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Preternature

The Devil is in the Tales: Evaluating Eye-Witness Testimony in Martin Delrio's *Disquisitiones magicae* (1599–1600)

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Abstract:	Martin Delrio's <i>Disquisitiones magicae</i> (1599–1600) likely was the most successful work of demonology printed during the early modern period. It was also a work of textual scholarship. This article studies in detail the few instances in which the Spanish-Flemish Jesuit chose to discuss anecdotes based on things he either saw or heard and how he attempted to establish their credibility. Embedding these stories in a diverse web of other (textual) examples further allowed Delrio to sidestep the vexed issue of discernment, establishing whether demonic agency had ever been involved. Careful study of the origins of these examples shows how many of these stories must have circulated widely and would be changed in the re-telling, enhancing their plausibility or relevance. The study of demonology through its shared stories, this article suggests, could open up new and exciting avenues for research.
Keywords:	demonology, Martin Delrio, eyewitness testimony, discernment of spirits, storytelling, folklore
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Response to Reviewers:

The Devil is in the Tales: Evaluating Eye-Witness Testimony in Martin Delrio's

Disquisitiones magicae (1599–1600)*

Martin Delrio's *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (3 vols, 1599–1600) has a good claim to being the most widely read demonological text of the early modern period, more popular even

* This article has very deep roots. Its origins go back to a conference entitled “Grenzüberschreitungen: Magiegllauben und Hexenverfolgung als Kulturtransfer” held at the German Historical Institute in Paris in May 2010. The conference, very suitably, brought English- and German-speaking historians together on neutral French ground. I will always remain grateful to Katrin Möller and Jürgen Michael Schmidt for organizing the event, also because it introduced me to a great many colleagues whom I now consider friends.

An earlier version of this article was written from scratch in 2015 after the publication of my monograph on Martin Delrio, when a fresh though ultimately doomed attempt was made to publish the conference proceedings. I am grateful to all those who commented on that version at the time, in particular Robin Briggs, Carla Roth, and Laura Varnam. I also discussed specific *exempla* with specialist colleagues and friends who will be thanked in the relevant footnote.

Appropriately enough, the current version was substantially revised in Germany, during a 2020/21 Humboldt Fellowship at the TU Dresden. I would like to register my thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and my sponsor at the TU, Gerd Schwerhoff, for their support. Finally, thanks are also due to the editors and reviewers of *Preternature* for their constructive feedback.

than the better-known *Malleus maleficarum* (1486).¹ Its longevity and popularity transcended confessional borders as well as the Atlantic Ocean. The Puritan President of Harvard College Increase Mather conceded that “it is rare to see such Words dropping from the Pen of a Jesuit.”² In 1690, a candidate for a master’s degree in Lutheran Leipzig (or his teacher) could still be envious of Martin Delrio’s scholarly achievements: “It is doubtful whether he is alone when he boasts [in his introduction] that he had entered the contest common to these three sciences [law, philosophy and theology] with sufficient success, but I am not so audacious.”³ It was not just witchcraft believers who read the *Disquisitiones* either. In 1704 the early Enlightenment *philosophe* Pierre Bayle complained that the work had been so often reprinted “that we would

¹ On the print history of both texts, see Jan Machielsen, *Martin Delrio: Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11–13; André Schnyder, “Der “Malleus maleficarum”: Fragen und Beobachtungen zu seiner Druckgeschichte sowie zur Rezeption bei Bodin, Binsfeld und Delrio”, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 74 (1992): 323–64.

² Increase Mather, “Cases of Conscience Concerning Witchcraft”, in *A Further Account of the Tryals of the New-England Witches* (London, 1693), 17.

³ Valentinus Alberti (praes.), *Dissertatio academica de sagis, sive, Foeminis commercium cum malo spiritu habentibus* (Leipzig, 1690), sigs A2v–A3r: “dubium, an solus, de quo gloriatur *ibid[em]* hoc commune tribus illis scientiis stadium satis feliciter ingressus fuerit. Mihi tanta audacia non est.”

need to involve new Visigoth and Ostrogoth invasions to make all copies perish.”⁴ And even then, Bayle predicted, more copies would simply be printed. Further editions of the *Disquisitiones* appeared in Cologne in 1720 and 1755 and in Venice in 1746.⁵ As the most cogent expression of early modern demonology, the *Disquisitiones magicae* was a work that Enlightenment *philosophes* urgently needed to refute.

Despite its evident historiographical importance, Delrio’s *Disquisitiones* has been comparatively neglected. Where the writings of witchcraft theorists are concerned, historians have traditionally focused on those who conducted hunts themselves or otherwise based their accounts on personal experience. Walter Stephens argued that these men were “testing” whether their theories corresponded with reality.⁶ Wolfgang Behringer postulated that “as a general rule ... in the background of most demonologies we can find a particular witch-hunt, and it is methodologically necessary to relate the texts to these specific contexts.”⁷ Lyndal Roper declared

⁴ Pierre Bayle, *Réponse aux questions d’un provincial*, vol. 1 (Rotterdam, 1704), 110: “Elles ont été si souvent reimprimées que pour en faire périr toutes les copies, il faudroit que de nouvelles invasions de Wisigoths & d’Ostrogoths s’en mélassent.”

⁵ For a not unproblematic inventory of editions see Edda Fischer, *Die “Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex” von Martin Delrio als gegenreformatorische Exempel-Quelle* (Frankfurt, 1975), 156–75.

⁶ Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 10.

⁷ Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 101.

that demonology “was to a large degree a science founded on the evidence of experience.”⁸ I do not disagree with statements such as these but I suggest that historians have had their own reasons for privileging this “empirical” side of demonology: it makes it easier to dismiss, at times even ridicule, elite witchcraft beliefs as the preserve of the aberrant few.⁹ Delrio’s *Disquisitiones* is an important exception to Wolfgang Behringer’s general rule. It is a text which attempted to place early modern demonology on a very different – textual – epistemological footing and which in the process sought to rehabilitate the science of demons as a serious intellectual pursuit.

In my biography of the Flemish-Spanish Jesuit Martin Delrio (1551–1608) I argued that we should situate the *Disquisitiones* among his many other publications, all of which were works of textual scholarship. I demonstrated that Delrio’s edition of Senecan tragedy, which includes the *Medea*, offered the Jesuit his first opportunity to expound on demonological subjects.¹⁰ Delrio’s early career as a magistrate did not possess the significance that Wolfgang Behringer in particular has attached to it. His period as a member on the royalist Council of Brabant during the brief government of Don John of Austria (r. 1576–1578) was short-lived. He was in office

⁸ Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 52.

⁹ The exception, of course, is Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, chaps 8 and 10. The argument is recapitulated in Jan Machielsen, “Demonology as textual scholarship: Martin Delrio’s *Disquisitiones magicae*,” in idem, ed., *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 2020), 179–94.

when most of the territory was in rebel hands.¹¹ The only magical encounter Delrio recounted as having had as a magistrate was with a mysterious man-like mandrake, which he heroically cast into a nearby fire.¹² Delrio encountered the one witchcraft prosecution to feature prominently in the *Disquisitiones* – that of the Stavelot monk Jean Delvaux – long after he had begun work on the book and again in textual format, through copies of the trial records sent by contacts.¹³ It is possible that Delrio was confronted with witches, whether in the confession booth or at the gallows, which he chose not to disclose. Certainly, other Jesuits in the Low Countries had such encounters, and in a later edition Delrio related at least one story – of a witch who felt no pain until a sacred amulet broke the devil’s protective spell – which he had learned from his Jesuit provincial.¹⁴ Even if such undisclosed encounters had occurred, it is significant that he chose not to disclose them, and that he built his demonology on textual sources instead.

