‘Please Don’t Burn Me, I Must Pray’: Agency and the Relationships Between Common Women Within the 1652 Trial of Michée Chauderon

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Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate my thesis to Michée Chauderon, the woman whose witch trial this microhistory follows. Through my close reading of this trial and my analysis of her identity, I have grown to genuinely care about her and all of the other women executed during the European witch hunt. As my supervisor, Dr. Sara Beam once said, I adopted the role of Michée's legal defense that just arrived a little bit late.

This project would have been inconceivable without the help and patience of my supervisor, Dr. Beam, who not only brought this trial to my attention, but also guided me through the process. Thank you so much. I also want to extend thanks to my parents and my friends Amber Fill and Cat Watt for dedicating hours of their time editing my extremely rough drafts.

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Introduction

The European Witch Trials

From the late fifteenth century until the early eighteenth century, witch hunts occurred across Europe influenced by books such as the Malleus Maleficarum. These books detail how to identify and persecute witches, and an estimated 50,000 accused witches—most of them women—were tried and executed.[1] These witch hunts were not a unified front; rather, the attitudes and processes differed greatly between countries and even between different towns. For example, in the Parlement of Rouen— the court governing Normandy, France— torture would be applied only once, which resulted in almost all of the accused refusing to confess.[2] In comparison, the decentralized Holy Roman Empire had no limits on torture, which was seen in the case of Maria Holl in Nördlingen, 1594. Maria survived 62 rounds of torture before finally being released by the courts.[3] This demonstrates that while a fear and awareness of witches was widespread across Europe, the specifics of how the witches behaved and how they should be punished varied widely.

Looking back on the legacy of the witch trials, it is easy to dismiss the mass targeting and execution of accused witches as ignorance and superstition. However, a strong belief in witches was essential for personal safety and faith.[4] A belief in God was a mandatory aspect of early modern lives, and witches were born of the devil; thus, people were expected to maintain belief in witches as well. This obligatory belief, however, did not stop early modern people from

[1] Christopher S Mackay and Heinrich Institoris, *The Hammer of Witches : A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*. (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2009); Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London: Routledge, 2016), 317.
[2] Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London: Routledge, 2016), 207.
[3] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 206.
[4] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 3.

possessing reason and logic, even within witch trials.[5] This thesis follows one particular trial, the 1652 trial of Michée Chauderon, the last witch ever executed in Geneva.

Seventeenth-Century Geneva

To understand the sequence of events within Michée's trial, one must understand the social and judicial climate of Geneva. Geneva was a strictly Protestant republic situated next to the large Swiss Confederation, viewing themselves as a "righteous island" surrounded by lesser Catholics.[6] In the late seventeenth century, Geneva was a small republic of 15,000 people, creating an intimate community within which secrets rarely stayed secret for long.[7] This republic was headed by the Small Council, a group of 25 elite men who, while considered noble and respected, were not required to have legal training.[8] This lack of university-level legal training, coupled with Geneva's lack of specific descriptions of crimes in their statutes, resulted in a judicial system heavily reliant on an adapted version of imperial Roman law.[9] Roman law was an essential aspect of justice across Western Europe, creating a shared legal framework that heavily emphasized the discovery of truth— an ideal that is both upheld and contradicted in Michée's trial. The Small Council did aim to discover the truth, but as I will be discussing, their version of truth was carefully guided to result in a specific outcome.

The Small Council was the judicial and administrative hub of Geneva, keeping a watchful eye on their tiny state.[10] Trials would typically begin once someone denounced another for a crime, though in this trial, the person who began the process was never confirmed.[11] Based on the dates that are recorded within the trial, we know that Michée was arrested before the witness

[5] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 2.
[6] Sara Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine: Infanticide in Early Modern Geneva* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 14.
[7] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine*, 9.
[8] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine*, 9.
[9] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine*, 17.
[10] William E. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 145.
[11] Raymond Mentzer, "The Self-Image of the Magistrate in Sixteenth-Century France," *Criminal Justice History* 5 (1984): 26.

testimonies. Unlike in the modern justice system, the witnesses gave their testimony in the presence of the clerk and *auditeur*— a public investigator— only, meaning that Michée would not be privy to the testimonies that were given. The only time that Michée would come face to face with the witnesses would be during a confrontation, which is where the defendant would attempt to preserve their version of the truth when confronted with a witness often claiming the opposite. This ritual was a formal and established part of Roman Law, seen as helping to uncover truth.[12] Torture was a well-established practice in Geneva, and Michée was primarily tortured with *la sellette* and *l'estrapade. La sellette* is a stool that the accused sits on, while boards around their feet are tightened with screws. *L'estrapad*e was another common torture technique where the defendant was hoisted by cords tied around their arms behind their back and then dropped sharply. While there were not any formal laws surrounding the number of times one could be tortured in Geneva, officials almost never surpassed three rounds.[13] This was the case for Michée, who confessed during her third ordeal. This practice reflected Geneva's broader legal culture, which was particularly severe in punishing crimes that threatened the social order, such as infanticide and witchcraft.[14]

Historiography

Emerging in the 1960s, microhistories are defined by historian Sigurður Magnusson as "the intensive historical investigation of a relatively well-defined smaller object."[15] Unlike traditional historical works which cover a broad historical period, microhistories tend to focus on

[12] Mentzer, "The Self-Image of the Magistrate in Sixteenth-Century France," 31.
[13] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine,* 25.
[14] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine,* 31.
[15] Sigurður G. Magnusson and Istvan Szijarto, *What Is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 5.

a singular event, person, or town. Historians utilize these hyper-specific topics to explore broader themes and trends in the larger historical narrative. Additionally, the emphasis on individual actors often reinforces the importance of agency. For microhistorians, people are not puppets controlled by the larger forces of history— rather, they are active agents in shaping their own experiences.[16] More specifically, microhistories often highlight who had agency and who did not, while examining how power dynamics operated within the larger historical context.

One key figure in the microhistory genre is Carlo Ginzburg, who wrote *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976). This book follows the miller Menocchio, who was executed by the Italian inquisition for heresy, with Ginzburg using the case to observe the intellectual culture of common people.[17] Another famous microhistorian is Natalie Zemon Davis, whose seminal work, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1982), challenged traditional notions of the historian's role by granting the character of Bertrande agency and intelligence.[18] Davis faced controversy surrounding this choice, being accused by Robert Finlay of imposing her own notions of peasant women onto Betrande.[19] However, Davis defended herself by categorically going through the text and listing her reasons as to why she bestowed autonomy onto Bertrande.[20] These more intimate scopes often create a more emotionally evocative narrative than a traditional historical argument. Due to the emphasis on individual actors, readers are able to identify with the historical figures. This allows non-historians to engage with the work more readily. However, microhistories are not without their pitfalls. They are often criticized for over-generalizing small-scale studies, as well as occasionally being described as "bland, unconventional oatmeal"

[16] Magnusson & Szijarto, *What is Microhistory?:Theory and Practice*, 6.
[17] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
[18] Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[19] Robert Finlay, "The Refashioning of Martin Guerre." *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (1988): 557.
[20] Natalie Zemon Davis, "On the Lame." *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (1988): 576.

by some traditional historians.[21] However, for Michée's trial, a microhistory allows me to focus on more intimate details, such as her personal character and agency, as well as the relationships between common women, which might be lost in a larger historical scope.

This microhistory focuses on the 1652 trial of Michée Chauderon. The trial includes interrogations, witness testimonies, and surgical reports, creating a detailed reconstruction of the event as it unfolded. The trial is in the seventeenth-century French language, which I have translated and reviewed with the translation software Deepl. My thesis utilizes Michée's trial to contribute to larger historical discussions surrounding the lives and agency of early modern women.

Positionality Statement

As a feminist who is primarily interested in women's history, this trial was incredibly compelling from the start. However, while my goal to prove Michée's agency and competence is a personal one, I was aware from the first draft that I was approaching this topic with an agenda. Thus, for any claim that I make about Michée's identity and agency, I made sure that I had multiple in-trial examples, as well as sufficient secondary literature adding additional context and argumentation. While I acknowledge the inherent bias I bring to this work, I believe that my research stands on its own merit. Through a careful study of witch trial literature and close reading of the trial, my thesis offers an interpretation of the role agency played in the trial of Michée Chauderon.

[21] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, translated by Joel Harrington in "Tortured Truths: The Self-Expositions of a Juvenile Career Criminal in Early Modern Nuremberg," *German History* 23 (2005): 145.

Thesis Overview

My thesis is structured in two sections: chapter one is a narrative that provides context and important information about the trial. Following the narrative is my analysis, where I focus on selected themes and ideas, one of which being agency.

Agency within witch trials is a heavily debated topic, with historians such as Emma Wilby arguing that the experience of interrogation within a witch trial is traumatic and jarring to the degree that it compromises the accused's agency.[22] This argument holds weight, as we do not typically associate agency with the accusation of witchcraft, an accusation that completely removed the accused's identity and reduced them to a vessel for societal anxieties.[23] Meanwhile, early-modern historian Laura Kounine, although agreeing that on the surface witch trials seem to completely strip a person of their agency, proposes that a careful unraveling of trial narratives reveals the subtle ways people exerted resistance.[24] I argue that while Michée Chauderon is forced into the restrictive condition of a witch trial, she is still able to exert her own forms of agency within the restrictive judicial system. Primarily, I argue that at the time of her confession, Michée did not truly believe she was a witch.

