

The Trial of Suzanne Gaudry (1652)

The trial of Suzanne Gaudry, preserved in oddly meticulous court records, offers a view of a case close to the traditional stereotype of witchcraft persecutions: the pathetic and illiterate old woman, the sabbath, the nocturnal flights, the carnal love of the devil, the effective use of terror and torture to obtain a confession, the recantation and burning at the stake, all brought together in a judicial atmosphere composed half of orderly interrogation and half of frightful insinuation and contradiction. The "leading questions," drawn from the "experience" of past centuries, show how a local secular court coordinated its activities to general traditions, and make clearer how the content of confessions remained so constant throughout the period of persecutions.

At Ronchain, 28 May, 1652. . . . **Interrogation of Suzanne Gaudry, prisoner at the court of Rieux.** Questioned about her age, her place of origin, her mother and father. -Said that she is named Suzanne Gaudry, daughter of Jean Gaudry and Marguerite Gerné, both natives of Rieux, but that she is from Esgavans, near Odenarde, where her family had taken refuge because of the wars, that she was born the day that they made bonfires for the Peace between France and Spain, without being able otherwise to say her age. Asked why she has been taken here. -Answers that it is for the salvation of her soul. -Says that she was frightened of being taken prisoner for the crime of witchcraft. Asked for how long she has been in the service of the devil. -Says that about twenty-five or twenty-six years ago she was his lover, that he called himself Petit-Grignon, that he would wear black breeches, that he gave her the name Magin, that she gave him a pin with which he gave her his mark on the left shoulder, that he had a little flat hat; said also that he had his way with her two or three times only. Asked how many times she has been at the nocturnal dance.

--Answers that she has been there about a dozen times, having first of all renounced God, Lent and baptism; that the site of the dance was at the little marsh of Rieux, understanding that there were diverse dances. The first time, she did not recognize anyone there, because she was half blind. The other times, she saw and recognized there Noelle and Pasquette Gerné, Noelle the wife of Nochin Quinchou and the mother of Paul Doris, the widow Marie Nourette, not having recognized others because the young people went with the young people and the old people with the old. And that when the dance was large, the table also was accordingly large.

Questioned what was on the table. -Says that there was neither salt nor napkin, that she does not know what there was because she never ate there. That her lover took her there and back. Asked if her lover had never given her some powder. -Answers that he offered her some, but that she never wanted to take any, saying to her that it was to do with what she wanted, that this powder was gray, that her lover told her she would ruin someone but good, and that he would help her, especially that she would ruin Elisabeth Dehan, which she at no time

wanted to do, although her lover was pressing her to do it, because this Elisabeth had battered his crops with a club. Interrogated on how and in what way they danced.

--Says that they dance in an ordinary way, that there was a guitarist and some whistlers who appeared to be men she did not know; which lasted about an hour, and then everyone collapsed from exhaustion. Inquired what happened after the dance. -Says that they formed a circle, that there was a king with a long black beard dressed in black, with a red hat, who made everyone do his bidding, and that after the dance he made a . . . [the word is missing in the text], and then everyone disappeared. . . . Interrogated on how long it has been since she has seen Grignon, her lover. -Says that it has been three or four days. Questioned if she has abused the Holy Communion. -Says no, never, and that she has always swallowed it. Then says that her lover asked her for it several times, but that she did not want to give it to him. After several admonitions were sent to her, she has signed this

Mark X Suzanne Gaudry

Second Interrogation, May 29, 1652,

In the presence of the afore-mentioned. This prisoner, being brought back into the chamber, was informed about the facts and the charges and asked if what she declared and confessed yesterday is true. -Answers that if it is in order to put her in prison it is not true; then after having remained silent said that it is true.

Asked what is her lover's name and what name has he given himself. --Said that his name is Grignon and that he calls himself Magnin.

Asked where he found her the first time and what he did to her. --Answers that it was in her lodgings, that he had a hide, little black breeches, and a little flat hat; that he asked her for a pin, which she gave to him, with which he made his mark on her left shoulder. Said also that at the time she took him oil in a bottle and that she had thoughts of love.

Asked how long she has been in subjugation to the devil. --Says that it has been about twenty-five or twenty-six years, that her lover also then made her renounce God, Lent, and baptism, that he has known her carnally three or four times, and that he has given her satisfaction. And on the subject of his having asked her if she wasn't afraid of having a baby, says that she did not have that thought.

Asked how many times she found herself at the nocturnal dance and carol and who she recognized there. --Answers that she was there eleven or twelve times, that she went there on foot with her lover, where the third time she saw and recognized Pasquette and Noelle Gerné, and Marie Homitte, to whom she never

spoke, for the reason that they did not speak to each other. And that the sabbat took place at the little meadow. . . .