¹¹ Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 104; Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, chap. 1.

¹² Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, 250–51; Martin Delrio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex in tres tomos partiti*, 3 vols (Leuven, 1599–1600), vol. 2, p. 226. Unless otherwise indicated, all future references are to this edition of Delrio’s tome.

¹³ Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, 248–49. I argued that the position of these additions, in the margins or at the end of paragraphs, was consistent with them being added late in the revision process.

¹⁴ On accounts of witchcraft in the Jesuit *litterae annuae* of the 1590s, see Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, 219–20; for the story told by Bernardus Oliverius in 1599, see Martin Delrio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex in tres tomos partiti*, 3 vols (Mainz, 1603), vol. 1, 172. The work is 1,200 pages long in its first octavo incarnation. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart’s forthcoming

The problem with witchcraft as a crime, as sceptics have always been quick to point out, was that it was not simply a question of identifying the culprit; it was often not even clear whether a crime had been committed.¹⁵ This was a problem that was built into demonology itself. Indeed, human ignorance was one of its building blocks, and an indispensable one at that. Naturally, demonology could not function without a belief in the superior powers and knowledge of demons. The devil, as Delrio noted, possessed the power of “local motion”. He was able to move, and hence replace, objects at great speed, as happened with “the metamorphoses of the pagans”.¹⁶ The devil’s other method was the so-called application of active things to passive ones, “by which change or mutation of things he often creates wonders, whose causes are natural but unknown to us, yet very well known to him.”¹⁷ The Jesuit likened the devil to a cook using fire to concoct something pleasant to eat; in the same way demons provided the method and conditions for creating wonders (*mira*), which nevertheless remained a strictly natural occurrence.¹⁸

complete translation, based on the 1608 edition, may reveal details that I have missed but it is unarguable that first-hand witchcraft prosecutions are (virtually) absent from the *Disquisitiones*.

¹⁵ An instructive example is George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes in Which Is Laide Open How Craftely the Divell Deceiveth Not Onely the Witches but Many Other and So Leadeth Them Awrie into Many Great Errours* (London, 1593).

¹⁶ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 127–8: “motum localem”; “gentilium metamorphoses”.

¹⁷ Delrio, vol. 1, 129: “Alter modus erat activa passivis applicando, per quem alteratione sive mutatione rerum mirabilia saepe facit, quorum naturales sunt causae sed nobis incognitae, ipsi notissimae.”

¹⁸ Delrio, vol. 1, 129–30.

At the same time, the devil's superior knowledge is also relative: witchcraft could exist *only* because of human ignorance. Delrio located the actions of the devil, not (as Jean Bodin did) within the realm of the supernatural – such miracles properly belonged to God alone – but within preternature, the concept after which this journal is named and which, thanks to Stuart Clark, is closely associated with him, although the Jesuit certainly did not coin it.¹⁹ Delrio himself defined preternature as that part of nature which “through itself does not exceed the boundaries of the order of nature but is said to exceed it only by reason of its method [of operation], of which either all men or most are ignorant”.²⁰ Magic, according to Delrio's precise definition, was “an art or ability, which using a created power, not a supernatural one, causes certain unusual wonders, whose working exceeds the common perception and understanding of men”.²¹

Human ignorance was thus a crucial part of early modern demonology at a *definitional* level. If we knew how the devil worked his evil magic we would not need him. (And perhaps his witches would not need him either.) From an anthropological perspective, we could even argue that ignorance was witchcraft belief's *raison d'être*. As E. E. Evans-Pritchard recognized long ago, witchcraft existed to explain wrongs that could not otherwise be comprehended (and, of

¹⁹ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 170–71. On preternature, see also Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), chap. 4.

²⁰ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 52: “qui ordo reipsa non excedit terminos naturalis ordinis, sed tantum dicitur excedere ratione modi, quem vel omnes homines vel plerique ignorant”.

²¹ Delrio, vol. 1, 12: “ars seu facultas, vi creata, et non supernaturali, quaedam mira et insolita efficiens, quorum ratio sensum et communem hominum captum superat”.

course, remedied).²² This aspect of witchcraft belief inevitably begs a question that has no real answer: how can the actions of the devil and his allies be recognized, given that they surpass the human understanding? In my biography of Delrio I argued that the Jesuit fully recognized this problem but that the accumulation of texts allowed him to avoid the well-known problem of discernment of spirits (*discretio spirituum*); the question of whether spirits in any particular situation came from God or the devil – or were the figments of the human imagination. Delrio's *exempla* (or examples) were ready-mades.²³ Their discernment had already taken place and been put in writing. All Delrio had to do, on many occasions, was to excerpt the original story, at times for pages on end. The limitations of this textual approach became readily apparent, however, even to their author or compiler. A work of textual scholarship, Delrio himself discovered, could give little guidance in the real world.²⁴

In this article I will explore the same argument but from the opposite end, by examining in some depth the rare occasions in which the Jesuit did draw on evidence of a personal nature. This analysis shows how Delrio either struggled to discern demonic agency or managed to sidestep discernment even then. As we shall see, stories that Delrio saw or heard were never advanced on their own but embedded within a wide range of different types of sources, drawn from different periods and regions. Personal observations were drawn from a lifetime of study or teaching at nearly a dozen universities and Jesuit colleges across Catholic Europe, from Léon to

²² E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, ed. Eva Gillies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

²³ I prefer the original Latin *exemplum* over example because it better captures the moral (exemplary) as well as evidentiary qualities of Delrio's stories.

²⁴ Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, chaps 10–11.

Leuven, and from Salamanca to Graz. His itinerant existence, in other words, further reflects the *Disquisitiones*'s geographically dispersed source base. Detailed study of the examples below thus counterintuitively underscores the textual foundations on which the *Disquisitiones* was built. They further show the importance of the connections and parallels established between different sources, establishing that witchcraft confessions were “marvelously consistent throughout the whole of Europe and across all ages.”²⁵ As a case study, these *exempla* also point towards possible new approaches to demonology, not as a body of discrete published works, but as a collection of stories that changed in the retelling.

I

Given that any direct experience with witchcraft is not immediately apparent in the *Disquisitiones*, the search for a witch-hunt trigger has been a particularly urgent one. Both Wolfgang Behringer and P. G. Maxwell-Stuart have argued that the witchcraft trial of Jean del Vault prompted Delrio to write.²⁶ As already mentioned, Del Vault had been a monk at Stavelot, not far from Liège, and Delrio had long been friends with one of the judges, Petrus Oranus (or Pierre d'Heur or Dheure), who conducted the trial. Yet chronology alone makes any direct involvement unlikely, and Delrio's interest in witchcraft, as already noted, can be traced back to his 1593–94 edition of Senecan tragedy, which he dedicated, in part, to Oranus. The

²⁵ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 109–10: “mire per Europam omnem, & cunctas aetates consentiente.”

²⁶ Martin Delrio, *Investigations into Magic*, trans. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 5–7; Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 103–4.

