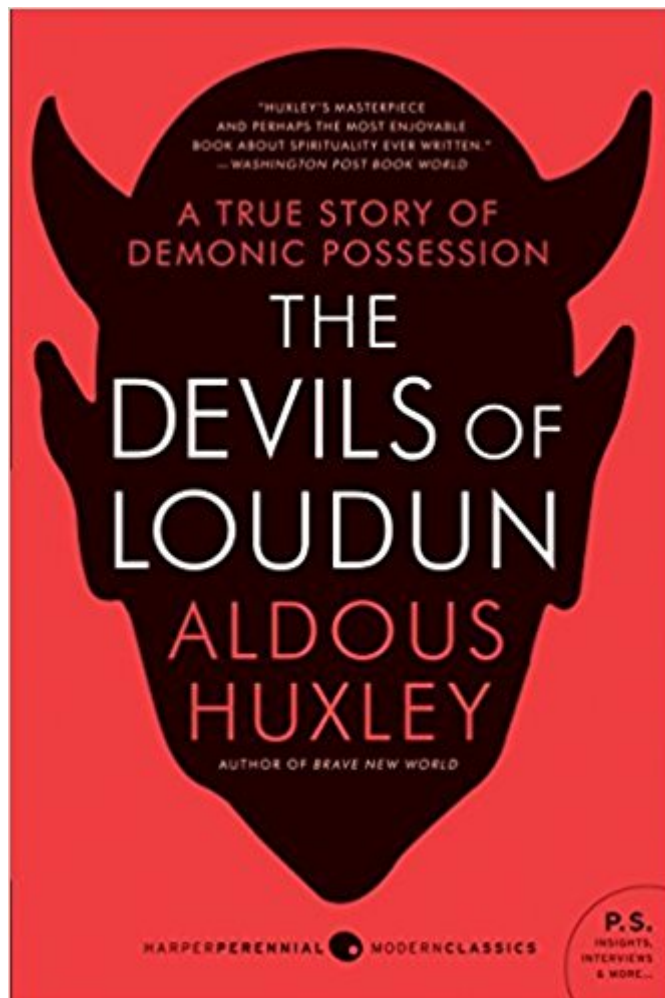


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The Devils Of Loudun



Synopsis

“HUXLEY’S MASTERPIECE AND PERHAPS THE MOST ENJOYABLE BOOK ABOUT SPIRITUALITY EVER WRITTEN.” — Washington Post Book World
Aldous Huxley’s “brilliant” (Los Angeles Times) and gripping account of one of the strangest occurrences in history, hailed as the “peak achievement of Huxley’s career” by the New York Times
In 1632 an entire convent in the small French village of Loudun was apparently possessed by the devil. After a sensational and celebrated trial, the convent’s charismatic priest Urban Grandier “accused of spiritually and sexually seducing the nuns in his charge” was convicted of being in league with Satan. Then he was burned at the stake for witchcraft.
A remarkable true story of religious and sexual obsession, *The Devils of Loudun* is considered by many to be *Brave New World* author Aldous Huxley’s nonfiction masterpiece.

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Customer Reviews

"Huxley has reconstructed with skill, learning and horror one of the most appalling incidents in the history of witch-hunting during its seventeenth-century heyday. *The Devils of Loudun* is fascinating, erudite, and instinct with intellectual vitality" *Times Literary Supplement*
"Huxley's analysis of motive, his exposition of the unconscious causes of behaviour, his exposure of the perversions to which religious emotion is subject, his discursions on the witch cult, on mass hysteria, on sexual eccentricity have the brilliance that all his writing has had from the very beginning" *Spectator*
"One of Huxley's best books" *Guardian*
"His masterpiece, and perhaps the most enjoyable book about

spirituality ever written. In telling the grotesque, bawdy and true story of a 17th-century convent of cloistered French nuns who contrived to have a priest they never met burned alive ...Huxley painlessly conveys a wealth of information about mysticism and the unconscious" Washington Post --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Aldous Huxley's acclaimed and gripping account of one of the strangest occurrences in history. In 1632 an entire convent in the small French village of Loudun was apparently possessed by the devil. After a sensational and celebrated trial, the convent's charismatic priest Urban Grandier "accused of spiritually and sexually seducing the nuns in his charge" was convicted of being in league with Satan. Then he was burned at the stake for witchcraft. In this classic work by the legendary Aldous Huxley "a remarkable true story of religious and sexual obsession considered by many to be his nonfiction masterpiece" a compelling historical event is clarified and brought to vivid life.

