



# The Possession at Loudun

*Michel de Certeau*

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## **The Possession at Loudun** Michel de Certeau

It is August 18, 1634. Father Urbain Grandier, convicted of sorcery that led to the demonic possession of the Ursuline nuns of provincial Loudun in France, confesses his sins on the porch of the church of Saint-Pierre, then perishes in flames lit by his own exorcists. A dramatic tale that has inspired many artistic retellings, including a novel by Aldous Huxley and an incendiary film by Ken Russell, the story of the possession at Loudun here receives a compelling analysis from the renowned Jesuit historian Michel de Certeau.

Interweaving substantial excerpts from primary historical documents with fascinating commentary, de Certeau shows how the plague of sorceries and possessions in France that climaxed in the events at Loudun both revealed the deepest fears of a society in traumatic flux and accelerated its transformation. In this tour de force of psychological history, de Certeau brings to vivid life a people torn between the decline of centralized religious authority and the rise of science and reason, wracked by violent anxiety over what or whom to believe.

At the time of his death in 1986, Michel de Certeau was a director of studies at the école des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris. He was author of eighteen books in French, three of which have appeared in English translation as *The Practice of Everyday Life*, *The Writing of History*, and *The Mystic Fable, Volume 1*, the last of which is published by The University of Chicago Press.

"Brilliant and innovative. . . . *The Possession at Loudun* is [de Certeau's] most accessible book and one of his most wonderful."—Stephen Greenblatt (from the Foreword)

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