Jesuit began teaching a course on ‘superstition and the evil arts’ in Leuven in August 1596.²⁷ He had not been able to observe any aspect of the trial in person. He only arrived in Liège in November 1597, long after Del Vaulx’s execution on April 2nd, 1597.²⁸ It was only then, while revising the *Disquisitiones* that he learned the details from Petrus Oranus.²⁹ As I have noted elsewhere, Delrio’s closest encounter with magic was with the “famous” Paris magician *maître* Gonin, whom he saw “frequently” when he was a student there in the mid-1560s. Arrested, Gonin tricked the Paris Parlement of hanging the mule of its *premier président* instead: “I assert nothing, but I heard this story often spread about; clearly he survived the judgement.”³⁰ Delrio thus offered hearsay that he caveated (“I assert nothing”) but which he immediately attempted to

²⁷ On Delrio’s time at the Jesuit College of Leuven as Professor of Scripture, see Machielsens, *Martin Delrio*, 212, 225; on the friendship between Oranus and Delrio, see Jan Machielsens, “Thinking with Montaigne: Evidence, Scepticism and Meaning in Early Modern Demonology”, *French History* 25, no. 4 (2011): 427–28; and Warren Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 1, 191–98.

²⁸ Jean Fraikin, “Un épisode de la sorcellerie en Ardenne et en région mosellane: L’affaire du moine de Stavelot, Dom Jean del Vaulx (1592-1597)”, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 85, no. 3–4 (1990): 650–68. Delrio’s correspondence with Justus Lipsius places Delrio in Liège from November 1597 to June 1598, see Machielsens, *Martin Delrio*, 66.

²⁹ As he notes, for instance, on Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, p. 190, where he acknowledges receiving a number of additions from Oranus.

³⁰ Delrio, vol. 1, 73: “Nihil adfirmo, sed hoc fama dispersum saepe audivi: certe ille iudicio supervixit.” Cf. Machielsens, *Martin Delrio*, 250.

bolster with objective fact (Gonin's continued survival). As such, his testimony hardly conveys first-hand knowledge, and it has not even proved possible to confirm the arrest.³¹

Two other anecdotes may further underline the limits of the Jesuit's personal experience. The first comes from the preface of the *Disquisitiones*, where Delrio reported being shown, as a student at the University of Salamanca (in the early 1570s), "a very deep vault, a remnant of a wicked gymnasium", where the Moors had once taught magic and "which a woman of manly spirit, Queen Isabella, the wife of Ferdinand the Catholic, had ordered to be blocked up with cement and stones scarcely a hundred years earlier."³² This vault, commonly (but erroneously) described as a cave, is more easily traced. In fact, it still exists today. Two seventeenth-century Spanish playwrights, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Miguel Cervantes, composed comedies entitled *La cueva de Salamanca*.³³ The second example, which Delrio had earlier reported in his

³¹ I am very grateful to Tom Hamilton for checking the papers of Al Soman in Washington, DC for any mention of *maître* Gonin. I have not been able to find any contemporary mention of Gonin, though an early Enlightenment figure and witchcraft sceptic wrote a mock biography of him in the early eighteenth century: Laurent Bordelon, *Les Tours de Maître Gonin*, 2 vols (Paris, 1713).

³² Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, p. 5: "ostensa mihi fuit crypta profundissima gymnasii nefandi vestigium; quam virilis animi mulier Isabella Regina, Ferdinandi Catholici uxor, vix ante annos centum caementis saxisque iusserat obturari."

³³ On this underground crypt, often erroneously described as cave, see Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, 3 vols (Madrid: Librería Católica de San José, 1880), vol. 1, 582–7; Manuel García Blanco, "Cervantes y El Entremés de La Cueva de

commentary on Senecan tragedy, involves meeting a so-called *zahorí* in Madrid, shortly after finishing his legal studies: “The Spanish know a sort of man whom they call *zahorís* and we could call *Lyncei*. When I lived in Madrid in 1575, I saw such a boy there. They say that that these men see things which are hidden in the inner entrails of the earth, veins of water or metal, treasures, and corpses placed under graves.”³⁴

Both examples show how very limited Delrio’s contact with the demonic really was. More importantly still, they illustrate the textual nature of the Jesuit’s evidence. The Salamanca cave was submitted into evidence only to confirm something that he had *read*: “I have read that after the Saracen [i.e., Muslim] inundation of Spain magic grew so strong that at a time when the essence of all good letters was poverty and ignorance, the demonic arts were almost alone in

Salamanca”, in *Seis Estudios Salmantinos* (Salamanca: Centro de estudios salmantinos, 1961), 78–85.

³⁴ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 35: “Norunt Hispaniae genus hominum, quod vocant Zahuris, nos Lynceos possumus nuncupare. Cum Madriti Anno [1575] versarer, talis ibi puer visebatur. Ferunt hosce videre quae abdita in penitis terrae visceribus, venas aquarum et metallorum, thesauros, et sub sarcophagis sita cadavera.” See also Martin Delrio, *Syntagma tragoediae latinae in tres partes distinctum*, 3 vols (Antwerp, 1593), vol. 3, 33.. On *zahorís*, a word with Arabic roots, see *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 23rd ed. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2014), s.v. “zahorí”. Lynceus was a “lynx-eyed” figure from Greek mythology credited with X-ray vision.

being taught openly in Toledo, Seville, and Salamanca.”³⁵ Similarly, where the *zahorís* were concerned, Delrio declared the entire matter “very much accepted and very famous: not only Pindar, [John] Tzetzes and other poets think it can happen, but also the philosophers.”³⁶ In short, such personal experiences were woven into a wider tapestry of written accounts and established authorities.

The three examples above are all instances which Delrio clearly stated to have *seen* himself, or rather he claimed to have witnessed the alleged magical site or practitioner. Further instances of first-hand eye-witness evidence could be supplied, but none of them even approach the (already rather limited) significance of those discussed. While in Bordeaux, for instance, the Jesuit “saw” (*vidi*) the roses in the College gardens blossom in autumn; a sure sign of the coming plague epidemic of the winter of 1584/85.³⁷ After the iconoclasm of 1566, he “saw” that the only statue in the cathedral of his native Antwerp left intact was that of the devil; proof that heretics were in league with the devil.³⁸ Instances where Delrio “knew” (*novi*) the persons involved are somewhat more common, but also more obscure as the connection is rarely made explicit. Again, most of these anecdotes are only tangentially related to witchcraft. Delrio “knew” someone in

³⁵ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 5: “Legimus post Sarracenicam per Hispanias illuvionem, tantum invaluisse Magicam; ut cum litterarum bonarum omnium, summa ibi esset inopia et ignoratio; solae ferme daemonicae artes palam Toleti, Hispali, et Salmanticae docerentur.”

³⁶ Delrio, vol. 1, 35: “rec receptissima et celeberrima est: et fieri posse censuerunt, non Pindarus, Tzetzes et alii poetae modo: sed et philosophi”. On Delrio’s evaluation of different types of textual authorities, see Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, 245.

³⁷ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 2, 269.

³⁸ Delrio, vol. 2, 74.

Leuven who pretended to be the soul of a widow's late husband to persuade her to marry him.³⁹ In the 1570s he "knew" a Spanish soldier "more distinguished in arms and war than in piety" who used to divine with his fingernails.⁴⁰ The invocation of personal knowledge implies a certain amount of intimacy and (hence) trustworthiness, yet the events and character traits described are such that Delrio is unlikely to have been particularly friendly with those involved. Presumably Delrio knew them by sight or by reputation.

