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Alain Boureau, *Satan the Heretic: the Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West*. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xiii + 255 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$30.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-06748-3.

Review by Christine Caldwell Ames, University of South Carolina.

If a potent criticism of medieval religious history is that it is too often un-admitted intellectual history, not illuminating the experiences and practices of persons on the ground, Alain Boureau's *Satan the Heretic* is a gravid response. Although this brief monograph is insistently a history of ideas, and one more so of ideas bruited about and worried over particularly by scholastic theologians in the high Middle Ages, it seeks to demonstrate the dark efficacy of these texts and debates. *Satan the Heretic* is a subtle analysis of a shift in ideas that would, eventually, lead to the severest and most corporeal ramifications for late-medieval and early modern Europeans. Its readers must grapple not only with the persuasiveness of Boureau's thesis, but also with the vitality of finely assembled intellectual history—the expansive power of narrow focus.

*Satan the Heretic*, originally published in French in 2004, is retro-sopic: presuming the fierce Protestant and Catholic witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it peers backwards to interrogate their medieval origins. Boureau observes that well-known scholarship on the early modern “witchcraze” has failed to account for “the *genesis* of the obsession with demons, which arose...around 1430-50” (p. 5). (Unfortunately, Boureau appears not to be familiar with Michael D. Bailey's 2003 study of Johannes Nider, the key interest of which is the relationship between anxieties about reform and about witchcraft in this period.)<sup>[1]</sup> To explain that genesis, *Satan the Heretic* recedes further, arguing that that the demonological ground of the fifteenth century's “obsession” was laid a century earlier, “emerg[ing] rather suddenly between 1280 and 1330” (p. 4). Boureau's interest is to isolate and to elucidate the moment of, and reasons for, the birth of this preparatory and inspiring demonology, which was not “natural” in Christian theology, but rather formed and responsive. Boureau's contention that “in contrast to what has previously been believed, an obsession with the Devil did not constitute an essential aspect of medieval Christianity,” together with his interest in the circumstances of this evolved novelty, demonstrate once again the perdurant influence of R. I. Moore's *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, in spirit if not in chronology (p. 3).

Why 1280 and 1330? Boureau avers that “our ‘demonological turning point’ might be placed in the terrible year 1277,” the year of the condemnation by Étienne Tempier, bishop of Paris, of several propositions taught by the arts faculty at the University of Paris (p. 5). To Boureau, the condemnation well evokes the “opposition of two anthropologies”—Franciscan and Dominican, the former more hostile to the latter's Aristotelian determinism—that he sees as crucial in dialectically producing the new demonology in this period. Slowly sparked from this opposition were the two chief ingredients in the new demonology that would invite the later witchcrazes: first, a theory of the efficacy and productivity of pacts; second, a theory of personhood and its vulnerabilities. These new ideologies of pact and personhood cooperated to shape a demonology in which human and Satan could be effectively bound by the ‘legality’ of a pact, and in which the newly porous personality was liable to both unholy and holy occupation. This cooperation, then, enabled the mid-fifteenth century eruption of fears over witches' sabbaths and *maleficia*. Boureau emphasizes that this demonology's different strains were also attached to diverse contexts: collective tensions, debates over political sovereignty, fears of conspiracies, articulations of the force of pacts among individuals and collectives, and the development of a theology

of sacraments that emphasized their nature as divine-human pact.

The terminus of 1330 is provided by Pope John XXII (r. 1316-34), who in 1320 held a consultation to discuss whether demonic invocation and magical practices constituted heresy, and in 1326 issued *Super illius specula*, which placed sorcery within the purview of heresy inquisitions. (The consultants included Jacques Fournier, bishop of Pamiers, who in 1320 was amid the inquisitions made famous in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*.)<sup>[2]</sup> *Satan the Heretic* begins by establishing the foundations for the consultation in 1320, sketching John's demonological interests and the "great novelty" of his demonology (p. 14). Chapter two tightens the focus to one of the consulting theologians, the Franciscan Enrico del Carretto (d. 1323). Of the diverse responses offered by the consultants, Enrico's provided "a true doctrinal turning point," arguing for the efficacy and "unique operative force" of Satanic rites like baptizing an image (p. 54). As in the eucharist, "a sign that effects what it represents," spells had causality because Satanic power enabled him to "construct a sacrament...an effective sign" (p. 61). Enrico leaned here upon sacramental theology of the pact regnant since the mid-thirteenth century, and, Boureau argues, also upon a distinctly Franciscan emphasis on freedom of choice. This theology of the pact was itself bound to contemporary social and political ideologies of such agreements; Boureau establishes the broader significance in the thirteenth century of the pact, in which "mutual contractual obligations" fused together social and political constituencies and produced "effective action" (p. 77). Boureau also observes the dark reverse of the collective pact's new importance in the fear of subversive conspiracies. These were a particular concern of John XXII, so much so that Boureau theorizes that the "obsession with effective plots" drove the search for scapegoats, rather than vice-versa (p. 83). John's own anxiety over demonic agency then underlay the establishment of these demonological foundations, indicating a striking interplay of personal psychology with several cultural and intellectual forces.