Looking back, it is easy to assume, much like modern historians do, that the accused witches did not actually believe they wielded supernatural powers. However, in their state of pain and confusion, the accused often came to believe that God had abandoned them and they deserved this due to their sins. Many then believed that the sins that warranted God's desertion

[22] Emma Wilby, *Invoking the Akelarre: Voices of the Accused in the Basque Witch-Craze, 1609-1614* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 39.
[23] Agency is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as the ability to take action.
[24] Laura Kounine, *Imagining the Witch: Emotions, Gender, and Selfhood in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 104.

was witchcraft.[25] However, in Michée's case, her potential agency is evident in two key ways: her mental fortitude to continue believing in her innocence, and her choice to confess— choosing to face a quick death rather than a slow one at the hands of banishment. I aim to suggest Michée possessed agency because witch trials as a whole constituted a systemic removal of agency and autonomy from accused women. I feel that if I can prove that Michée was still able to exert some agency within an incredibly restrictive judicial system, then it renders the witch trials slightly less bleak.

Besides Michée's agency, I also analyze the complex social relationships between common women as seen within the trial, and how these dynamics impacted the course of the trial. From the power that the other women of Geneva wielded over Michée, to the societal expectations that influenced their interactions, these relationships played a crucial part in shaping the trial's outcome. Finally, I attempt to uncover the possible reasons why the court decided to execute her, because the circumstances surrounding her execution were highly suspect. By examining these themes, my thesis sheds light on how individual agency, social dynamics, and judicial power intersected in Michée's trial— ultimately shaping her fate.

[25] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 17.

List of Important People:

Michée Chauderon — The Accused Witch, 55-year-old widowed laundrywoman who had lived in Geneva for 30 years

Admitted Victims:

Pernette Guillermet — The primary victim and primary instigator of claims against Michée, was thought to be possessed by a demon

Elisabeth Valin — The secondary victim, believed that she was cursed by Michée before the trial, but was cured, so she is not ill or possessed at the time of the trial

Denied Victims:

Gabrielle Malbosson — A young girl who had been ill for months after Michée kissed her face

Jeanne Darlod — Claimed that Michée had hurt her arm and cursed her to become sick

Witnesses:

Bernarde du Coste — Witnessed Pernette asking Michée to cure her through a special broth

Etienna Cleijaz — Pernette attacked her and her husband while she was possessed

Jeanne Palluard — Witnessed Pernette stating that she and Michée are bound together as demon and mistress

Jeanne Darlod — Witnessed Pernette eating pieces of straw that came from Michée's bed

Pernette Chamoz — Witnessed Elisabeth after being cured, and later witnessed her flee from Michée out of fear

Sara Chartier — Witnessed Elisabeth Valin's mother Louise express her distrust of Michée

Gabrielle Aubert — Witnessed both Pernette and Elisabeth speak about being cursed together, additionally witnessed Pernette's violent fantasies about murdering Michée

Suzanne Malbosson — The mother of Gabrielle, claimed that Michée kissing her Gabrielle made her sick

Other Individuals:

Elisabeth Royaume — Mother of Pernette Guillermet and a former employer of Michée. Michée and Elisabeth previously argued about a missing lamp

Christophe Valin — Father of Elisabeth Valin and former employer of Michée

Louise Valin — Deceased mother of Elisabeth Valin who distrusted Michée

The Genevan Surgeons — A group of surgeons who performed medical procedures on Michée to find proof of witchcraft, ie. a Devil's mark

The Non-Genevan Doctors — A group of surgeons and physicians brought in from outside Geneva who declared Michée had the Devil's mark

The Devil — Appeared to Michée as a donkey, a dog, a shadow and a hare (varying accounts), gave her poison and incited her to violence

Timeline of the Trial:

- 1622— Michee arrives in Geneva from Boëge, a village in the Catholic region of Savoy
- December 1639 — Michée is tried and convicted of *paillardise* (sexual immorality), and banished from Geneva
- 1648 — Michee is employed by several families as a washerwoman
- 1649 — Michee eats peas with Elisabeth Valin while Elizabeth is in the hospital
- 1649-1650 — Elisabeth is ill
- 1650 — Elisabeth is cured by a broth Michée makes
- 1650 — Michée claims to have been marked by a shadow (the Devil) while coming back from the town of Cologny (Michée also stated that this occurred in 1651)
- September 1650 — Michee claims to have given Elisabeth the poisoned white apple
- November 1651 — Michée claims the Devil provided her with the white apple (contradiction with the above event)
- January 1652 — Bernarde witnesses Pernette's unusual behavior
- March 4, 1652 — Michée undergoes the first interrogation
- March 5, 1652 — First round of witness testimonies are gathered
- March 6, 1652 — Michée's second round of interrogation (after being officially imprisoned)
- March 6-11, 1652 — The first and second Genevan doctors examinations of Michée
- March 12, 1652 — Michée's third round of interrogation
- March 12-19, 1652 — The third doctor's examination (non-local) of Michée
- March 20, 1652 — Michée's third round of interrogation
- March 30, 1652 — Michée's fourth round of interrogation (torture begins)
- April 1, 1652 — **Michée's Confession**
- April 2, 1652 — Michée's fifth round of interrogation
- April 6, 1652 — Michée is sentenced to death and executed

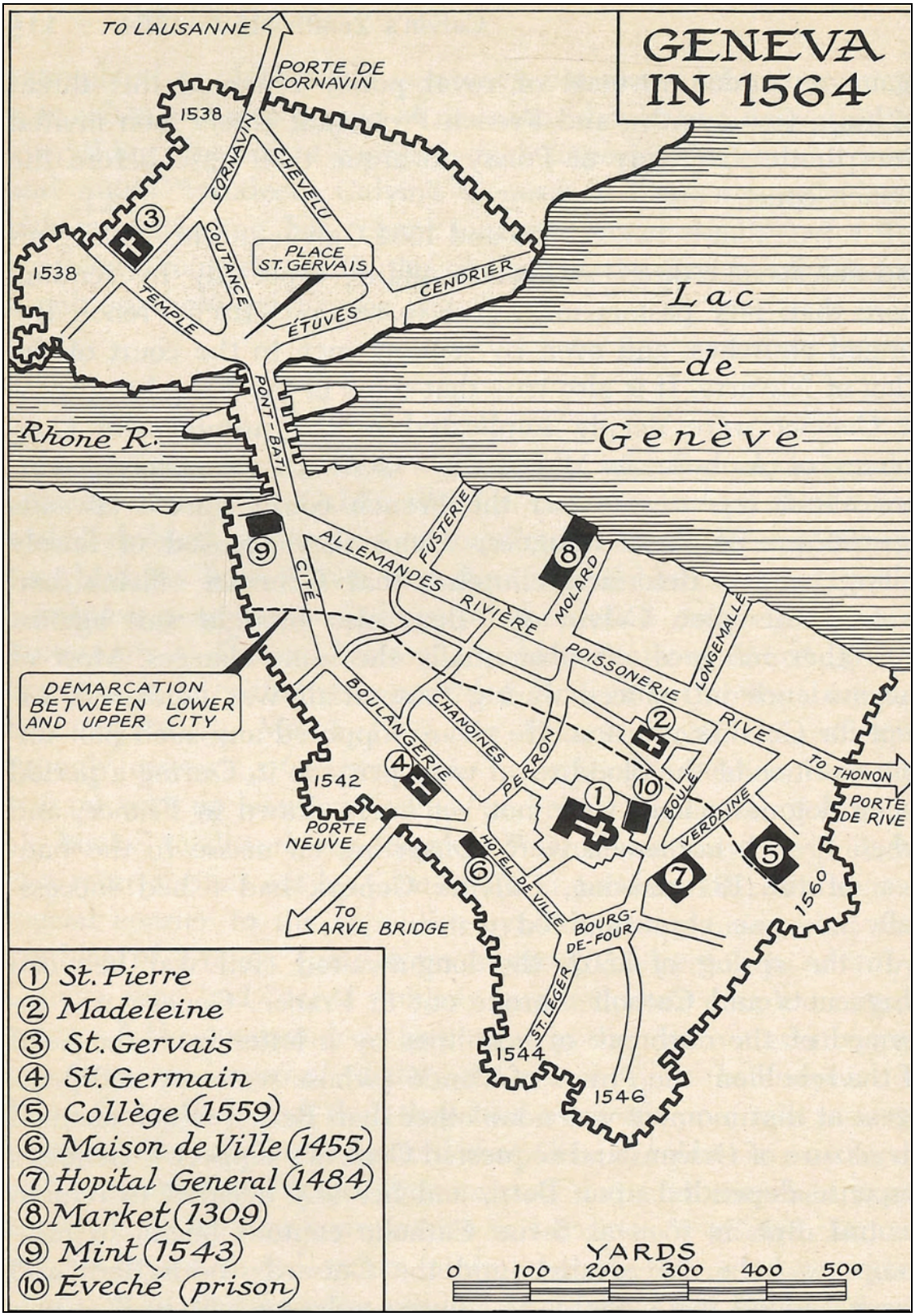

Figure 1: Map of Geneva, Calvin's Geneva, *John Wiley and Sons.*

Chapter One: The Trial

On March 4, 1652, widowed washerwoman Michée Chauderon was interrogated for the first time by the Small Council of Geneva. She had moved from the nearby commune of Boëge 30 years earlier, meeting her late husband, Louis Ducrest in Geneva. Since Boëge was a Catholic commune at the time and Geneva was staunchly Protestant, her origins might have been a factor in the suspicion against her. Michée and Louis quickly became romantically entangled whilst unmarried, leading to Michée's first conviction: "*paillardise,"* meaning sexual immorality.[26] As punishment, both her and her husband were banished from Geneva. As "crimes of the flesh" were typically invisible until pregnancy revealed the crime, it is likely that Michée was pregnant when she was banished.[27] However, at the time of the trial, no child is ever mentioned. Since her husband's passing, Michée had worked as a washerwoman with many employers, spending time in people's homes and with their children. Although Michée was a well integrated member of the community, her independent status as a widow could be seen as a threat to the patriarchal norm, resulting in fear and suspicion towards her.[28]