Even with the following anecdote, whose truth Delrio asserted most polemically (and which actually involves the capture of a witch) we should be skeptical about his own personal involvement. The Jesuit reported that

I stayed in Calais in 1597 (when it had the good fortune to be taken by His Most Serene Highness Archduke Albert and protected by soldiers of the Catholic King [Philip II]). Near the Nieulay bridge two signs, guarded by a garrison of Walloons, had been put up to mark the boundary against the people of Boulogne, who were the enemies at that time. Just before the evening two sentries saw a dark cloud fly towards them in a clear sky. They appeared to hear the jumbled voices of many people within it, [but] neither saw them. Then, the braver one said: "What is this thing? Are we safe? If you agree, I will aim my harquebus at that cloud." His colleague concurred. With the sound of thunder [the discharge of the gun], a woman fell down from the cloud before their feet. She was intoxicated, naked, very fat, and middle aged. Her thigh had been shot through twice.

³⁹ Delrio, vol. 1, 369.

⁴⁰ Delrio, vol. 2, 219.

When they seized her, she pretended to be feeble minded. She said almost nothing else in reply to their question except “are you friend or foe?”⁴¹

The Jesuit declared the story “most certain” (*certissimum*) and he denounced would-be sceptics: “What will those who deny that [witches] are transported say to this? They will deny that they believe it. Let them remain incredulous, because they will not believe eyewitnesses, several of whom I could produce.”⁴² Still, unlike the late Othon Scholer, I do not consider it “more than likely” (*mehr als wahrscheinlich*) that the soldiers knew of Delrio’s presence and consulted him.⁴³ This is partly because Delrio was only briefly in Calais, recovering from a failed attempt to leave the Low Countries for Spain by sea. Buffeted by storms and harassed by the English, his vessel limped back to Calais. (“Nine days . . . without food,” he complained to his friend, the

⁴¹ Delrio, vol. 3, 22: “Versabar anno 1597 Caleti (quando, faelicibus auspiciis Serenissimi Archiducis Alberti vi expugnatum, a Catholici Regis militibus tenebatur). Ad Pontem Nueleti duo signa Walonum praesidio posita limitem, contra Bolonienses, tum hostes, tuebantur. Sub vesperam sudo caelo Procubitores duo vident nubem subnigram advolare, et in ea videntur sibi audire confusas voces multorum, quos nulli videbant. Tum alter audacior: “quid hoc rei est? Satin securi? Si videtur, librabo arcubuziam in ipsam nubem. Assentitur socius. Cum tonitru sclopi decidit ex nube ante pedes mulier ebria, nuda, bene obeso corpore et media aetate, femur traiecta duplici vulnere. Capta se mentis impotem simulabat, nec fere aliud adloquentibus referebat, quam: “Hostesne, an faederati?”“

⁴² Delrio, vol. 3, 22: “Quid ad haec, qui negant transferri? Negabunt credere sese. Maneant increduli, quia nec oculatis, quos possum plurimos adducere, credent”

⁴³ Othon Scholer, *Der Hexer war’s, die Hexe, ja vielleicht sogar der Dämon höchstpersönlich* (Trier: Spee, 2007), 60.

Brabant humanist Justus Lipsius, “because the little I ate my stomach immediately ejected”.⁴⁴) More importantly, Delrio’s rhetorical strategy seeks to distract attention away from a curious lacuna. The Jesuit claimed both (relative) physical proximity to the crime scene and announced the availability of witnesses. Yet he refused to supply such additional evidence because sceptics would refuse to accept the story regardless. It is a rather clever excuse that should make us wonder how much more detail Delrio could have provided. It seems clear that he would have said he had *seen* the witch (or the soldiers) if he had indeed done so, as he did elsewhere.

Tellingly, in the 1603 edition Delrio re-enforced the anecdote by further anticipating the criticism of would-be sceptics who privileged the evidence of their own eyes or experience: “They will not believe. Why? Because they have not seen or heard of it, and they have interrogated certain people, who replied that they knew nothing. ... I do not know whether they declare to know all things that happen in private. Yet they have happened no less as a result.”⁴⁵ This, in effect, is a plea to trust the experiences of others, which Delrio followed up with testimony he excerpted at great length from the Lorraine judge Nicolas Rémy. Even here, then, the *Disquisitiones* is built not on an appeal to (his own) personal experiences, but to those of the many. As we shall see, it was the apparent universality of these experiences, across time and space, which – for Delrio – constituted the most definitive proof for witchcraft’s existence.

II

⁴⁴ Letter ILE 97 06 24 D cited in Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, 66.

⁴⁵ Delrio, *Disquisitiones (1603)*, vol. 3, 19: “Non credent. Cur? Quia nec viderunt, nec audiverunt, et quosdam interrogaverunt, qui se nihil scire responderunt. Si quae quis nescit, quia nescit, ideo non vera; vere illi, et recte. An audeant profiteri se quae in domestico conclavi gesta scire omnia, nescio. Non ideo tamen minus gesta.”

The argument sketched out above can also be made using *exempla*, exemplary stories about which Delrio had privately been informed rather than seen first-hand. By their very nature, as echoes of lost conversations, these stories have proved very hard to trace. Delrio only rarely chose to reveal the names of his sources, so it is difficult to gauge the nature of the relationships involved. Yet the few instances where a source is identified are instructive. The Jesuit, for example, told the story of a witch who was shot while transformed into a bird and later found dead at home from a bullet wound. It had “just” been “reported” to Delrio by François-Henri vander Burch, the dean of Mechelen cathedral (and after Delrio’s death, bishop of Ghent and archbishop of Cambrai).⁴⁶ The story is briefly related in the third volume of the *Disquisitiones* which was published a full year after the appearance of the first instalment. In all probability Delrio took the story from a letter he received in response to the publication of the earlier volumes. He also included correspondence from Petrus Oranus (the Liège magistrate) in the third volume, and he would excerpt from even more letters in his 1603 edition, including a letter from the Brussels magistrate Philips Numan, a witchcraft sceptic “more distinguished for his poetry than for his piety.”⁴⁷ There is no reason, therefore, to assume Delrio knew all his sources well. We should also note that usually no details as to time or place are provided, raising questions for instance about Vander Burch’s sources. Indeed, the report appears to reflect a common folktale.

⁴⁶ Général Guillaume, “Burch (François-Henri Vander)”, *Biographie nationale ... de Belgique*, vol. 3/2 (Brussels: H. Thiry, 1872), cols 162–4; Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 3, 22: “nuper hic in Belgio mihi retulit”.

⁴⁷ Delrio, vol. 3, 122–30 (dated November 27, 1599); Delrio, *Disquisitiones (1603)*, vol. 3, 64: “poetica arte, sed pietate clariore”. See also the letter by Liège physician and poet Frédéric Jamot, with whom Delrio was close: *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 181–3.

Henri Boguet tells the virtually identical story of a witch who lost her keys while transformed into the shape of a cat. She was traced back to her home in a very similar fashion.⁴⁸

Those *exempla* in which the Jesuit did not even identify his sources are even more ephemeral. Let us consider, for instance, his discussion of “nefarious prayer formulas” used to heal wounds and protect against other dangers, “with which the devil in the end always deceives. When they are in the worst state of mortal sin, he allows them to be killed and he deserts those whom he previously had protected on several occasions.”⁴⁹ Here Delrio went so far as to claim that he “could name someone very well known to me, to whom this happened.”⁵⁰ Delrio quite plausibly referred to the sudden death of the Spanish commander Julian Romero in 1577. In his unpublished account of Don John’s government, he had refused to believe the rumor that “the same happened to [Romero], what usually happens to almost all whose wounds were healed with spells or incantations, namely that most die a sudden and unexpected death.”⁵¹ Despite the apparent change of mind, the similarities are too striking to be coincidental. Still, even if Delrio

⁴⁸ Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, trans. Montague Summers (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009), 142.

