within the walls, there were the usual dirty streets, the customary gamut of smells, from wood smoke to excrement, from geese to incense, from baking bread to horses, swine and unwashed humanity.

Peasants, and artisans, journeymen, and domestics—the poor were a negligible and anonymous majority of the city's fourteen thousand inhabitants. A little above them the shopkeepers, the master craftsmen, the small officials clustered precariously on the lowest rung of bourgeois respectability. Above these again—totally dependent upon their inferiors, but enjoying unquestioned privileges and ruling them by a divine right—were the rich merchants, the professional men, the people of quality in their hierarchical order: the petty gentry and the larger landowners, the feudal magnates and the lordly prelates. Here and there one could find a few small oases of culture and disinterested intelligence. Outside these oases the mental atmosphere was suffocatingly provincial. Among the rich, the concern with money and property, with rights and privileges, was passionate and chronic. For the two or three thousand, at the most, who could afford litigation or needed professional legal advice, there were, at Loudun, no less than twenty barristers, eighteen solicitors, eighteen bailiffs and eight notaries.

Such time and energy as were left over from the preoccupation with possessions were devoted to the cosy little monotonies, the recurrent joys and agonies of family life; to gossip about the neighbours; to the formalities of religion and, since Loudun was a city divided against itself, to the inexhaustible acerbities of theological controversy. Of the existence at Loudun, during the parson's incumbency, of any genuinely spiritual religion there is no evidence. Widespread concern with the spiritual life arises only in the neighbourhood of exceptional individuals who know by direct experience that God is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit. Along with a good supply of scoundrels, Loudun had its share of the upright and the well-intentioned, the pious and even the devout. But it had no saints, no man or woman whose mere presence is the self-validating proof of a deeper insight into the eternal reality, a closer unison

with the divine Ground of all being. Not until sixty years later did such a person appear within the city walls. When, after the most harrowing physical and spiritual adventures, Louise du Tronchay came at last to work in the hospital of Loudun, she at once became the centre of an intense and eager spiritual life. People of all ages and of every class came flocking to ask her about God, to beg for her advice and help. “They love us too much here,” Louise wrote to her old confessor in Paris. “I feel quite ashamed of it; for when I speak of God, people are so much moved that they start crying. I am afraid of contributing to the good opinion they have of me.” She longed to run away and hide; but she was the prisoner of a city’s devotion. When she prayed, the sick were often healed. To her shame and mortification, Louise was held responsible for their recovery. “If I ever did a miracle,” she wrote, “I should think myself damned.” After a few years she was ordered by her directors to move away from Loudun. For the people there was now no longer any living window through which the Light might shine. In a little while the fervour cooled; the interest in the life of the spirit died down. Loudun returned to its normal state—the state it had been in when, two generations earlier, Urbain Grandier rode into town.

From the first, public sentiment in regard to the new parson was sharply divided. Most of the devouter sex approved of him. The late *curé* had been a doddering nonentity. His successor was a man in the prime of youth, tall, athletic, with an air of grave authority, even (according to one contemporary) of majesty. He had large dark eyes and, under his biretta, an abundance of crinkly black hair. His forehead was high, his nose aquiline, his lips red, full and mobile. An elegant Van Dyck beard adorned his chin, and on his upper lip he wore a narrow moustache sedulously trained and pomaded so that its curling ends confronted one another, on either side of the nose, like a pair of coquettish question marks. To post-Faustian eyes his portrait suggests

a fleshier, not unamiable and only slightly less intelligent Mephistopheles in clerical fancy dress.

To this seductive appearance Grandier added the social virtues of good manners and lively conversation. He could turn a compliment with easy grace, and the look with which he accompanied his words was more flattering, if the lady happened to be at all presentable, than the words themselves. The new parson, it was only too obvious, took an interest in his female parishioners that was more than merely pastoral.