Pernette and Elizabeth

In 1648, Michée provided her services as a washerwoman to the Guillermet family. During this period, Michée spent time with their then 19-year-old daughter, Pernette Guillermet. Michée ceased her work with the Guillemets that year after Michée and Elisabeth Royaume (Pernette's mother) had an argument surrounding a missing lamp. However, her mark on the family would be long-lasting. In the following years, Pernette began to act strangely. Throughout

[26] Michel Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable: Michée Chauderon, dernière sorcière exécutée à Genève*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: Éditions Georg, 2019), 235.
[27] Ulinka Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 144.
[28] Janine Marie Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

the trial, Pernette's behaviour is described both by Michée and various witnesses as strange, violent, and showing signs of being possessed. By the late seventeenth century, diabolical possession was by far the most common conception of witchcraft in Geneva.[29] It was often associated with violent fits and accusations of witchcraft.[30] While Pernette matches this conceptualization in most aspects, some— such as the ability to speak other languages— are not present, which is addressed within the first surgeon's report. This fixation on diabolical possession is particularly evident as three of the four witch trials in Geneva preceding Michée's, as well as three of the four after hers, followed the same pattern.[31] It was Pernette's behaviour that initiated the trial. Pernette says several times that the demons inside of her refer to Michée as her "mistress." Through this phrasing, Pernette positions Michée as the cause behind her possession, holding Michée responsible for putting the demons inside of her. From a modern perspective, we can speculate as to the true nature of Pernette's possession, whether mental illness or a personal vendetta, but unfortunately, we will never know for sure.

The second victim, Elisabeth Valin, tells a very different story. Infamous witch trials such as those in Salem, Massachusetts, often began with multiple individuals exhibiting identical symptoms, as seen with the two girls who began the Salem witch craze, Elizabeth Parris and Abigail Williams.[32] In another example, during the Loudun Possessions of 1633, the possessed nuns all had near identical symptoms: hearing voices, experiencing phantom blows, and fits of uncontrollable laughter.[33] The large differences between the symptoms of Elisabeth and Pernette add to the tapestry of curiosity surrounding this trial.

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[29] E. William Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537-1662." *The Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 2 (1971): 197.
[30] Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004), 8.
[31] Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537-1662." 198.
[32] Alan Woolf, "Witchcraft or Mycotoxin? The Salem Witch Trials," *Journal of Toxicology. Clinical Toxicology* 38, no. 4 (2000): 457.
[33] Moshe Sluhovsky, "The Devil in the Convent." *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (2002): 1379.

Elisabeth Valin, who was 18 at the start of the interrogation, was believed to have been cursed and then cured by Michée before the trial even started. This was quite common in witch trials, where accusations would come even years after a "curse" actually occurred.[34] In 1649, Christophe Valin was an employer of Michée, and thus Michée and his daughter Elisabeth knew each other. Elisabeth ate peas with Michée after Michée visited her in the hospital and following this, Elisabeth became extremely ill. Given that she was mentioned to have been in the hospital when this took place, she could have already been sick and became worse. However, there is the possibility that she was in the hospital because her parents could not afford to take care of her, as hospitals during this time were not strictly the medical facilities they are now.[35] In the trial, it is recorded that Elisabeth claimed demons were inside her and that they considered Michée their mistress. However, this statement was not directly made by Elisabeth, but was instead reported by Pernette Guillermet, the primary 'victim' of Michée, who claimed to have heard Elisabeth say this.[36]

Interestingly, Michée made a simple soup for Elisabeth to help her illness. This soup— or specifically, the act of Michée making it— is a consistent theme throughout the trial. After consuming the soup, Elisabeth's ailments disappeared. In 1651, one year before the trial, Pernette Chamoz (one of the witnesses) saw Elisabeth flee from Michée while in town. Upon asking, Elisabeth told Pernette Chamoz that she "can not bear to look at her (Michée)" since being cured, influencing the narrative that Chamoz tells to the *auditeur*.

[34] Kounine, *Imagining the witch*, 45.
[35] John McCallum, "'Nurseries of the Poore': Hospitals and Almshouses in Early Modern Scotland," *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 2 (2014): 428.
[36] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 206.

The First Interrogation

On the fourth of March, Michée is questioned by an *auditeur* on suspicion of witchcraft. This trial is a written account of the questions she was asked, and her responses to them; however, they are not her words. There is a hidden mediator: the court scribe who took Michée's Genevan dialect and altered it for the more widely understood French.[37]

During the trial, Michée was tortured, accused and sentenced and yet her responses appear perfectly measured and steady. So much of human communication is influenced by aspects outside of the spoken word, and the removal of these aspects limit Michée's expression of identity within the trial. Did she cry when she was first dropped by the *estrapade*? Did she shout her innocence? These are questions that will never be answered because of the inherent sterilization of emotions within trial records. Further emphasizing the presence of the hidden mediator is the ending to most of the witness testimonies. Most of the women's signatures read *"Répété a persévéré et n'a signé pour ne savoir écrire ce enquise"* (repeatedly perseveres and does not sign, as (they) do not know how to write this inquiry). This highlights that these women, Michée likely included, were not able to read, and thus could not sign their own testimonies.

Throughout the first interrogation, Michée staunchly denies any sort of motive or involvement in Pernette's possession, consistently delivering one word responses of "*non*." She is consistent and guarded, denying any involvement with Elizabeth's sickness. However, Michée does confirm that Pernette begged her to remove the demons inside of her, to which Michée responded, "I cannot because I do not have the power to do so."[38]

During this interrogation, the investigators asked a question that would be repeated throughout the trial: did Pernette kiss Michée. The reasoning behind this question is never

[37] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine,* 15.
[38] "faire pour n'en avoir la puissance" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 197.

explicitly stated, but likely is not meant as an accusation of homosexuality. Unlike physical intimacy between men, intimacy between women was not typically considered sexual.[39] Instead, the realities of most women's daily lives made it difficult to uphold personal boundaries or privacy; physical contact was unavoidable.[40] The repetitive examinations surrounding kissing is more likely a reference to "*Osculum infam*" or "the kiss of shame," where witches would greet the Devil with a kiss on the anus— in this context, extending to the demons inside Pernette greeting their mistress, Michée, with a kiss.[41]

Additionally, the first interrogation introduces Elisabeth supposedly being cured by Michée's broth. As well as the broth, it is mentioned that Michée gave Elisabeth apples, tying into a larger theme of food and poison throughout the trial.[42] Within witch trials, poisoning was uniquely associated with women, appearing as the "ultimate betrayal" of their roles as food providers and nurturers.[43] Throughout her trial, poison is a consistent question posed to Michée. Peas, soup, wine, apples— every aspect of Michée's suspected spread of possession through Geneva is viewed through the lens of food. Finally, Elisabeth Valin is brought out in front of Michée in a confrontation. This confrontation is quite short, with Elisabeth simply affirming that she knows Michée.[44] The first interrogation finishes with the judges demanding Michée declare her guilt, to which she responds "I have told the truth and I have not harmed anyone."[45]

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[39] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 68.
[40] Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 65.
[41] Francesco Maria Guazzo, *The Obscene Kiss*, wood engraving from *Compendium Maleficarum*, 1608, scanned by Derek Smootz, public domain
[42] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable*, 199.
[43] Theresa A. Vaughan, *Women, Food, and Diet in the Middle Ages: Balancing the Humours* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 36.
[44] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 198.
[45] "dit la vérité et n'avoir donné aucun mal à personne" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 197.