⁴⁹ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 61: “quibus Diabolus semper tandem imponit, et quando sunt in statu pessimo lethalis culpae, sinit eos occidi, et deserit quos ante aliquoties defenderat.”

⁵⁰ Delrio: “Possem nominare mihi probe notum, cui id accidit.”

⁵¹ Martin Delrio, *Mémoires ... sur les troubles des Pays-Bas durant l’administration de Don Juan d’Autriche, 1576–1578*, trans. Adolphe Charles Hyacinthe Delvigne, 3 vols (Brussels: Société de l’histoire de Belgique, 1869), vol. 2, 356–8: “idem ei accidisse, quod contingere solet fere omnibus quorum vulnera sortilegiis aut incantationibus sanata fuerint, ut subita plerumque ut repentina morte moriantur.”

knew another person who was said to have died in such circumstances, there is no reason to assume that his claim to “know” the person necessarily entailed intimate familiarity, nor does it suggest first-hand knowledge of the practice of magical charms.

Another possible military source was our Jesuit’s younger brother, Gerónimo del Río, who had a long career in the Spanish army. He was already serving as a military captain when Don John recalled the Army of Flanders from Italy in 1578.⁵² As late as 1624 Gerónimo joined the prestigious military Order of Santiago.⁵³ The two brothers remained in contact, and Gerónimo even wrote a preface for one of his brother’s posthumous publications.⁵⁴ He is a possible, perhaps even probable, source for the spiritual apparition which occurred just before their hometown, Antwerp, was taken by royalist forces:

Several years ago, during Alexander Farnese’s admirable siege to Antwerp, the Dutch and the English fought extraordinarily hard in order to bring aid to the besieged. The besieged did likewise at the same time, making a sortie to distract the enemy. They safely, as it appeared to them, took possession of a dyke that had already been taken by royal soldiers. Then Pedro de Paz, a Spanish *maestro de campo*, was seen near the dyke

⁵² Miguel Ángel Bacigalupe Echevarría and Friedrich Edelmayer, eds, *Die Chronik Über Don Juan de Austria / La Crónica Sobre Don Juan de Austria* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2003), 182. The passage is absent from the original Latin version, suggesting that Gerónimo was responsible for the Spanish translation.

⁵³ Julie Versele, *Louis del Rio, 1537–1578: Reflets d’une période troublée* (Brussels: Université de Bruxelles, 2004), 17.

⁵⁴ Martin Delrio, *Adagialia sacra veteris et novi Testamenti*, 2 vols (Lyon, 1612) vol. 1, sigs ā2r–v.

by the royal soldiers, though only by a few at first. He was a man greatly praised both for his military skills and for his great piety who had already died several months before. Armed as usual, he seemed to be leading the legion and to be ordering them to follow him, summoning his soldiers for some time with his hand. The first group pointed to the second; those to the third; those to the following groups; all saw the same, were amazed, and they followed their leader, who they knew had returned to life. He went before them, led them to the enemy, and a battle took place. The Dutch were forced back to the ships and abandoned the dyke to royal forces. In that moment that most well-defended town lost hope of victory and protecting itself.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, p. 304: “Batavi Anglique ut obsessis opem ferrent, et obsessi eodem tempore ut hostem distinerent facta eruptione, acerrime pugnabant, aggeremque iam Regio militi ereptum possidebant securi ut sibi videbantur. Tum a regiis militibus primo paucioribus conspectus prope aggerem Petrus de Paz Hispanus Tribunus, vir et militaribus et pietatis ornamentis laudatissimus, qui iam mensibus aliquot ante defunctus. Visus hic armatus, ut solebat, legionem praecedere, et suis quondam militibus manu advocatis, sequerentur ut se imperare. Indicant primi secundis, hi tertiis, hi sequentibus; vident omnes idem, mirantur animisque resumptis notum sequuntur ducem, praeit ille, et recta in hostem ducit, fit pugna, sed Batavi in naves compulsi aggerem Regiis reliquere. Hoc momento oppidum munitissimum spe victoriae et se tuendi, decidit.” I am grateful to Stephen Chambers for discussing this passage with me.

Though Gerónimo was away in Spain for the winter and spring of 1584, he must have returned to the Low Countries thereafter.⁵⁶ Consulting a contemporary chronicler allows us to verify some of the basic facts. Paz had died in August 1584 from a bullet to the head during the siege of the town of Dendermonde, not far from Antwerp. According to the Spanish captain and chronicler Alonso Vázquez, he was like a father to his men and “very brave, Christian, prudent, and a great soldier.”⁵⁷ The conquest of the Covenstein dyke on May 27, 1585 by Paz’s successor Juan del Águila did indeed prove a turning point in the siege of Antwerp, though Paz’s ghostly presence goes unreported.⁵⁸ In one sense the story is not surprising at all. Folktales of dead soldiers returning to war are common across Europe, and posthumous appearances, notably those of Saint James (Santiago) and Saint Peter, permeate Spanish military lore and even accompanied the

⁵⁶ On October 19, 1583 the Delrio family’s erstwhile patron, Cardinal Granvelle, wrote from Madrid to ask Alexander Farnese that Gerónimo’s leave (“licenza”) be extended by another six months: Edmond Pouillet and Charles Piot, eds, *Correspondance Du Cardinal de Granvelle, 1565–1586*, 12 vols (Brussels: F. Hayez, 1877), vol. 10, p. 382 (Letter 112).

⁵⁷ Alonso Vázquez, *Los Sucesos de Flandes Y Francia Del Tiempo de Alejandro Farnese*, ed. Marqués de la Fuensanta del Valle and et al, Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España 72 (Madrid: Miguel Ginesta, 1879), 511: “Era muy valiente, cristiano, prudente y gran soldado.” I am grateful to Raymond Fagel for the reference.

⁵⁸ Instead, Alonso Vázquez, *Los Sucesos de Flandes y Francia Del Tiempo de Alejandro Farnese (Vol. 2)*, ed. Marqués de la Fuensanta del Valle and et al, Colección de Documentos Inéditos Para La Historia de España 73 (Madrid: Miguel Ginesta, 1879), 58–60. details extensive debate among Spanish soldiers about the best course of action.

Spaniards to the New World.⁵⁹ Also noteworthy is the fact that the anecdote is woven into a wider textual tapestry. Delrio reported the story after accounts of two fifteenth-century spiritual apparitions, taken from Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Cesare Baronio. It is followed by a lengthy *exemplum* drawn from a published Jesuit account (the so-called *litterae annuae* or annual reports composed by Jesuit Colleges) from Peru; Delrio offered his readers “a swarm of witnesses and a hail-storm of copious *exempla*”.⁶⁰ By providing similar *exempla* drawn from widely different sources Delrio again created an appearance of universality.

We can divide Delrio’s second-hand anecdotes roughly into three types. A very small number seem to rely directly on hearsay, as in the case of the witch executed in Trier, when Delrio was living in Mainz (in 1587–88). She had stolen the milk of other people’s cows and stored it in a tap in her own home: “Evidently a demon milked them at the same time and very swiftly transported the milk to it.”⁶¹ A second group, however, were probably derived from printed pamphlets, as with Delrio’s assessment of the demonic possession of the Hainaut

⁵⁹ For an example of dead soldiers returning to war see Mahler’s *Revelge* drawn from Ludwig Achim Freiherr von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder*, vol. 1 (Charlottenburg: Egbert Bauer, 1845), 81–84. I am grateful to Robin Briggs for this reference. For appearances of Saint James and Saint Peter on the side of the Spanish *conquistadores* see, for instance, Francisco López de Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 46–47, 209.