Boureau next looks back to a sharp increase in the 1270s in scholastic interest in demonology and particularly in demonic agency, positing several prompts for this attention: dualist Cathars who demanded response; hierarchies of natural and supernatural figures in pagan and Arabic cosmologies; and angelology. That interest was marked by Dominican-Franciscan tension, as the tradition established by Thomas Aquinas in the 1270s that restricted demonic agency would differ from the later liberating demonology of Peter John Olivi. Olivi's spiritual-Franciscan eschatology, contrasting the Franciscan choices of poverty and perfection with the evil choices of fallen angels, emphasized demons' will and place in temporality, ending in a liberal view of demonic agency and 'capabilities.'

However, this demonic power was impotent in itself; it needed an 'in,' an opportunity, only possible if the individual person had openings for that agency's intrusion. Boureau explores in the following chapters new psychologies of porous personalities that created literal and theoretical space for this demonic capability. Canonization trials at the beginning of the fourteenth century illustrate this demonological turn, concerned not only with the will and with effective judicial language (vows, curses) but also with the permeability of the individual in holy and unholy possession. Both "possession and madness manifested the weakness of the human personality," and Boureau presents scholastic discussions of other manifestations of this "openness." These included the sleepwalker, whose legal and moral culpability was pondered by theologians and canonists (p. 143). Here again is the productive conflict between a Thomist or Dominican "anthropology" and a Olivian or Franciscan one; the former doubted that reason could produce an act during sleep, but the latter's affirmation of this "intention beyond consciousness" provided another "accidental" contribution to this new demonology. The "rise of the mystical" in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries was another instance of "this new invasion of the supernatural" and of interrogations into agency and personality (p. 174). Examinations into the sanctity of women like Clare of Montefalco and Angela of Foligno generated further discussion of porousness, human passivity, and subjectivity that also contributed to this "demonological turn." (Boureau cites both Nancy Caciola's *Discerning Spirits* and Dyan Elliott's *Fallen Bodies* in his discussion of mystical possession; Elliott's *Proving Woman*, published in the same year as *Satan the Heretic's* original French publication, would also have been usefully consulted for the English translation.)<sup>[3]</sup>

The summary of these various scholastic strugglings between 1280 and 1330 was “the end of a confidence in the confinement of demons” and new faith in demonic effectiveness and humans’ “fragile and porous constitution.” Yet one more ingredient was necessary: an eschatological sensibility that could animate this demonology. As Boureau recognizes, the obvious weakness in his etiological chain (circa 1300 to circa 1450 to the later witch hunts) is explaining the gap between this fourteenth-century demonology and the fifteenth-century eruption of the “obsession” with demons. If the ideological ingredients were in place by 1330, why did a century pass before they manifested themselves fully in fears of witches’ conspiracy and harm? Why was this demonology rather preparatory than immediately effective? Boureau suggests that procedural questions obstructed and delayed the widespread prosecution of witches until the fifteenth century, and more substantively that the fruition of this demonology depended upon perceptions of attack and collapse—fears not wholly present until the tumultuous ecclesiastical and political circumstances of the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. (Here he unknowingly intersects with Bailey.) In other words, crafting ideologies by which demonic agency in the porous person could be blamed was just the first step; the full force could only come when everyone agreed that there was something to blame it for.

The success of Boureau’s delicate argument depends upon some good will towards the translation, in which there are a few infelicities. Some French words appear to have been mildly anglicized rather than translated into their English equivalents (“cultural,” “Clunisian”). The city of Vienne in France, site of the Council of Vienne in 1311-12, is with unnecessary confusion rendered as Vienna (p. 143). Most distressing is the frequent use of verbal contractions (“doesn’t,” “don’t,” “let’s”), inexplicable unless as a weak effort to lower word counts. And *Satan the Heretic*’s power also depends upon recognizing that it is rather deferred: that is, the argument’s weight derives from what the reader knows will be eventually sown in this ground, rather than from its state in 1330. But if one is convinced by Boureau that the “obsession with demons” that so haunted fifteenth-century Europe originated between 1280 and 1330, then *Satan the Heretic* is perhaps most rewarding as a glimpse of how a destructive obsession could be born from an ostensibly tepid confluence of ideas.

#### NOTES

[1] Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

[2] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: the Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage, 1978).

[3] Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

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