Witness Testimonies

All of the witness testimonies were likely taken in close succession, as the *auditeur* would travel house to house looking for potential witnesses. They appear here in the order that they are listed within the trial. As witchcraft was often an evidence-less crime, witness testimonies were essential for establishing motive and wrongdoing.[46] Within this trial, the narratives between all the witnesses are very consistent throughout their accounts. Witness repetition was very common, especially amongst women, as gossip spread through small towns like Geneva. The women of the trial were common women, who often were dependent on a social economy of mutual favours and advice.[47] Because women in the neighborhood formed these female networks, information spread quickly, shaping shared perceptions of acceptable behaviour.[48] This is demonstrated within Michée's trial, as the closeness of the women of Geneva allowed for a rapid spread of suspicion against Michée.

Bernarde du Coste

Bernarde is introduced in the text as the widow of the "honourable Nicolas Dufour", and she is also one of the only women able to sign her own name.[49] This indicates that while she was a common woman, she was likely of a more respected, educated class than Michée. Bernarde du Coste observed Pernette through the window of her house while walking by, screaming and scratching at her face. She also saw Pernette beg Michée— who was in the room with Pernette, along with several other women— for broth, as well as requesting Michée to sprinkle soot on

[46] Jonas Roelens, "Gossip, Defamation and Sodomy in the early modern Southern Netherlands," *Renaissance Studies* 32 (2018): 248.
[47] Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 55.
[48] Capp, *When Gossips Meet,* 60.
[49] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 200.

top. Bernarde then reports seeing Pernette try to kiss Michée, before Pernette starts to rip her own hair out. Bernarde quickly fled at this display.

Etienna Cleijaz

Étienna Cleijaz's testimony is given next. Her husband is not titled as 'honourable' and she is unable to sign her name, indicating a slightly lower social status than Bernarde. She lived above Pernette, and reports having heard Pernette's restlessness at night because of her torment. On Christmas Eve of 1651, Pernette came up to Étienna's room and asked to have dinner with her and her husband. Étienna gave Pernette some meat to eat, telling her to eat it "in the name of God."[50] Pernette then threw the meat into the fire, and when Étienna tried to retrieve it, Pernette threw her to the ground and scratched at her face. When Étienna's husband tried to intervene, Pernette knocked him out completely.[51] Étienna also mentions seeing Michée deliver laundry to Elisabeth Royaume five to six weeks prior. At the time, Étienna was inside the Guillermet residence, and recounts that Pernette acted possessed as a response to the presence of Michée. Étienna then describes Michée mentioning a David Dupuis, who Michée believed knew how to cure possession. This man is only ever mentioned by Michée, and based on records from Geneva genealogy [records], David Dupuis was a member of the Council of Two Hundred— a legislative order under the Small Council.[52] This would have indicated a level of education and respectability, hence why Michée believed he might be able to help. Pernette then cries out "we are in the body of the creature for a dispute over a lamp" additionally referring to Michée as her mistress once more and asking for more soup with soot and poison added.[53] Étienna then offers

[50] "au nom de Dieu" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable*, 20.
[51] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 201.
[52] E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 145; David Dupuis- Geneanet. (n.d.). https://gw.geneanet.org/rossellat?lang=en&n=dunant&oc=3&p=maurice
[53] "nous sommes dans le corps de la créature pour une dispute d'une lampe qu'elle avait mise dedans" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 201.

to make the soup for Pernette, which Pernette rejects; she only wants soup from Michée. Michée refuses to make the soup, and Étienna's testimony ends there.

Jeanne Darlod

While Jeanne is unable to sign her name at the conclusion of her testimony, she is the daughter of the noble Paul Darlod, and the only woman with noble ties in this trial. Jeanne states that 6 weeks prior to the start of the trial, Michée bumped her on the arm and she has been ill ever since. She also accuses Michée of cursing the young girl Gabrielle Malbosson by rubbing her face.[54] Most interestingly, Jeanne Darlod introduces the Master Surgeons, who test Pernette's possession, appearing in several accounts. They are named as the Honorable d'Aubigné, Devigny, L'Hollandais, Rousser and Jean Cougnard.[55] These men come into Michée's room, asking her questions, while Devigny secretly takes some straw from Michée's bed. They then take this straw to Pernette, who eats it and declares that it belongs to her mistress [Michée]. The men test her with regular straw, which Pernette can identify as not from Michée.[56] While ingesting straw was not a part of common demonological theory, this would have confirmed that Pernette and Michée were unnaturally connected— giving credibility to Pernette's claim of demonic possession. The introduction of these men marks a significant deviation in the trial, as every other witness and victim involved is female. Male figures such as David Dupuis and Christophe Valin are mentioned in passing but never testify. Because the majority of contributors to the trial are female, it acts as a microcosm of the dynamics between early modern women.

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[54] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 202.
[55] The Master Surgeons mentioned here were Genevan medical practitioners who were called in during judicial procedures to deliver findings to the Small Council. During the early modern period, surgeons and physicians were emerging as advisors to judges and interrogators, which is why they have the jurisdiction to be evaluating Pernette's possession and later testing Michée for devils marks. See Katherine Dauge-Roth, "Bodies of Evidence: Judges and Surgeons at the Crime Scene in Early Modern France," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 54:1 (January 2024): 147.
[56] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 203.

Jeanne Palluard

Jeanne Palluard is the other woman in the trial who signed her own name, though hers or her husband's profession are never mentioned. Six weeks prior to the trial, Jeanne Palluard was told by Pernette to fetch Michée, with Pernette expressing a desire to talk to her. After bringing Michée to Pernette, Jeanne recounts hearing Pernette say she and Michée were "bound together" and Michée had charmed both her and Elisabeth.[57] After this, Jeanne saw Pernette beg Michée for the special broth, to which Michée refused once more.

Pernette Chamoz

Three years before the trial, Pernette Chamoz and Michée both lived in the house of a Mr. Revillod. This indicates that she is of a lower class than women like Jeanne Darlod and Bernarde du Coste, but unlike Michée, Pernette Chamoz was married. She is unique as the first witness whose testimony primarily concerns Elisabeth Valin rather than Pernette Guillermet. As previously mentioned, Pernette Chamoz witnesses Elisabeth's miraculous recovery from her illness via broth, and her ensuing flight from Michée. But, most interestingly, she describes a meeting between Pernette Guillermet and Elisabeth. Pernette Guillermet told Elisabeth that "Michée is our mistress."[58] Statements like this support a reading of the trial wherein Pernette Guillermet is the primary instigator of this trial, as she can be seen clouding Elisabeth's testimony with her own convictions.

Sara Chartier

[57] "nous sommes attachées" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 203.
[58] "la Michée est notre maîtresse" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 204.

Sara Chartier, the wife of the carpenter, gives a brief testimony where she describes her conversations with the deceased mother of Elisabeth Valin, Louise Valin. According to Sara, Louise— who died sometime between 1650-1652— believed Michée had given demons to her daughter. Louise had sent for Michée to make a healing broth for the tormented Elisabeth, and Elisabeth was cured almost immediately.[59] After this event, Sara was told by both of the Valin women that Michée was the reason for Elisabeth's prior cursing. Therefore, Elisabeth did believe that Michée had cursed her. However, given Elisabeth was 15 years old when her torment happened, she was likely influenced by the opinions of the people around her, especially her mother.

Gabrielle Aubert

The last witness testimony is given by Gabrielle Aubert— her profession and status were never noted but she was unable to sign the document, so likely an average common woman— who was asked by Elisabeth Royaume to see Pernette, begging for help as her daughter was so tormented and ill. When she arrives, Gabrielle recounts Pernette giving a long and violent speech highlighting how she has been possessed for four years, cursed through Michée's laundry. Pernette rambles and shouts phrases such as, "she will charm us and if we are charmed we will kiss her calling her our mistress" and "if Michée is put in prison we will go to see her to strangle her saying Michée our mistress will be burned."[60] After this, Gabrielle confirms the story of Jeanne Darlod about the surgeons going into Michée's room to fetch the straw.

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[59] Porret*, L'Ombre du Diable,* 205.

[60] "et si elle entre, elle nous charmera et si nous sommes charmés nous la baiseront en la nommant toujours Michée notre maîtresse la méchante lessiveuse et que si on met ladite Michée en prison nous irons voir pour l'étrangler en disant la Michée notre maîtresse sera brûlée" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 206.

The Second Interrogation

The second interrogation begins on March 6, two days after the first one. Since this interrogation occurred after the first round of witness testimonies, the assembled testimony would become the questioning framework. While the accused would never be told what the witnesses reported, it was their responsibility to refute the information in order to prove their innocence.[61] The focus of this interrogation was to determine the rationale for cursing Pernette, and the vehicle in which this curse occurred. The judges reiterate their previous questions about the missing lamp. Michée denies quarreling with Elizabeth Royaume over the lamp, stating that when asked, she gave the lamp back.[62] The admission that she gave the lamp back does suggest that Michée likely stole it and was caught by Elizabeth Royaume. They also ask if Michée had drank from the same cup as Pernette, attempting to create a theme of food fitting with the peas of Elisabeth Valin. This accusation is very interesting as it directly contradicts what Pernette and Elisabeth Royaume believe: that Michée gave Pernette the curse through the laundry. However, as witness interrogations are conducted outside the courtroom, it is possible that Michée did not know that this was their belief. During this interrogation, Michée confirms she knew of Pernette's possession, having witnessed it when Elisabeth Royaume brought her to see Pernette, but denies any involvement. She also denies knowing both Jeanne Darlod and Etienna Cleijaz. Michée's strategy of complete denial had been previously successful, but this claim that she did not know either woman was easily identified as a lie. Both Darlod and Cleijaz's testimony include lengthy conversations and encounters with Michée, which the courts were aware of during the second interrogation. Michée also denies involvement in Gabrielle Malbosson becoming sick. Then the incident with the surgeons and straw is brought up, with Michée

[61] Mentzer, "The Self-Image of the Magistrate in Sixteenth-Century France," 28.
[62] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 208.

confirming that it happened, but denying any knowledge about the straw.[63] Afterwards, Michée agrees that she brewed the soup for Elisabeth, but at the behest of Elisabeth's mother, and she has no idea about the effects of her soup. The court decides that more interrogation is needed and no decision is made.