Interrogated on how long it is since she saw her lover, and if she also did nor see Marie Hourie and her daughter Marie at the dance. --Said that it has been a long time, to wit, just about two years, and that she saw neither Marie Hourie nor her daughter there; then later said, after having asked for some time to think about it, that it has been a good fifteen days or three weeks [since she saw him]. having renounced all the devils of hell and the one who misled her.

Asked what occurred at the dance and afterwards. --Says that right after the dance they put themselves in order and approached the chief figure, who had a long black beard, dressed also in black, with a red hat, at which point they were given some powder, to do with it what they wanted; but that she did not want to take any.

Charged with having taken some and with having used it evilly. --Says, after having insisted that she did not want to take any, that she took some, and that her lover advised her to do evil with it; but that she did not want to do it.

Asked if, not obeying his orders, she was beaten or threatened by him, and what did she do with this powder. --Answers that never was she beaten; she invoked the name of the Virgin and answered that she threw away the powder that she had, not having wanted to do any evil with it.

Pressed to say what she did with this powder. Did she not fear her lover too much to have thrown it away? --Says, after having been pressed on this question, that she made the herbs in her garden die at the end of the summer, five to six years ago, by means of the powder, which she threw there because she did not know what to do with it.

Asked if the devil did not advise her to steal from Elisabeth Dehan and to do harm to her. --Said that he advised her to steal from her and promised that he would help her; but urged her not to do harm to her; and that is because she [Elisabeth Dehan] had cut the wood in her [Suzanne Gaudry's] fence and stirred up the seeds in her garden, saying that her lover told her that she would avenge herself by beating her.

Charged once more with having performed some malefice with this powder, pressed to tell the truth. --Answers that she never made any person or beast die; then later said that she made Philippe Cornié's red horse die, about two or three years ago, by means of the powder, which she placed where he had to pass, in the street close to her home.

Asked why she did that and if she had had any difficulty with him. -Says that she had had some difficulty with his wife, because her cow had eaten the leeks.

Interrogated on how and in what way they dance in the carol. --Says that they dance in a circle, holding each others' hands, and each one with her lover at her side, at which she says that they do not speak to each other, or if they speak that she did not hear it, because of her being hard-of-hearing. At which there was a guitarist and a piper, whom she did not know; then later says that it is the devils who play.

After having been admonished to think of her conscience, was returned to prison after having signed this Mark X Suzanne Gaudry

Deliberation of the Court of Mons-June 3,1652

The under-signed advocates of the Court of Mons have seen these interrogations and answers. They say that the aforementioned Suzanne Gaudry confesses that she is a witch, that she has given herself to the devil, that she has renounced God, Lent, and baptism, that she has been marked on the shoulder, that she has cohabited with him and that she has been to the dances, confessing only to have cast a spell upon and caused to die a beast of Philippe Cornié; but there is no evidence for this, excepting a prior statement. For this reason, before going further, it will be necessary to become acquainted with, to examine and to probe the mark, and to hear Philippe Cornié on the death of the horse and on when and in what way he died. . . .

Deliberation of the Court of Mons-June 13, 1652 [The Court] has reviewed the current criminal trial of Suzanne Gaudry, and with it the trial of Antoinette Lescouffre, also a prisoner of the same office. It appeared [to the Court] that the office should have the places probed where the prisoners say that they have received the mark of the devil, and after that, they must be interrogated and examined seriously on their confessions and denials, this having to be done, in order to regulate all this definitively. . . .

Deliberation of the Court of Mons, June 22, 1652 The trials of Antoinette Lescouffre and Suzanne Gaudry having been described to the undersigned, advocates of the Court of Mons, and [the Court] having been told orally that the peasants taking them to prison had persuaded them to confess in order to avoid imprisonment, and that they would be let go, by virtue of which it could appear that the confessions were not so spontaneous: They are of the opinion that the office, in its duty, would do well, following the two preceding resolutions, to have the places of the marks that they have taught us about probed, and if it is found that these are ordinary marks of the devil, one can proceed to their examination; then next to the first confessions, and if they deny [these], one can proceed to the torture, given that they issue from bewitched relatives, that at all times they have been suspect, that they fled to avoid the crime [that is to say, prosecution for the crime of witchcraft], and that by their confessions they have confirmed [their guilt], notwithstanding that they have wanted to revoke [their confessions] and vacillate. . . .

