



The Wanton Jesuit and the Wayward Saint: A Tale of Sex, Religion, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century France

Mita Choudhury

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This microhistory investigates the famous and scandalous 1731 trial in which Catherine Cadière, a young woman in the south of France, accused her Jesuit confessor, Jean-Baptiste Girard, of seduction, heresy, abortion, and bewitchment. Generally considered to be the last witchcraft trial in early modern France, the Cadière affair was central to the volatile politics of 1730s France, a time when magistrates and lawyers were seeking to contain clerical power.

Mita Choudhury's examination of the trial sheds light on two important phenomena with broad historical implications: the questioning of traditional authority and the growing disquiet about the role of the sacred and divine in French society. Both contributed to the French people's ever-increasing disenchantment with the church and the king. Choudhury builds her story through an extensive examination of archival material, including trial records, pamphlets, periodicals, and unpublished correspondence from witnesses.

The Wanton Jesuit and the Wayward Saint offers new insights into how the eighteenth-century public interpreted the accusations and why the case consumed the public for years, developing from a local sex scandal to a referendum on religious authority and its place in French society and politics.

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