The First Masters Surgeons Report

On March 10, the first report from the Master Surgeons was taken. Within the seventeenth century, surgeons became essential to the criminal process.[64] While surgeons were more comparable to a master artisan rather than our modern-day perception of a doctor, they were professionals whose words were regarded highly.[65] The surgeons were looking for a witch mark, or devil's mark— a mark that the Devil claws onto his initiates to seal their obedience and service to him. These marks, which could take the appearance of a common mole or spot, are pricked by needles, and if the subject does not bleed, they are considered a witch.[66] This report is an examination of Michée, searching for these marks. The surgeons find a "lentil-sized mark" under Michée's breast which they prick with a long needle. She does not bleed or express any pain, which the surgeons say is "extraordinary and suspicious" but they also do not confirm that it is a devil's mark.[67]

[63] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 209.
[64] Dauge-Roth, "Bodies of Evidence," 147.
[65] Dauge-Roth, "Bodies of Evidence," 148.
[66] Heikki Pihlajamäki, "Swimming the Witch, Pricking for the Devil's Mark': Ordeals in the Early Modern Witchcraft Trials," *Journal of Legal History* 21, no. 2 (2000): 36.
[67] "extraordinaire et suspecte" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 211.

The Second Masters Surgeons Report

The second report conducted on March 11 describes an examination performed on Pernette. The surgeons— who are joined by a physician for this report— chronicle frequent hiccups and crying as Pernette's most visible symptoms.[68] They reportedly speak to the demons inside of Pernette, who claim that Michée is their mistress whilst Pernette is in a trance. The surgeons then ask the same question in Latin and Greek to the "demons" but Pernette is silent. This questioning in other languages was seen as a crucial step in identifying possession, as the demon was often able to understand languages unknown to the sufferer.[69] After coming to, Pernette describes the feeling of the demons as "ants in parts of her body" and that they were "trying to strangle her when she cried out."[70] The surgeons conclude the report by suggesting to bring Pernette to Michée in a confrontation.

The Third Interrogation

The third interrogation begins with a repetition of many previous accusations but includes a new and notable question: whether Michée asked Elisabeth Royaume for forgiveness and if she promised to find someone to cure Pernette. Michée denies this, saying that it was not her who said this, but David Dupuis.[71] Pernette is then brought out in a confrontation with Michée. Pernette claimed that after having an argument with Michée while doing the laundry, Michée gave her demons while having supper with her.[72] Michée denies both of these claims.

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[68] Unlike Surgeons, physicians were university-trained and possessed large amounts of theoretical medical knowledge. They were typically paid more than surgeons, but often did not participate in hands-on medical practice. See Dauge-Roth, "Bodies of Evidence," 141.
[69] Ferber, *Demonic Possession,* 25.
[70] "elle nous a dit qu'elle sentait les démons comme des fourmis en plusieurs parties du corps et qu'ils tachaient de l'étrangler quand elle criait ainsi" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 212.
[71] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 213.
[72] "extraordinaire et suspecte" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 214.

The Third Masters Surgeons Report

The third surgeon's report on March 15 is the last performed by local surgeons before the Small Council brings in aid from outside of Geneva. This report describes a lengthy and incredibly painful procedure where a several-inch long needle is inserted into Michée's breast again. The report concludes with the surgeons confirming that the marks on Michée are unique to all other marks on her body, but they admit that the marks "do not meet all the conditions described by those who have dealt with witchcraft."[73]

Suzanne Malbosson

Unlike the other women, Suzanne did not speak during the first round of testimonies, instead appearing only in the second round, on the 17th of March. Suzanne, like Michée, was a widow, and seems to have been a genuine friend to Michée. Suzanne states that after giving birth, Michée brought eggs to her and kissed her child, Gabrielle, and that the child has been sick ever since.[74] She admits that she never connected Michée to her daughter's illness, but that her neighbour— unnamed but likely one of the other women of the trial— told her that Michée could be at fault.[75] This further demonstrates how the interconnectedness between the women of Geneva shaped the larger trial.

The Fourth Interrogation

This interrogation is very short and is a response to Suzanne Malbosson's testimony. In the interrogation, Michée continues denying all involvement with the court's accusations, now

[73] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 216.
[74] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 216.
[75] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 216.

including the sickness of the Malbosson child. The conversation then pivots to the Devil for the first time. Michée staunchly denies any sort of diabolical involvement, claiming that the only marks on her body are "the ones that God gave me."[76] With this questioning, the court was attempting to establish if Michée had entered a Devil's Pact, which was the concept of the "heretical bargain" between a witch and the Devil.[77] The contract with the Devil was the essence of the crime of witchcraft, as it would bestow supernatural abilities onto the witch, thus allowing them to do harm.[78]

During this interrogation, Michée is tortured for the first time by both *la sellette* and *l'estrapade*.[79] Throughout this round of torture, Michée persists in her innocence. The torture is continued in the rest of the trial, though it is something that is mentioned sparingly. Torture was a widely accepted part of the legal process, believed to reveal the truth when proof and evidence were unclear.[80] Because of Michée's staunch denial up to this point, the interrogators believed they needed to take more drastic measures to discover the truth. To the interrogators, they needed to wrench Michée's truth from her unlawful possession, and pain was believed to be the way to achieve that goal in the early modern period.[81]

Figure 2: La Sellette, from *Pratique Criminelle* by Jean de Mille, 1541

[76] *"n'avoir autre marque que celles que Dieu lui a faites"* Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 217.
[77] Brian Levack, *Witchcraft in the British Isles and New England : New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 77.
[78] Levack, *Witchcraft in the British Isles*, 78.
[79] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 218.
[80] Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 24.
[81] Silverman, *Tortured Subjects*, 63.

The Fourth Master Surgeons Report

The Fourth Surgeons' report is the first taken from medical practitioners from outside Geneva, given that they wrote their report in French and not in the Genevan dialect, they were likely from Savoy or France. Unlike the more cautious Genevan surgeons, these men confirm that the marks on Michée's upper lip and thigh "give a just suspicion of being satanic marks" after just one test.[82] This is the last of the surgeon's reports, indicating that the Small Council was satisfied after receiving this report, as it confirmed what they believed— that Michée was a witch.

The Fifth and Sixth interrogations

On March 30 the fifth and sixth interrogations begin. These interrogations are much longer than all of the others, encompassing a combined two day period with torture throughout. The judges begin by asking her if she told the jailer she had a heavy heart, to which Michée says that it was just her heart beating.[83] Then the interrogation moves to the typical repetition and denial of the previous interrogations. At this point, the interrogator's tone has become more insistent and direct, abandoning the formal tone of the previous interrogations. He tells her "What a mistake you have made in giving yourself to him."[84] After some more denials, Michée admits to being marked, but denies knowing how it happened.

[82] "un juste soupçon d'être marques sataniques" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 219.
[83] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 220.
[84] "quelle fâcherie elle avait reçue quand elle se donna à lui" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 220.

This is a massive shift within the trial: before, Michée had denied involvement of any kind, so her admitting the Devil marked her is a significant change. Michée is then attached to *la sellette*, and from this point onward, she undergoes torture during the interrogation. Michée does not initially introduce the Devil into her story, but instead mentions a mysterious shadow that touched her lip and marked her thigh. However, the sudden shift from complete denial to mentioning a supernatural shadow does indicate that Michée was trying to find ways to end the torture without confessing completely. Michée is then moved to torture from *l'estrapade*, and the interrogators drop her— instructing her to tell the truth, to which she responds that she already has.[85] She also mentions that when the shadow marked her, she was angry at a woman. This woman is never named by Michée, claiming that she forgot. This is important as this anger is introduced as a reason why she might have been preyed upon by the Devil. This interrogation ends with Michée finally admitting, "the Devil marked me with the shadow."[86]

The interrogation resumes the next day, and Michée seems to regret introducing the shadow, as she now tries to claim that it never marked her. However, she quickly gives up on this denial and begins telling the judges about the shadow, which appears first as a man, then as a dog— it is unclear if Michée is speaking about two occasions or if her story is changing— who attempts to solicit her. Even though she has only spoken about the shadow, the interrogation's next question is "what did the Devil say" to which Michée finally relents, "he said I would never want for anything and so I gave myself to him."[87] At this point, Michée has sealed her fate. Her portrayal of innocence has faltered and from this point, the trial simply becomes a catalogue of her guilt. Whether she is executed or simply banished, she would have known that she would not

[85] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 222.
[86] "qu'il l'avait marquée par cette ombre" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 222.
[87] "qu'est ce que le diable lui dit" "qu'il lui dit qu'elle n'aurait jamais faute de rien, et qu'elle se donna à lui" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 223.

be released without punishment. While this was undoubtedly an important moment for Michée, in the eyes of the interrogators, their goal has not changed. They still need to uncover the whole truth, and thus more questioning is necessary.