Well, first things first: if you're at all interested in the spiritual and intellectual life of 17th century France, then you need to read this book. Huxley does a masterful job- in my opinion- of evoking a France under the nominal reign of a weak and superstitious king (Louis XIII) but actually under the arbitrary and oppressive rule of his minister (Richelieu). The author paints a vivid picture of a milieu in which both Renaissance learning and the most rank medieval superstition go hand in hand. We likewise see venality and corruption juxtaposed with generosity and holiness of life. Richelieu on the one hand and a Fr. Surin on the other. What I particularly enjoyed was Huxley's refusal- in spite of the obvious temptation- to fall into pat roles, however, of black and white- good versus evil. The evil players in this dramatized historical account of the supposedly demonic possessions of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun France, such as Richelieu, are never portrayed as totally evil; nor are the saintly players, such as Surin, portrayed as totally good. Richelieu has his moments of generosity and patriotism and Surin - Huxley very correctly paints- had his periods of eccentric behavior bordering on insanity. My only problem with the book- I suppose- and this is a minor one) is that Huxley often wanders off into personal comment and philosophical musings about the nature of good and evil and other personal asides which I think add nothing to the narrative; indeed I think they detracted from the flow of the story. Still, all in all, this story of a judicial murder and one is tempted to say mass hysteria in Baroque France well deserves its reputation as a classic of the genre of historical fiction or - rather- dramatized history in the tradition of Capote's "In Cold Blood."

I really like Ken Russell's brilliant and bizarre film "The Devils" and so I was really looking forward to reading Huxley's book. Russell cherry picked from the book most of the best passages that would be visually striking such as the apothecary's stuffed alligator, huge enemas used as torture devices, and the scene with the false relic presented to the exorcists. As expected Huxley the scholar goes deeper and explores the psychological, political, and spiritual aspects of this whole sordid affair. I found the fleshed out background stories of the main players to be very interesting. The cynical power hungry sadist Lauberdemont comes through as a truly reprehensible villain. Sister Jeanne's conflicted motivations and Grandier's inner turmoil are also examined from a variety of different angles and so there is a more well rounded understanding of these people. Huxley doesn't lead the reader on. He provides the information and the insight so that one can decide for oneself what to make of this tragic drama. I can only guess that the source material was somewhat limited because about half the book is focussed on Huxley's psychological theories mixed with theology. It is a bit dry in some of these passages. He also has a deep interest in the fairly tangential Father Surin who suffered mightily for years from what appear to be psychosomatic terrors. Indeed a sizeable portion of the book is spent exploring Surin's difficult life in the decades following the events in Loudoun. I found Surin to be suffering from debilitating spiritual schizophrenia. Once that is established and the demonic possessions are long in the past, Surin's torments and self flagellating become less and less germane to the story and frankly I found myself wondering why his story deserved so many pages. I suspect that there was a sizeable amount of information written by and about Surin and perhaps this influenced Huxley's choice of subject matter. Overall this was a thought provoking book that stretched a strange and tragic series of events a bit too thin while padding the page count with somewhat dry academic material. If you have a strong interest in 17th century French history and the role of theology in politics, you will probably be satisfied. If you are looking more for the sensational exorcisms, possessed nuns, and witch burnings I highly recommend Ken Russell's film.

It calls itself "a true story of demonic possession." It is equally a story of politics, of common men in dubious battle with the most powerful entities in their lives - the Catholic Church and the French government. The possession is a sideshow, a very well documented sideshow, but the players are the real story. It may be the most thoroughly documented case of possession in history.

Aldous Huxley is one of the best writers and thinkers of the century. This is one of his best works, better than *Brave New World*. A novel like treatment of true events, an incredible view of France during the inquisition.

This is a true story of a convent in the 16th century and is a wonderful reason to abolish religion and other superstitious nonsense

Amazing book! Very intense read!

excellent historical document. good christian resource concerning the fallacy of witch burnings and demon possession post Christ ascension. Also entertaining and well-written. but a great historical reference document.

A masterpiece depicting in an extraordinary way human behavior. Paulo Correia Parede, Portugal

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