Third Interrogation, June 27, in the presence of the afore-mentioned. The prisoner being led into the chamber, she was examined to know if things were not as she had said and confessed at the beginning of her imprisonment. -- Answers no, and that what she has said was done so by force.

Asked if she did not say to Jean Gradé that she would tell his uncle, the mayor, that he had better be careful. . . and that he was a Frank. --Said that that is not true.

Pressed to say the truth, that otherwise she would be subjected to torture, having pointed out to her that her aunt was burned for this same subject. --Answers that she is not a witch.

Interrogated as to how long she has been in subjection to the devil, and pressed that she was to renounce the devil and the one who misled her. --Says that she is not a witch, that she has nothing to do with the devil, thus that she did not want to renounce the devil, saying that he has not misled her, and upon inquisition of having confessed to being present at the carol, she insisted that although she had said that, it is not true and that she is not a witch.

Charged with having confessed to having made a horse die by means of a powder that the devil had given her. --Answers that she said it, but because she found herself during the inquisition pressed to say that she must have done some evil deed; and after several admonitions to tell the truth. She was placed in the hands of the officer of the *haultes oeuvres* [the officer in charge of torture], throwing herself on her knees, struggling to cry, uttering several exclamations, without being able, nevertheless, to shed a tear. Saying at every moment that she is not a witch.

The Torture

On this same day, being at the place of torture. This prisoner, before being strapped down, was admonished to maintain herself in her first confessions and to renounce her lover. --Said that she denies everything she has said, and that she has no lover. Feeling herself being strapped down, says that she is not a witch, while struggling to cry.

Asked why she fled outside the village of Rieux. --Says that she cannot say it, that God and the Virgin Mary forbid her to; that she is not a witch.

And upon being asked why she confessed to being one, said that she was forced to say it. Told that she was not forced, that on the contrary she declared herself to be a witch without any threat. --Says that she confessed it and that she is not a witch, and being a little stretched [on the rack] screams ceaselessly that she is not a witch, invoking the name of Jesus and of Our Lady of Grace, not wanting to

say any other thing.

Asked if she did not confess that she has been a witch for twenty-six years. -- Says that she said it, that she retracted it, crying Jesus-Maria, that she is not a witch.

Asked if she did not make Philippe Cornié's horse die, as she confessed. -- Answers no, crying Jesus-Maria, that she is not a witch. The mark having been probed by the officer, in the presence of Doctor Bouchain, it was adjudged by the doctor and officer truly to be the mark of the devil.

Being more tightly stretched upon the torture-rack, urged to maintain her confessions. --Said that it was true that she is a witch and that she would maintain what she had said.

Asked how long she has been in subjugation to the devil. --Answers that it was twenty years ago that the devil appeared to her, being in her lodgings in the form of a man dressed in a little cow-hide and black breeches.

Interrogated as to what her lover was called. --Says that she said Petit-Grignon, then, being taken down [from the rack] says upon interrogation that she is not a witch and that she can say nothing.

Asked if her lover has had carnal copulation with her, and how many times. --To that she did not answer anything; then, making believe that she was ill, not another word could be drawn from her. As soon as she began to confess, she asked who was alongside of her, touching her, yet none of those present could see anyone there. And it was noticed that as soon as that was said, she no longer wanted to confess anything. Which is why she was returned to prison.

Verdict July 9, 1652 In the light of the interrogations, answers and investigations made into the charge against Suzanne Gaudry, coupled with her confessions, from which it would appear that she has always been reputed for being stained with the crime of witchcraft, and seeing that she took flight and sought refuge in this city of Valenciennes, out of fear of being apprehended by the law for this matter; seeing how her close family were also stained with the same crime, and the perpetrators executed; seeing by her own confessions that she is said to have made a pact with the devil, received the mark from him, which in the report of sieur Michel de Roux was judged by the medical doctor of Ronchain and the officer of *hautes oeuvres* of Cambrai, after having proved it, to be not a natural mark but a mark of the devil, to which they have sworn with an oath; and that following this, she had renounced God, Lent, and baptism and had let herself be known carnally by him, in which she received satisfaction. Also, seeing that she is said to have been a part of nocturnal carols and dances. Which are crimes of divine lese-majesty: For expiation of which the advice of the undersigned is that the office of Rieux can legitimately condemn the aforesaid Suzanne Gaudry to

death, tying her to a gallows, and strangling her to death, then burning her body and burying it there in the environs of the woods. At Valenciennes, the 9th of July, 1652. To each [member of the Court] 41ivres, 16 sous. . . . And for the trip of the aforementioned Roux, including an escort of one soldier, 30 livres. .