During this portion of the trial, Michée's accounts become increasingly inconsistent. She is enduring her third round of torture and has been imprisoned for nearly a month. Her admissions during this interrogation seem less like genuine belief in her guilt and more like attempts to craft narratives that might satisfy the interrogator enough to pause the torture. She states that she was marked by the shadow, six months, one year, and two years ago during different parts of her testimony. Additionally, she initially says the Devil never made her do harm, which she later contradicts. Michée then introduces the concept of the Devil appearing as a donkey, giving her a white apple to kill someone. This apple is heavily contested, with Michée first saying that she did not take it, then pivoting to say that she gave a different apple to Elisabeth Valin, before finally pivoting again to say that she threw the apple away and never used it. She then admits to cursing Pernette, using powder given to her by the Devil and slipping it into her cup. While she initially denies cursing Elisabeth, and blames someone else, Michée later admits to cursing both Pernette Guillermet and Elisabeth Valin. Michée insists that the girls never did anything wrong, she was simply instructed to harm them by the Devil.[88]

Michée's Confession

On April 1st, Michée's confession was written down by the court. Her charges are listed and she denies knowing any other sorcerers. Michée then says that while she acknowledges she deserves death, she hopes she will not be burned alive, as the pain might keep her from praying

[88] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 229.

for forgiveness.[89] This confession is not her own, but rather a 'cleaned up' version of her earlier confessions during torture. This is very strange, as typically— as seen in the 1686 trial of Jeanne Catherine— the final confessions are easily compared against the accused's own words.[90] This 'cleaning up' was not performed by Michée, but rather by the court scribe tidying up the inconsistencies and having her sign it. Nowhere else in the trial is the invisible presence of the court as a mediator of Michée's speech more apparent than here.

There is one final interrogation reviewing all of Michée's crimes. Michée admits once more to hurting Elisabeth and Pernette once more. More inconsistencies appear as Michée says she cursed Elisabeth through the peas they ate together and then via the poisoned apple. She was emotionally and physically battered, but even after 6 rounds of interrogation and 3 rounds of torture, Michée still refuses to accept some charges, such as harming Jeanne Darlod and Gabrielle Malbosson.[91]

The Declaration of the Small Council marks the trial's end. In an act of "leniency instead of harshness," Michée's request was heard— she was hanged first before being burnt to ash.[92] In her sentencing, the Small Council declares that by her execution, they have used her as an example to deter others who might seek to harm the Genevan community, as Michée did. Her death marks the last witch execution in the small town of Geneva. While it would be satisfying if Michée's status as the 'last executed witch in Geneva' resulted from public outcry or sadness over her trial, that is not the case. Executions of witches were already decreasing during the seventeenth century across Europe and within Geneva, so Michée being the last witch execution

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[89] "mérite la mort mais prie qu'on ne la fasse pas brûler vive, afin que le tourment ne l'empêche pas de prier Dieu" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 228.
[90] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine*, 130.
[91] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 229.
[92] "usant plutôt de douceur que de rigueur" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 234.

was indicative of the time.[93] While Geneva did have witch trials after Michée, these resulted in punishments like banishment instead.

Chapter Two: The Analysis

The Image of the Witch

Considering the whole of the European witch trials, Michée was disadvantaged from the very start. She did not have a father or husband, who were figures that were often essential to proving an accused witch's innocence, vouching for their morality. In New England, during the same time period, women without male relatives were over four times as likely to be convicted of witchcraft than those with husbands, brothers or sons.[94] She was also a born Catholic, which associated her with the "superficiality" and "insincerity" that the Protestant Genevans attributed to Catholics.[95] On top of that, she was an old woman. While the belief in the old woman witch was seen as ridiculous by some during the time, such as the minister John Gaule, who in 1646 had scoffed that "every old woman with a wrinkled face is not only suspected but pronounced for a witch," it was still the most common conception of a witch by the public.[96] From sixteenth and seventeenth-century engravings such as Jacques de Gheyn's *The Witches Sabbath* and Albrecht Dürer's *The Witch*, the visage of the common witch often took the form as an old, poor crone. Besides this physical visualization, the cultural conceptualization of the witch was a person motivated by spite who lacked a strong sense of community or connection with neighbors.[97]

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[93] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 318.
[94] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987), 62.
[95] Anna Kvicalova, *Listening and Knowledge in Reformation Europe: Hearing, Speaking and Remembering in Calvin's Geneva* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 3.
[96] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 21.
[97] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours,* 23.

At first glance, Michée does not fit this vision. Michée was a somewhat trusted member of the community, even if— as will be discussed later— the townspeople already considered her as a witch long before the trial started. This trust by the townspeople is demonstrated throughout the trial. Michée eats peas with Elisabeth when she is in the hospital and she brings eggs to Suzanne Malbosson to help support Suzanne after Suzanne's husband died. She was trusted enough to show affection to Gabrielle and frequently spent time with the young girl.[98] She was begged to help cure Elisabeth with a broth once she fell ill. Despite rumours of witchcraft that may have predated the trial, Michée was not just tolerated— she was relied upon. She held a position of trust within the community; she was someone people turned to when they needed help.

Figure 3: Jacques de Gheyn II, Preparation for the Witches' Sabbath, 1610

Figure 4: Albrech Dürer, The Witch, 1500

[98] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 216.

Relationships prior & leading up to suspicion

It is necessary to consider the structures influencing how these women may have interacted with each other before the trial, in order to grasp the complexities of the social dynamics that shaped Michée's trial. Most of these women were not of the upper class, however, Michée was a washerwoman employed by many of these women, so she was of a lower status than the Royaume and Valin family. Because Michée relied on these women for employment, there was an inherent power dynamic between them. Additionally, she had been banished once before from Geneva for sexual immorality, which further lowered her social status.[99] At the same time, Michée seems to have been a trusted member of the community, as evidenced by the time she spent with the town's children. This raises the question: did the women of Geneva already believe Michée to be a witch before the trial began? The answer is quite likely, yes, but perhaps initially in a positive sense. Power-wielding women in towns were often co-opted by townspeople, being commanded and utilized for the town's benefit.[100] Even though Michée was not an active healer— as her abilities were attributed to a single soup cure— she was viewed as possessing some degree of power.

Given that Michée was already known as someone with these abilities before Elisabeth even became sick, it is likely that people had suspected— for at least a year prior to the trial— that if Michée could cure, she could likely also curse.[101] This theory is further bolstered by the fact that Michée was only accused of cursing Pernette after refusing to make the broth to heal her. This fact suggests the motivation for accusing Michée may have been based in retaliation.

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[99] Jason Philip Coy, *Strangers and Misfits: Banishment, Social Control, and Authority in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 122.
[100] Clive Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," *Past & Present* 140, no. 1 (1993): 52.
[101] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 204.

Additionally, the missing lamp that Michée is accused of taking from the Guillermet family adds to the potential wariness that the women of Geneva were feeling toward Michée. While it is impossible to know the conversations that were being had during this time, it is plausible that Michée's refusal to cure Pernette, coupled with the missing lamp, disrupted the image of Michée as the 'socially permissible' witch.

Witchcraft also was an easy explanation for any unexplained physical or mental ailment, as it presented an opportunity for action.[102] Pernette's sickness, which started three months before the trial, was unexplained and very noticable. From Bernarde du Coste witnessing Pernette screaming and scratching at her own face to Etienna Cleijaz being attacked by Pernette, her behavior was incredibly conspicuous. In response to this unexplained ailment, Michée— who was already potentially established as a witch— became a simple scapegoat. It is impossible to know whether Pernette was the original person who accused Michée, or if someone in Pernette's vicinity indicated her as a potential suspect. Michée was an easy target to point to by the Royaume family, not only because of her perceived magical prowess, but also because Michée seems to have stolen a lamp from the family before the trial started, further incriminating the washerwoman.

Michée's Identity

Within a witch trial, the accused are forced by the interrogators to construct an intricate narrative weaving the Devil and their wickedness into every aspect of their life. It was not enough to simply confess to being a witch; the interrogation and even torture would continue until the confession aligned with the interrogators own understanding of witchcraft.[103] Within this

[102] Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 62.
[103] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 52.

performance of wickedness, or conversely, of staunchly proclaimed innocence, the accused's actual identity is often lost.[104] This loss of identity makes it difficult for historians to construct microhistories around someone on trial. While torture was believed to reveal the truth by the seventeenth-century judicial system, modern historians view that statement with skepticism.[105] When trying to answer questions such as "was Michée's confession an act of agency," or "did Michée actually believe she was a witch," the first question that must be answered is "who was Michée?" Due to the restrictive nature of trial records, this question is not as simple as it might seem.