Grandier lived in the grey dawn of what may be called the Era of Respectability. Throughout the Middle Ages and during the earlier part of the Modern period the gulf between official Catholic theory and the actual practice of individual ecclesiastics had been enormous, unbridged and seemingly unbridgeable. It is difficult to find any mediaeval or Renaissance writer who does not take it for granted that, from highest prelate to humblest friar, the majority of clergymen are thoroughly disreputable. Ecclesiastical corruption begot the Reformation, and in its turn the Reformation produced the Counter-Reformation. After the Council of Trent scandalous Popes became less and less common, until finally, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the breed died out completely. Even some of the bishops, whose only qualification for preferment was the fact that they were the younger sons of noblemen, now made a certain effort to behave themselves. Among the lower clergy abuses were checked from above by a more vigilant and efficient ecclesiastical administration, and from within, by the zeal radiating from such organizations as the Society of Jesus and the Congregation of the Oratory. In France, where the monarchy was making use of the Church as an instrument for increasing the central power at the expense of the Protestants, the great nobles and the traditions of provincial autonomy, clerical respectability was a matter of royal concern. The masses will not revere a

Church whose ministers are guilty of scandalous conduct. But in a country where not only *l'État*, but also *l'Église, c'est Moi*, disrespect for the Church is disrespect for the King. "I remember," writes Bayle in one of the interminable footnotes of his great *Dictionary*, "I remember that I one day asked a Gentleman who was relating to me numberless Irregularities of the Venetian Clergy, how it came to pass that the Senate suffered such a thing, so little to the Honour of Religion and the State. He replied, that the public Good obliged the Sovereign to use this Indulgence; and, to explain this Riddle, he added that the Senate was well pleased that the Priests and Monks were held in the utmost contempt by the People, since, for that reason, they would be less capable of causing an Insurrection among them. One of the Reasons, says he, why the Jesuits there are disagreeable to the Prince is because they preserve the Decorum of their Character; and thus, being the more respected by the inferior People, are more capable of raising a Sedition." In France, during the whole of the seventeenth century, state policy towards clerical irregularities was the exact opposite of that pursued by the Venetian Senate. Because it was afraid of ecclesiastical encroachment, the latter liked to see its clergymen conducting themselves like pigs and disliked the respectable Jesuits. Politically powerful and strongly Gallican, the French monarchy had no reason to fear the Pope, and found the Church very useful as a machine for governing. For this reason it favoured the Jesuits and discouraged priestly incontinence, or at least indiscretion.[fn1] The new parson had embarked on his career at a time when clerical scandals, though still frequent, were becoming increasingly distasteful to those in authority.

In his autobiographical account of a seventeenth-century boyhood and youth, Grandier's younger contemporary, Jean-Jacques Bouchard, has left us a document so clinically objective, so completely free from all expressions of regret, from any kind of moral judgment, that nineteenth-century

scholars could publish it only for private circulation and with emphatic comments on the author's unspeakable depravity. For a generation brought up on Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, on Hirschfeld and Kinsey, Bouchard's book no longer seems outrageous. But though it has ceased to shock, it must still astonish. For how startling it is to find a subject of Louis XIII writing of the less creditable forms of sexual activity in the flat, matter-of-fact style of a modern college girl answering an anthropologist's questionnaire, or a psychiatrist recording a case history! Descartes was ten years his senior; but long before the philosopher had started to vivisect those writhing automata, to which the vulgar attach the names of dog and cat, Bouchard was conducting a series of psycho-chemico-physiological experiments on his mother's chambermaid. The girl, when he first took notice of her, was pious and almost aggressively virtuous. With the patience and acumen of a Pavlov, Bouchard reconditioned this product of implicit faith so that she became at last a devotee of Natural Philosophy, as ready to be observed and experimented upon as to undertake researches on her own account. On the table next to Jean-Jacques' bed were piled half a dozen folio volumes on anatomy and medicine. Between two assignations, or even between two experimental caresses, this odd forerunner of Ploss and Bartels would open his *De Generatione*, his Fernelius or his Ferandus and consult the relevant chapter, sub-section and paragraph. But, unlike most of his contemporaries, he would accept nothing on authority. Lemnius and Rodericus a Castro might say what they liked about the strange and alarming properties of menstrual blood; Jean-Jacques was determined to see for himself whether it really did all the things it was reputed to do. Seconded by the now willing chambermaid, he made a succession of trials, only to find that, from time immemorial, the doctors, the philosophers and the theologians had been talking through their mortar-boards and birettas. Menstrual blood did not kill grass, did not