⁶⁰ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 303–9: “nubem testium, grandinemque copiosum exemplorum”.

⁶¹ Delrio, vol. 1, 158: “videlicet interea daemon illas mulgebat, et celerrime lac eo transportabat.”

visionary Jeanne Féry.⁶² A third group of *exempla* probably were rooted in textual sources, even though Delrio had learned them, like the following “charming” (*lepidus*) tale, from “most trustworthy men”:

In the territory of Trier there was a peasant, who with his eight-year-old little daughter was planting cabbages in the garden. He praised the little girl highly because she attended to her task well. Talkative on account of her age and her gender, she threw out that she knew how to do other things which were even more astounding. The father asked what this could be. ‘step back a little’, she said, “and I will suddenly make it rain in the part of the garden you wish.” Amazed he said, “All right. I will step back.” When he moved back, she dug a trench. On it, she poured water from her feet (to use the more chaste Hebrew expression) [i.e., she urinated] and she disturbed this with a small stick, murmuring something. And behold, suddenly rain fell from the clouds on the said place. “Who,” asked the stunned father, “taught you this?” “Mother,” the girl replied. ‘she is most skilled in this and other similar things.’ Aroused by an ardent fervor, the peasant a few days later pretended that they had been invited to a wedding and put mother and

⁶² Delrio, vol. 2, 171. On witchcraft pamphlets, see also Wolfgang Behringer, “Witchcraft and the Media”, in *Ideas and Cultural Margins in Early Modern Germany: Essays in Honor of H.C. Erik Midelfort*, ed. Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer and Robin Bruce Barnes (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 217–36. Abaigéal Warfield’s forthcoming monograph on the *Hexenzeitungen* will fill this striking lacuna in the historiography. On Jeanne Féry, see Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004), 119–20.

daughter, festively dressed for a wedding, on a cart and took them to the nearby town. He handed them to a judge to be punished for the crime of witchcraft.⁶³

As usual, the tale did not stand on its own: it followed a report from Jesuit missionaries in Peru about the rain dances practiced by local pagan priests, and it was further used to help explicate a passage in the *Elegies* of the Roman poet Propertius. Although Delrio did not identify his sources, it is likely that he learned of the story during his above-mentioned stay in Mainz. And yet, the story may well have textual roots. A virtually identical version, set in Swabia, is told in the *Malleus maleficarum* (1486) with a slightly more benign end: the girl was rebaptized (a rather dubious notion theologically), though the wife was still “burned to ashes”.⁶⁴ The medieval

⁶³ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 155: “In ditone Trevirensi rusticus fuit, qui cum filiola sua octenni, caules plantabat in horto. Filiolam forte collaudavit, quod apte hoc munus obiret. Illa, sexu et aetate garrula, se nosse alia facere, magis stupenda iactat. Pater, quid id foret sciscitatur. Secede paullum, inquit, et in quam voles horti partem subitum imbrem dabo. Miratus ille; age secedam, ait. Quo recedente, scrobem puella fodit, in eam de pedibus (ut cum Hebraeis loquar pudentius) aquam fundit, eamque bacillo turbidat nescio quid submurmurans. Et ecce tibi subito pluviam de nubibus in conductum locum. Quis (inquam obstupefactus pater) te hoc docuit? Mater, respondet, huius et aliorum similium peritissima. Zelo incitatus agricola, post paucos dies, invitatum se ad nuptias simulans, uxorem cum gnata, festive nuptiali modo exornatas in currum imponit in vicinum oppidum devehit, et iudici tradit maleficium crimen supplicio expiaturas. Hoc mihi fide dignissimorum virorum narratio suggestit.” For “water of the feet” as a euphemism for urine see, for instance, Isaiah 36:12. I would like to thank Joanna Weinberg for the reference.

⁶⁴ Heinrich Institoris and Jakob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of Witches*, ed. Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 374–75. Reidar

period had placed its faith in spoken modes of communication, and news mostly continued to pass through such chains of oral transmission well into the early modern period.⁶⁵ It is possible that Delrio's "most trustworthy men" had adapted an old story from the *Malleus*, placing it in the recent past to make it more newsworthy and changing its ending to make it more suitable to the higher standards of Tridentine Catholicism. Clearly, versions of this story had passed from oral to scribal forms of communication and back for more than a century.⁶⁶ It seems to me altogether more worthwhile to attempt to trace this folktale and its permutations than to denounce the farmer's evil plot to use "witchcraft ideology ... to get rid of his family", as Scholer has done.⁶⁷

III

Studying this crop of personal and second-hand *exempla* has already taught us much, not only about Delrio and demonology's evidentiary problems but also about the wider community that

Christiansen lists many variations on the story of "The Daughter of the Witch" (ML3035), including a variant in which she makes it rain (C3). None of the versions match the story in the *Malleus* and *Disquisitiones* very closely, however: Reidar Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants*, FF Communications 75 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1958), 41–44.

⁶⁵ Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 38–39; David Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008).

⁶⁶ As happened in England with the Overbury scandal: Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112.

⁶⁷ Scholer, *Der Hexer war's, die Hexe, ja vielleicht sogar der Dämon höchstpersönlich*, 128.

produced and shared these stories. Many of these seemingly personal *exempla* were variations of stories that had circulated widely, and they likely had deep folkloric roots. The inclusion in demonological works of these tales of the demonic, with revised times, places, and endings, shows that witchcraft was part of a partly oral culture of news and entertainment in which stories were changed and updated in the retelling, to enhance their value and plausibility.⁶⁸ The story of the girl who had made it rain resurfaced again in the German city of Rothenburg 1639 when a version of the tale involving six daughters was told to the local court by an orphaned girl – she will not have learned it from either the *Malleus* or *Disquisitiones*.⁶⁹ Similarly, Martin Delrio and Henri Boguet both learned the story of the witch killed while in animal form from different people. A variant in which witches transformed into cats survived an attack and sued (!) their assailant for assault was included in the *Malleus maleficarum*.⁷⁰ That earlier variant may well have been adapted or simply fallen into oblivion because it was considered less credible or entertaining. Exploring demonological literature through its stories – how they spread and changed over time – would allow us to explore demonology from the inside out and examine the

⁶⁸ On the importance of changing ideas about narrative plausibility for the decline of witchcraft belief, see Frances E. Dolan, *True Relations: Reading, Literature, and Evidence in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), chap. 2.

⁶⁹ Alison Rowlands, ‘The Witch-Cleric Stereotype in a Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Context’, *German History* 38, no. 1 (2020): 1–23, at 3.

⁷⁰ Institoris and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 340.

interaction between popular (oral) and elite (written) culture.⁷¹ When done systematically and linked to existing indexes of folk literature (such as the ones consulted for this article), such an approach would also open up the study of demonology to approaches from the digital humanities.

While the study of *exempla* thus provides opportunities for further research, they also allow us to draw conclusions about Delrio's rhetorical strategies and demonology's evidentiary problem (a problem, of course, that confronted all witchcraft authors whether they realized it or not). We have seen the ways in which Delrio attempted to repackage rumor as certain knowledge. He did so by asserting personal knowledge, though of the persons or locations involved, not of the magical activity itself. He also bolstered the credibility of these stories by asserting the exceptional reliability of his sources, who often were "most trustworthy men", or by challenging would-be sceptics to disbelieve them. Thus, by raising the stakes he confronted the reader with a choice: were they with him, the pious Jesuit, or were they themselves (potentially heretical) sceptics? His rhetorical strategies should not blind us to the stories' true nature, however. These *exempla* were, like all forms of rumor, "quotations with a loophole".⁷² Although the margins of the *Disquisitiones* swarmed with references, no citation was ever given for these anecdotes. While Delrio tried to obfuscate this fact, a measure of uncertainty surrounded them, as with all forms of hearsay.