In *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Natalie Zemon Davis argued for the intelligence and agency of the wife of Martin Guerre, Bertrande, who had been previously portrayed as unintelligent by the sixteenth-century judge and historian Jean de Coras.[106] Similarly, I aim to suggest that Michée possessed identity and intelligence. Michée is painted by the interrogators as weak-willed and easily manipulated, as demonstrated when they ask why "she was so quick to give herself to the devil."[107] These characteristics were often associated with women, as women were thought to possess a weaker moral nature, leaving them open to temptation and evil.[108] Was Michée weak-willed? Everything that can be gleaned about her life suggests otherwise. She was a fatherless widow, forced to make money on her own during a time where independent women were viewed as a danger to the social order, with many women being systematically excluded from higher paying work.[109] Though she was of a lower social standing than the other women of the trial, she was not a beggar, and she had a home. Returning from banishment and losing her

[104] Kounine, *Imagining the Witch*, 124.
[105] Laura Kounine, "'Not a Drop of Tears, or Any Sweat from Fear Came from Her': Interrogating Mind, Body, and Emotions in Early Modern German Witch Trial," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 5*4, no. 1 (2024): 113.
[106] Natalie Zemon Davis. *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[107] "comment c'est qu'elle se porta si prestement à se donner au Diable" Porret*, L'Ombre du Diable,* 232.
[108] Susan Broomhall, "Poverty, Gender, and Incarceration in Sixteenth-Century Paris," *French History* 18 (2004): 20.
[109] Rublack, *The Crimes of Women*, 153.

husband while still being able to make a living for herself is impressive. Additionally, we can infer that Michée was a kind person, as she visited Elisabeth in the hospital and made food for the town's children. Due to Michée's lower status, her willingness to share peas and eggs with Elizabeth and Suzanne demonstrate generosity since food was likely a precious commodity for a poor washerwoman. Michée further demonstrated her kindness through her care for Pernette and Elisabeth. When Michée first witnessed Pernette's possessed behaviour, she encouraged Elizabeth Royaume to take Pernette to David Dupuis, believing he could help her. Furthermore, when Michée finally confessed to cursing Pernette and Elisabeth, she made sure to specify that the girls did not do anything to deserve their cursing, they were simply chosen randomly.

Relationships between women as described within witness testimonies

Throughout the trial, the different testimonies provided by witnesses paint a picture of the relationships between the common women of Geneva. There were eight witnesses, all of whom were female. While having more female witnesses than male for witch trials was quite common, data shows that this higher level of female witnesses was not the case for every crime.[110] For instance, in cases of burglary, male witnesses were the majority.[111] The higher level of female witnesses was partially due to the unique tie to physical ailments that witch trials often included; as women were the ones who would tend to the ill, they were at a closer proximity than men.[112]

I suspect that this willingness to give testimony was also due in part to the inherent danger a witchcraft accusation posed to the other women in town.[113] Within the female network of gossip, no one wanted to be the outlier defending the accused. This is likely why Suzanne

[110] Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 47.
[111] Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 48.
[112] Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 51.
[113] James A. Sharpe, "Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth-Century England: Some Northern Evidence," *Continuity and Change* 6, no. 2 (1991): 192.

Malbosson— who said that Michée might have caused her daughter's sickness— testified days after the other women: the rising fear in the community and the pressure placed on her by the others forced her to participate. Since Suzanne was a lower class widow and a genuine friend of Michée's, she likely could have been the next target if suspicion spread. By testifying, she may have believed it would guarantee her safety. Even if women were not worried about that possibility, testifying could still help bolster their reputations. To be viewed as a respectable woman— creating separation from the inherent weakness of the female gender— they had to completely separate themselves from dishonourable women.[114] Within this social dynamic, a witchcraft trial offered a chance for the other women of the town to solidify their honour.

However, testifying also carried the risk of retaliation, as accused witches were pressured to name accomplices. This often resulted in accused witches pointing the finger at those who had accused them, spiraling into a much larger trial. In the Salem witch trials, with the original accused, Tituba, listed several neighbourhood women as conspirators with the Devil. By the end of the trial, nearly 200 residents of Salem had been accused of witchcraft.[115] This fear of being targeted by Michée for speaking out manifests itself within the testimonies. Of the eight witnesses, only the bold Jeanne Darlod actually claimed that Michée was a witch. The other seven primarily made observations about Pernette and Elisabeth's behaviour, never directly levying an accusation towards Michée. This demonstrates that in the early modern period, women had to navigate the dangers of both speaking up and staying silent, balancing self-preservation with societal expectations of their cooperation.

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[114] Rublack, *The Crimes of Women*, 150.

[115] Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, "'I Am a Gospel Woman': On Language in the Courtroom Discourse during the Salem Witch Trials, with Special Reference to Female Examinees," *Studia Neophilologica* 84, no. sup1 (2012): 67.

Agency and Confessions in Witch trials— Michée's Agency

After several rounds of torture, Michée finally confessed, admitting that the Devil told her she would never want for anything, and thus she gave herself to him.[116] The notion of 'truth' in the context of witch trials is always a complicated metric. Witchcraft was a unique crime in that it left little to no physical evidence; thus, the interrogators relied on the accused's confessions to solidify their guilt.[117]

The key question within Michée's trial is whether she truly believed that she had cursed Pernette and Elisabeth, or if the confession was a lie— Michée simply aiming to end the pain. The answer to this question is impossible to truly know, as only Michée knew the truth. However, there are certain aspects of her confession that create the impression that Michée had not been fully convinced of her guilt. One of the most prominent parts of her confession that suggests she was lying was the high level of inconsistencies.

Michée's confession is so incoherent at times that during her official sentencing, the court rewrote her confession to make it more understandable. She claims she saw the Devil only twice, but describes him appearing as a shadow, a man, a large dog and a donkey. She also is very conflicted about her methods of poisoning Pernette and Elisabeth. She states that she delivered the curse to Pernette through a drink, not through the laundry. However, during the second interrogation, Michée denies having a drink with her. As both Pernette and Elisabeth Royaume had the curse delivered through the laundry, this indicates that Michée was unaware of how the affliction had actually been perceived to spread. This slight inconsistency aids the theory that Michée did not genuinely believe she was cursing people, and was simply inventing stories based on the information she was told, as well as what she already knew about popular

[116] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 223.
[117] Roelens, "Gossip, Defamation and Sodomy," 248.

conceptions of witches. She states that she poisoned the girls through their food— Pernette through wine and Elisabeth through peas— as well as the narrative around the poisoned apple. The inconsistencies that litter her confession suggest that Michée was trying to convince the interrogators of her guilt to stop the pain, rather than indicating her genuine belief in what she was saying.

An alternative interpretation of these inconsistencies is that Michée, after weeks of imprisonment and repeated torture, was not deliberately fabricating a narrative to appease her interrogators but was instead experiencing delirium and confusion. Imprisonment was a well-documented form of torture in of itself.[118] Michée was left alone in a dark cell for weeks, with her only company being the occasional visit of the interrogator and the torturer. By the end of the experience, it is possible that her spirit was broken and she was convinced of her guilt, leading to her confession. In this sense, her confession may not have been a deliberate lie, but rather a reflection of a mind pushed beyond its limits— where the distinction between external coercion and internal belief became blurred. However, I believe that even if she did not possess the unwavering strength of Maria Höll, there was a thread of agency and determination that can be followed through Michée's trial.[119] Even as she buckled under the weight of torture, she did not completely surrender to the narrative the court wanted to construct.

Further supporting the argument that Michée consciously shaped her confession is that many of the images she evokes within her confession were well known aspects of other witch trials. The popular conceptions of the witch were not entirely born of the clergy. Rather, several aspects of witchcraft iconography— such as the witch's familiar— originated from local beliefs

[118] Spencer J. Weinreich, "Why Early Modern Mass Incarceration Matters: The Bamberg Malefizhaus, 1627–31," *Journal of Social History* 56, no. 4 (2023): 730.
[119] Maria Höll was the witch from Nördlingen, Germany who refused to confess through 62 rounds of torture: See Page 5.

and were then incorporated into theological presuppositions.[120] It could be argued that Michée saw or felt a shadow, and upon being interrogated, came to genuinely believe that she encountered the Devil. However, it is unlikely that Michée genuinely believed that the Devil approached her as a donkey holding a pure white apple in its mouth, who then verbally asked her "do you want this apple."[121] Both the donkey and the apple are common images of witch trials, with the iconography of the poisoned apple especially appearing in several other witch trials.[122] Both the impossibility of her story and the commonness of the imagery she was utilizing within this story further lends itself to the possibility that Michée was drawing from what she had heard— rather than what she actually believed— in order to satisfy the interrogators.[123]

Another aspect of Michée's potential agency within her confession comes in the form of subtle resistance. Having been imprisoned since March 6th, and just having experienced her first round of torture, Michée was undoubtedly physically and emotionally traumatized. Because of this trauma, she had told the jailer that her heart was heavy, indicating that she wanted to confess. However, during the fifth interrogation on March 30th, when the court asks if she "told her jailer that she had a heavy heart," Michée claims that she was mistaken, and it was just her heart pounding.[124] This illustrates that even after suffering torture and extensive time in prison, Michée still possessed resolve and coherency enough to withhold certain confessions and subtly resist the pressure to fully comply with the court's narrative. While it could be argued that she lost this resolve by the end, as she confesses one day after this incident, she manages to maintain a small amount of agency even during her confession.