tarnish mirrors, did not blast the buds of the vine, did not dissolve asphalt and did not produce ineradicable spots of rust on the blade of a knife. Biological science lost one of its most promising investigators when, in order to get out of marrying his collaborator and *corpus vile*, Bouchard precipitately left Paris in order to seek his fortune at the papal court. All he wanted was a bishopric *in partibus*, or even, at a pinch, in Brittany—some unpretentious little benefice of six or seven thousand livres a year; that was all. (Six thousand five hundred livres was the income derived by Descartes from the judicious investment of his patrimony. It was not princely; but at least it permitted a philosopher to live like a gentleman.) Poor Bouchard was never beneficed. Known to his contemporaries only as the ridiculous author of a *Panglossia*, or collection of verses in forty-six languages, including Coptic, Peruvian and Japanese, he died before he was forty.

Loudun's new parson was too normal and had too hearty an appetite to think of turning his bed into a laboratory. But, like Bouchard, Grandier was the scion of a respectable bourgeois family; like Bouchard, he had been educated at an ecclesiastical boarding school; like Bouchard, he was clever, learned and an enthusiastic humanist; and like Bouchard, he hoped to make a brilliant career in the Church. Socially and culturally, if not temperamentally, the two men had much in common. Consequently what Bouchard has to say of his childhood, his schooldays and his holiday diversions at home may be regarded as being indirectly evidential in regard to Grandier.

The world revealed by the *Confessions* is very like the world revealed to us by modern sexologists—but, if anything, a little more so. We see the small fry indulging in sexual play—indulging in it freely and frequently; for there seems to be singularly little adult interference with their activities. At school, under the good fathers, there are no strenuous games, and the boys' superfluous energy can find

no vent except in incessant masturbation and the practice, on half-holidays, of homosexuality. Pep talks and pulpit eloquence, confession and devotional exercises are to some slight extent restraining influences. Bouchard records that, at the four great feasts of the Church, he would refrain from his customary sexual practices for as long as eight or ten days at a stretch. But, try as he might, he never succeeded in prolonging these interims of chastity to a full fortnight, *quoy que la dévotion le gourmandast assez*—despite the fact that he was not a little checked and chided by devotion. In any given set of circumstances our actual behaviour is represented by the diagonal of a parallelogram of forces having appetite or interest as its base and, as its upright, our ethical or religious ideals. In Bouchard's case and, we may suppose, in the case of the other boys whom he names as his companions in pleasure, the devotional upright was so short that the angle between the long base and the diagonal of manifest behaviour was of only a very few degrees.

When he was at home for the holidays Bouchard's parents assigned him sleeping quarters in the same room with an adolescent chambermaid. This girl was all virtue while she was awake, but could not, it was obvious, be responsible for what happened while she was asleep. And according to her private system of casuistry, it made no difference whether she was really asleep or merely pretending. Later on, when Jean-Jacques' schooldays were over, there was a little peasant girl who minded the cows in the orchard. For a halfpenny, she was ready to grant any favours her young master might demand. Yet another maid, who had left because Bouchard's half-brother, the Prior of Cassan, had tried to seduce her, now re-entered the family's service and soon became Jean-Jacques' guinea-pig and co-worker in the sexual experimentation described in the second half of the *Confessions*.