⁷¹ Lívia Guimarães Torquetti dos Santos is completing her doctoral dissertation following the myth of the accidental outsider appearing at the sabbat across early modern literary and folkloric sources.

⁷² Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *The Rumour: A Cultural History*, trans. Christian Braun (London: Free Association Books, 1999), 3.

When assessing news reports for themselves, those living through Europe's religious wars much preferred confirmation by written, published, or official sources.⁷³ Our Jesuit was no exception in this regard. He surrounded his anecdotes with seemingly indisputable fact in ways that seemed to verify them. The fact that *maître* Gonin remained alive, for instance, gave credence to the story of his magical deliverance out of the clutches of the Paris magistrates. More often such corroborating facts were drawn from written sources. Salamanca's underground vault confirmed what Delrio had read about the magical practices of the Moors (rather than the other way around). More importantly still were the parallels constructed between *exempla* drawn from different sources, regions, and times. For Delrio, the rain dances of the pagan Indians of the New World proved the weather magic practiced by Europe's witches – whether they knew it or not, both were allies of the devil. The *Disquisitiones* therefore wove the early modern garden-variety witch into a much larger tapestry of demonic activity, some of which was more difficult to disprove. The idea that the gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans were nothing but devils in disguise was already commonplace in the time of the Church Fathers.⁷⁴ The novelty of the demonic pact was buried under a wealth of evidence of demonic activity, seemingly drawn from

⁷³ For a case study see Henk Van Nierop, “‘And Ye Shall Hear of Wars and Rumours of Wars’: Rumour and the Revolt of the Netherlands”, in *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands*, ed. Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 69–86.

⁷⁴ For an excellent case study, see Anthony Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle: The Pagan Oracles in Early Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), chap. 2.

over 1,000 different sources.⁷⁵ The presentation of demonic activity as both age-old and widespread made it more difficult to declare the confessions of witches improbable or fictitious. This overarching strategy strengthened Delrio's personal and second-hand anecdotes: if weather magic happened in ancient Greece and modern Peru, why not in Trier? Still, although Delrio would never have admitted this, the same strategy made the veracity of these *exempla* strangely irrelevant. Given the wealth of *exempla* presented, a single anecdote (especially one based on hearsay) could easily be discarded.⁷⁶

A comparison with the more experiential mode of demonology is instructive. As already suggested, historians have been both more familiar and more comfortable with works built in large part on the confessions of witches. When Henry Boguet wanted to know whether intercourse with the devil could lead to pregnancy he asked two of his witches: "one answered that she was too old, and the other that God would not permit it."⁷⁷ Yet as Virginia Krause has argued, the confessions of witches were deeply intertwined with the inquisitorial methods that produced them.⁷⁸ Indeed, these works stand or fall with the perceived reliability of their author and their ability to discern truth from falsehood. They can be questioned by doubting their

⁷⁵ See the "elenchus autorum" included in Martin Delrio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (Lyon, 1612), sigs RR6v–SS4v. for a rudimentary inventory of his sources.

⁷⁶ In this sense the *Disquisitiones* is a fundamentally different work from many sixteenth-century chronicles. Carla Roth's work will throw a flood of new light on the ways early modern chroniclers attempted to separate fact from fiction.

⁷⁷ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, 35.

⁷⁸ Virginia Krause, *Witchcraft, Demonology, and Confession in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

author. Unsurprisingly, the writings of Boguet, De Lancre, and (in a different way) Rémy were mighty oaks with very shallow roots. Accusing their authors of credulity or malice also discredited the witch-hunts they were directly or (in the case of Rémy) indirectly responsible for. By contrast, challenging a single *exemplum* offered in the *Disquisitiones* would not bring the entire edifice falling down. Its credibility was not founded on a claim to personal experience or observation; it rested on the testimony of the many, rather than the author alone. The Anglican theologian Meric Casaubon, for instance, relied heavily on Delrio's work: "I will not say, that I believe every thing that he doth propose as true: it may be his faith doth in some things extend much further than mine: but I would have the quality of his witnesses well considered."⁷⁹

In some respects, the success of the *Disquisitiones* has also masked the success of demonology as a form of textual scholarship. One way forward would have been to add more *exempla* and make the work still more exhaustive. This Delrio did himself, revising the *Disquisitiones* on two occasions.⁸⁰ Another was to restore the *Disquisitiones* and rid it of its textual corruptions, as an elaborate preface to the 1746 Venice edition claimed it had achieved.⁸¹ The work also became a source for *exempla* to be recycled and re-used by later authors. The

⁷⁹ Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise Proving Spirits, Witches and Supernatural Operations by Pregnant Instances and Evidences* (London, 1672), 72–73.

⁸⁰ Martin Delrio added new *exempla* to the 1603 Mainz and 1608 Lyon editions of the *Disquisitiones*.

⁸¹ Martin Delrio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (Venice, 1746). The title page already claimed that this was an "editio nova prioribus auctior et plurimis sublatis Typographorum erroribus, ut ex sequenti praefatione dignosci potest, pristino nitore restituta." The preface offers a detailed analysis of the work's print history.

Compendium maleficarum (1608, rev. ed. 1626) of the Italian friar Francesco Guazzo, with every chapter neatly divided into *doctrina* and *exempla*, was essentially a compendium drawn from the *Disquisitiones*.⁸² Students at Lutheran universities in the 1680s and 1690s still pillaged the work for *exempla* in their master's dissertations. A 1682 Wittenberg dissertation excerpted its discussion of the witches' sabbat—"it will not displease us to insert his words from there."⁸³ Perhaps most interestingly, later "experimental" demonologists entered into dialogue with the work, seeking to add to or detract from its claims. Henri Boguet and Pierre de Lancre both fall into this category. Because of the existence of earlier writings (with Delrio last on the list), Lancre was content with "a simple account of the depositions of witnesses and the confessions of the accused."⁸⁴ Even the demons themselves were asked for their opinion of Delrio. The possessed nuns of Lille exclaimed that Delrio had written "so many stupid things about magic that he makes the devils laugh."⁸⁵

We have seen one way in which texts were preferable to the spoken word; it proved more difficult to question their authority. Texts were mediators of past (religious) experience. "Pick up

⁸² Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum in tres libros distinctum ex pluribus authoribus* (Milan, 1608). Its very first anecdote comes from Delrio.

⁸³ Adam Mirus (praes.), *De conventu sagarum ad sua Sabbata, quae vocant, dissertationem* (Wittenberg, 1682), sig. A4verso: "unde non pigebit verba eius adscribere."

⁸⁴ Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons où il est amplement traité des sorciers et de la sorcellerie* (Paris, 1612), sig. ē3verso.

⁸⁵ Cited by Robin Briggs, "Dubious Messengers: Bodin's Daemon, the Spirit World and the Sadducees", in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186.

and read” had been a trope within the Christian consciousness since Saint Augustine recounted hearing those words in his *Confessions*.⁸⁶ Similarly, saints’ lives were often compared to eyeglasses, offering the reader unmediated access to the revelatory experiences of others (they were to be looked *through* rather than *at*).⁸⁷ Still, texts were also relics in the literal meaning of that word; they were all that remained of a past that could not otherwise be accessed. Their advantage, certainly for a work like the *Disquisitiones*, therefore also lay in their opacity. Unlike contemporary oral testimony, the written word could not be tested or questioned in the same way. For those who credited Delrio’s pagan, biblical, patristic, medieval, and contemporary sources – and the parallels constructed between them – the *Disquisitiones* provided incontrovertible evidence for the existence of the spirit world. The *exempla* Delrio had accumulated had themselves a cumulative effect. Ironically, given that its subject matter – the devil – was regarded as a protean creature, it was the apparent similarity in testimony that underpinned Delrio’s argument.