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[120] Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," 77.
[121] "qu'en passant il lui dit: veux-tu cette pomme?" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 226.
[122] Kounine, *Imagining the witch*, 156.
[123] Boria Sax, "The Magic of Animals: English Witch Trials in the Perspective of Folklore," *Anthrozoös* 22, no. 4 (2009): 327.
[124] "si elle n'avait pas dit à son geôlier qu'elle avait le cœur chargé" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 220.

Michée's confession, in all its inconsistencies, can also be read as a display of subtle resistance. At this point, she is astoundingly incoherent. In the span of a few lines of dialogue, Michée admits to hurting Elisabeth, denies ever healing Elisabeth, admits to giving Elisabeth the poisoned apple, then claims that she cursed someone else, not Elizabeth. This incoherence makes it difficult to identify what statements made by Michée are conscious words, and which statements are rambling. However, observing what Michée does acquiesce to, and what she refuses to admit, illuminates conscious choices. Namely, while Michée does admit to poisoning Pernette, she continuously denies that she gave demons to her.[125] Additionally, while she admits to cursing Pernette and Elizabeth, she refuses to admit to cursing Jeanne Darlod and Gabrielle Malbosson. Thus, even after spending weeks in prison, even while being tortured, Michée still expressed a small degree of resistance within her confession.

Michée's Choice

Michée's past banishment for *paillardise* gave her a rare insight into Geneva's judicial system, potentially influencing her choice during her trial: to confess and face execution rather than risk the near-certain death of banishment. While her previous trial experience was not nearly as lengthy and did not involve torture, it still would have granted her more familiarity with the judicial system than, for example, the other women of the trial. This experience likely influenced her decisions within her trial.

Banishment was uniquely devastating for women, especially without a husband, and it could also result in death.[126] If she did not confess to witchcraft, continuing to hold out her

[125] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 227.
[126] Daniel Jütte, "Survivors of Witch Trials and the Quest for Justice in Early Modern Germany," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 50, no. 2 (2020): 352.

innocence, the court of Geneva would not have simply freed her. From 1573-1662, 145 out of Geneva's 211 witchcraft cases resulted in banishments, and this almost certainly would have been the fate Michée would have met as well.[127] Unlike her prior banishment, Michée was thirteen years older and without her husband. A second banishment was likely a death sentence for Michée, which she would have been aware of. The general societal distaste for independent, working women would have made it incredibly difficult for her to find sustainable work and most importantly, the surrounding towns would have refused to take an accused witch.[128] She likely would have ended up as a vagrant or beggar, and if she was charged with vagrancy, she could have been banished a third time.[129] Banishment would sever her ties to the Genevan community she had long been part of, leaving her to wander from town to town with little hope of safety or survival. Thus her choice was laid quite plainly: either maintain her innocence through more rounds of torture— with her likely reward being a slow death outside of Geneva— or end the pain by confessing, ensuring a faster death.

Suspicious circumstances surrounding Michée's death

After confessing to using witchcraft against Pernette and Elisabeth, it could be argued that Michée's death was inevitable. However, certain aspects of how the Small Council handled the trial lends itself to the theory that the court of Geneva was manipulating the trial to ensure Michée's death.

The first of these oddities is the situation surrounding the Master Surgeons' reports. The first three reports, given by Genevan surgeons and physicians, do not confirm that the marks

[127] Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537-1662," 188.
[128] Rublack, *The Crimes of Women*, 153.
[129] Jason Coy, "Beggars at the Gates: Banishment and Exclusion in Sixteenth-Century Ulm," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 39 (2008): 631.

under Michée's breast are satanic in origin.[130] While the surgeons say that the marks are suspicious, they specify that they "do not meet all the conditions commonly found in witches."[131] In response to this, the Small Council solicits surgeons from outside the city, who promptly declare the marks to be satanic.[132] Bringing in outside practitioners was very expensive, as the invoice for two outside surgeons in 1686 was 10 écus, which would take a single male labourer in Geneva up to 200 days to make.[133] In the early modern period, prisoners were expected to pay for the costs of their trial, but since Michée was a poor widow set to be executed, that was not an option.[134] Because of this, the Small Council's decision to spend large amounts of money just to confirm her marks to be diabolical, reads as possibly suspect.

Another likely manipulated aspect of the trial was Michée's confession, which was incoherent and inconsistent. According to standard witch trial practice, the accused witch had to convince the interrogator of their guilt by crafting a narrative that was both coherent and ascribed to what the interrogators wanted the accused to say.[135] So, the court should have continued interrogating her until her confession gained a bit more coherency. However, not only did the interrogator not question Michée's confession further, but in the official sentencing, the Small Council re-wrote her confession so that it made more sense. Several notable differences emerged between her original statement and the revised version: the complete omission of the poisoned apple, a glossing over of inconsistencies in her timeline of meeting the Devil, and a simplification of his appearances— while Michée originally described him taking multiple

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[130] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 211.
[131] "marques ne répondent pas absolument à toutes les conditions décrites par ceux qui ont traité de celles qui se trouvent communément aux sorcières" Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 216.
[132] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 219.
[133] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine*, 116.
[134] Broomhall, "Poverty, Gender, and Incarceration," 13.
[135] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 52.

forms, the official record reduced this to just a hare.[136] This doctoring is almost unheard of, and is directly at odds with the standard of Roman Law that emphasized discovering truth.[137]

If the court had not accepted Michée's incoherent confession and the original surgeons' report, she likely would have been banished rather than executed. This outcome could have saved the council money, maintained their standard of justice, and they still would have been rid of Michée. The presence of outside surgeons and the manipulation of her confession suggest that the Small Council wanted Michée executed from the very beginning of her trial. While the limitations of the document prevent any certain answer for why the Small Council would have wanted her dead, there are several possible explanations.

The first possible reason is given by the Small Council itself. When Michée is eventually burned, the Small Council declared that she should serve as an example to anyone who might engage in witchcraft. However, if their goal was to make potential witches fear the retribution of the Small Council, this is undermined by the six ensuing trials, wherein the accused witches were banished, not executed.[138]

A second theory is based in the fear of the Small Council. It is easy now— knowing that Michée did not commune with the Devil to harm the community— to disparage the council's determination to prosecute her. However, like the common people of Geneva, the council also believed in the danger of witches. If they viewed Michée as a genuine danger to the community, their determination makes sense, although this theory does not explain why they did not simply banish her permanently.

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[136] Porret, *L'Ombre du Diable,* 229.
[137] Beam, *The Trial of Jeanne Catherine*, 17.
[138] Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537-1662," 198.

Another theory is that the Guillermet family had some influence over the Small Council, as the parents of Pernette might have insisted on Michée's death in order to cure Pernette. However, this is somewhat unlikely, as the Guillemets were not noble, and thus would not have likely exerted much influence over the nobles of the Small Council.

The final theory is that Michée may have possessed sensitive information, perhaps from her time spent in people's homes, that the Small Council wanted to silence. This would explain the Small Council's insistence on Michée's execution as a means of silencing her; however this undeniably cinematic theory is impossible to support with facts.

Ultimately, the myriad of possible explanations for the odd procedures of the Small Council during this trial are just that: possible. What we know for certain is that the Small Council of Geneva were convinced Michée was a witch and were not satisfied with just punishment or banishment. The reasons behind that desire remain obscured by the limits of the historical record.

Conclusion

While Michée's confession was undoubtedly shaped by torture and coercion, the inconsistencies and moments of subtle resistance within her statements suggest that she retained some degree of autonomy throughout the trial. In the larger history of the witch trials, attempting to establish agency within a court dialogue steeped in uneven power structures is difficult.[139] This topic is even harder to discern when the agency that is being debated is of a more subtle kind—like the kind Michée could have possessed.

[139] Kounine, *Imagining the Witch*, 128.

In addition to the potential self-determination within Michée's confession, her trial contributes significantly to the broader history of lower-class women, a historically underrepresented group. Throughout the trial, factors ranging from the power dynamics of class to the female networks of gossip are witnessed shaping the larger outcomes of the trial. While the everyday interactions of these women are impossible to know, through the trial we can catch glimpses of societal expectations, friendship and accusation.

My focus on individual agency and the dynamics between everyday people is why this thesis could never be anything other than a microhistory. By focusing on Michée's experience, this study not only reconstructs a single trial but also highlights how power, gender, and social networks operated in witch trials more broadly. While it is possible that at the culmination of her confession, Michée was completely delirious and confused— lacking any agency, I hope I have presented other possible interpretations of the last days of Michée's life. The witch trials were an undeniably tragic historical period, and I believe that if historians can find subtle threads of identity and determination within a system designed to force its accused into linear narratives of self, the historiography will be richer for it.

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