It was, of course, still possible to challenge Delrio’s magnum opus *as* a work of textual scholarship, and some did. The witchcraft sceptic Friedrich Spee mocked Delrio’s claim that he had never read of innocent people being represented at the sabbat: “it proves that an infinity of other things that have truly happened have not happened, because Delrio never read or heard of them.”⁸⁸ Others challenged the bridges that Delrio had attempted to build or his reading of

⁸⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.xii.

⁸⁷ Massimo Leone, *Saints and Signs: A Semiotic Reading of Conversion in Early Modern Catholicism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 4.

⁸⁸ Friedrich Von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis or a Book on Witch Trials*, trans. Marcus Hellyer (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 189.

particular passages. The English divine John Wagstaffe plagiarized from Delrio in the second edition of his *The Question of Witchcraft Debated* (1671). A set of verses of classical poetry, he had lifted out of the *Disquisitiones*, “might be produced out of the Heathen Poets, sufficient to testifie [to] the folly of the vulgar Heathens, in their belief concerning the Power of Witches.”⁸⁹ Hostile to the idea that pagan thought held anything of value for Christianity, Wagstaffe inverted the parallels the Jesuit had constructed to discredit witchcraft belief as a pagan superstition. The French sceptic Gabriel Naudé questioned Delrio’s skill as a textual critic. Naudé argued that Delrio had simply misread the classical authors: “For if [Pierre] Le Loyer and Delrio may be credited, the principall Authours that affirm all these fables we have related of Numa, are Plutarch, and D. Halicarnassaeus, which yet when we come to read, and peruse, we shall find, that on the contrary they are those that refute, undermine, discover, and advise us not to credit [the fables].”⁹⁰

Still, such attempts remained challenging, certainly compared to the ease with which experiential demonology was uprooted. In fact, the greatest difficulty the *Disquisitiones* faced lay somewhere elsewhere entirely, and it was a direct result of the work’s greatest strength – its textual nature. The problems with eye-witness testimony and second-hand reports also throw light on Delrio’s textual *exempla*. Although antiquity may seem to have validated some particularly venerable (biblical, patristic, and classical) sources, all *exempla* suffered the same

⁸⁹ Wagstaffe, *The Question of Witchcraft Debated*, p. 43.

⁹⁰ Gabriel Naudé, *The History of Magick by Way of Apology, for All the Wise Men Who Have Unjustly Been Reputed Magicians, from the Creation, to the Present Age*, trans. John Davies (London, 1657), 120–21.

difficulty. Delrio had simply buried the problem of discernment more deeply.⁹¹ Based on textual scholarship, the *Disquisitiones* shielded its sources from scrutiny and, as such, it *seemed* to avoid the problem of discernment of spirits. Its heavy reliance on textual evidence divorced the *Disquisitiones* from the early modern witch-hunt because, as Lancre already noted and I have shown elsewhere, it failed to offer the reader practical advice.⁹²

To be sure, sometimes Delrio's textual *exempla* did require discernment. These instances already show the real difficulties involved. For instance, our Jesuit judged the apparition of a female Christ to be an angel instead: "I will rather judge that she was an angel, because if Christ himself appeared in female form, why should we not believe that angels sometimes present themselves in the same form?"⁹³ In his account of a possessed woman from Hainaut (briefly alluded to above), the Jesuit offered two "indications of imposture" that were *literally* definitional: "not only because she was possessed by the devil, but also because she had dared to usurp the priestly and masculine office."⁹⁴ The difficulty is apparent. Demonic assault, as the life

⁹¹ Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, 251–52.

⁹² Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance*, 109; Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, chap. 11.

⁹³ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 1, 264: "Arbitrer potius Angelum fuisse. Quod si Christus ipse faeminea in forma apparuit; cur non Angelos eadem in forma se conspiciendos praebere nonnumquam credamus?"

⁹⁴ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 2, 171: "Duo tamen hic erant imposturae indicia: tum quod erat energumena, tum quod auderet Sacerdotale ac virile officium usurpare."

of Saint Anthony illustrates, could also have been a sign of holiness.⁹⁵ Claims to divine visions were redefined in demonic and gendered terms. If her visions had their origin in God, the charge of usurpation would not have applied.⁹⁶

The problem of discernment was even more pressing when Delrio had to decide for himself, as one (final) example proves. The discovery of (kidney) stones in the urine of a count's son in Luxembourg in 1578 offered possible proof for the claim that the devil could form natural objects (such as stones) inside the human body: "Even though the majority attributed this to the *veneficium* of his adulterous wife (and he later ordered her killed by an assassin), it could nevertheless happen naturally, out of the corruption of the humors and defects of the kidneys. This wife was addicted to the sect of Calvin and more familiar with her minister than was decent; and so, through her morals and her faith she was no stranger to the suspicion of the common

⁹⁵ On the figure of Saint Anthony, see Stuart Clark, "Angels of Light and Images of Sanctity", in *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 279–304.

⁹⁶ The literature on late medieval and early modern visionaries, failed and officially recognized, is vast. On the difficulties faced by Teresa of Avila, see Colin Thompson, "Dangerous Visions: The Experience of Teresa of Avila and the Teaching of John of the Cross", in *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 53–74, and on the increasing hostility to women visionaries, see Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

people.”⁹⁷ After concluding that it was most probably a natural condition, Delrio turned his gaze back on the boy’s mother. The very structure of the anecdote highlights its ambivalence. Refusing to cast judgement himself, Delrio left it to his readers to decide. If the actions of demons were located within the preternatural realm – that part of nature humans were ignorant of – then the question of how they could be discerned was impossible to prove. Ignorance of causation only meant that demons *could* have done it, not that they did.

We can now see why Martin Delrio preferred textual *exempla* over personal experience, quantity over quality. The invocation of testimony that was, as he put it, “marvelously consistent throughout the whole of Europe and across all ages” was the only answer to a problem that was insoluble. Indeed, presenting an apparent consensus of age-old witnesses, in effect, ignored the problem of discernment of spirits altogether. These sources had to be taken on trust alone, authenticated only by their quantity and similarity. For those who accepted Delrio’s many *exempla* the *Disquisitiones* outlined the devil’s power, more convincingly than the work of Boguet or Rémy ever could. Yet this was a pyrrhic victory. Delrio’s textual source base failed to address the concerns and questions faced by judges. When he attempted to answer them, Delrio made an unwelcome but marvelously ironic discovery. He learned that only by isolating

⁹⁷ Delrio, *Disquisitiones*, vol. 2, 58: “etsi plerique uxoris eius adulterae (quam et occidi per sicarium ille postea iussit) veneficio tribuerent; potuit tamen naturaliter contingere, ex humorum corruptione, et renum vitio. Mulier illa Calvinii sectae erat addicta, et ministro familiarior, quam oportebat; ideo nec a moribus nec ab instituto aliena fuit vulgi suspicio.”

demonology from the real world could its inner demons be put to rest. The devil is, as they say, in the details.⁹⁸

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⁹⁸ On the challenges the *Disquisitiones* faced post-publication, see Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, chap. 11.

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