

1. *The Ancestry of the Demonic*

Ἡ. ἔφη ὡς ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων

– Heraclitus¹

DEMONS AS AMBIVALENT OPPONENTS: THE DAIMON

Our word for demon is etymologically derived from the ancient Hellenic *daimon*. This is an interesting and challenging concept, and points towards an original ambivalence that efficiently resists all attempts to fix and delimit the meaning of demons and the demonic. In his *Greek Philosophical Terms* F.E. Peters defines *daimon* as “*supernatural presence or entity, somewhere between a god (theos) and a hero.*”² According to Peters, the Greeks had developed a belief in supernatural spirits at a very early stage; this can be detected in their language. For example, the Greek word for happiness was *eudaimonia*, which literally meant ‘having a good daimon.’ These people believed that a daimon attached to a person at the moment of birth and dictated one’s destiny, good or evil. A good daimon acted as a kind of “guardian spirit” in the life of a happy person. The exact forms of this belief seem to have varied, and according to the shamanistic view the daimon was a very intimate part of an individual, another name for the soul. Among the later transcendentalists it became popular to think about daimons as intermediary figures between the Olympians and the mortals; they inhabited areas close to men and exercised direct influence over their affairs.³

¹ Diels 1903/1966, 177 (Vol. I, fragment 119).

² Peters 1967, 33. The classification of rational beings into four classes (gods, daimons, heroes and men, in this order) comes from Hesiod and was followed by Plutarch in his *Moralia* (see Ferguson 1984, 33). – Jatakari 1996 is a thorough study (in Finnish) about the role of the *daimon* in Greek thought between 550 and 300 B.C.E. The original roots of *daimon* are multiple and disputed. It is commonly related to the verb ‘to apportion’ (δαίωμα), but the scholarship does not agree on what was originally apportioned. Some researchers think that the earliest daimons were malign natural powers and spirits; the “apportioning” would have signified violent rending or eating of body (W. Porzig). Others have more positive hypotheses, and suggest that daimons at an early stage were bearers of light (W. Buckert), or that the daimonic ‘apportioning’ included the dimension of apportioning fate or destiny (M.P. Nilsson). See Jatakari 1996, 4.

³ Peters 1967, 33-34. Everett Ferguson produces a useful summary of Greek views on daimons in his study *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (Ferguson 1984, 33-59). Jensen (1966) has a more specific goal: to trace the function of Greek demonology in the philosophical and religious dualism of Pythagorean and Platonic thought.

The ambivalent role of daimons is important to notice; apart from that they could be either good or evil, they also gave name to an element in human subjectivity that was an essential and intimate part of human existence, but that was *not human* at the same time. The daimon marked a limit, or fracture, embedded in the human make-up itself. Their mythological position in the interspace between men and gods also underlines their borderline character. This view was given prominence by Plato, who wrote in his *Symposium* that Eros (love) is a “mighty daimon” (*daimôn megas*). His account continues:

All that is daemonic [daimonic] lies between the mortal and the immortal. Its functions are to interpret to men communications from the gods – commandments and favours from the gods in return for men’s attentions – and to convey prayers and offerings from men to the gods. Being thus between men and gods the daemon fills up the gap and so acts as a link joining up the whole. Through it as intermediary pass all forms of divination and sorcery. God does not mix with man; the daemonic is the agency through which intercourse and converse take place between men and gods, whether in waking visions or in dreams.⁴

The negative and destructive sides of such “unconscious” influences and communications are well illustrated in the ancient Greek poetry. As E.R. Dodds has argued in his study *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), that the people were already in those days aware of how human behaviour can be ruled by different, and even conflicting “reasons.” In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon could reason with his senseless acts by claiming that Zeus had blinded him with his enchantment (*atê*), but despite this, he himself carried the responsibility for the consequences.⁵ The Greeks did not have a unified concept for a “soul” or “personality”; such concepts as *psychê*, *thymos*, *noos*, and *menos* characterise the area of individual “psychology” in plural and fluid manner.⁶ Since the psychic structure was invested with this polymorphic character, it was easy to personify and objectify conflicting impulses, or actions motivated by unconscious reasons as influences of external, alien origin.⁷ The Greek writers frequently let their characters talk about their actions by referring to the influence of daimon – even if the more comprehensive vision offered to the audience included the fate of family, or the plans of gods. In Euripides’ *Medea* the nurse thinks that her mistress’ terrible mad-

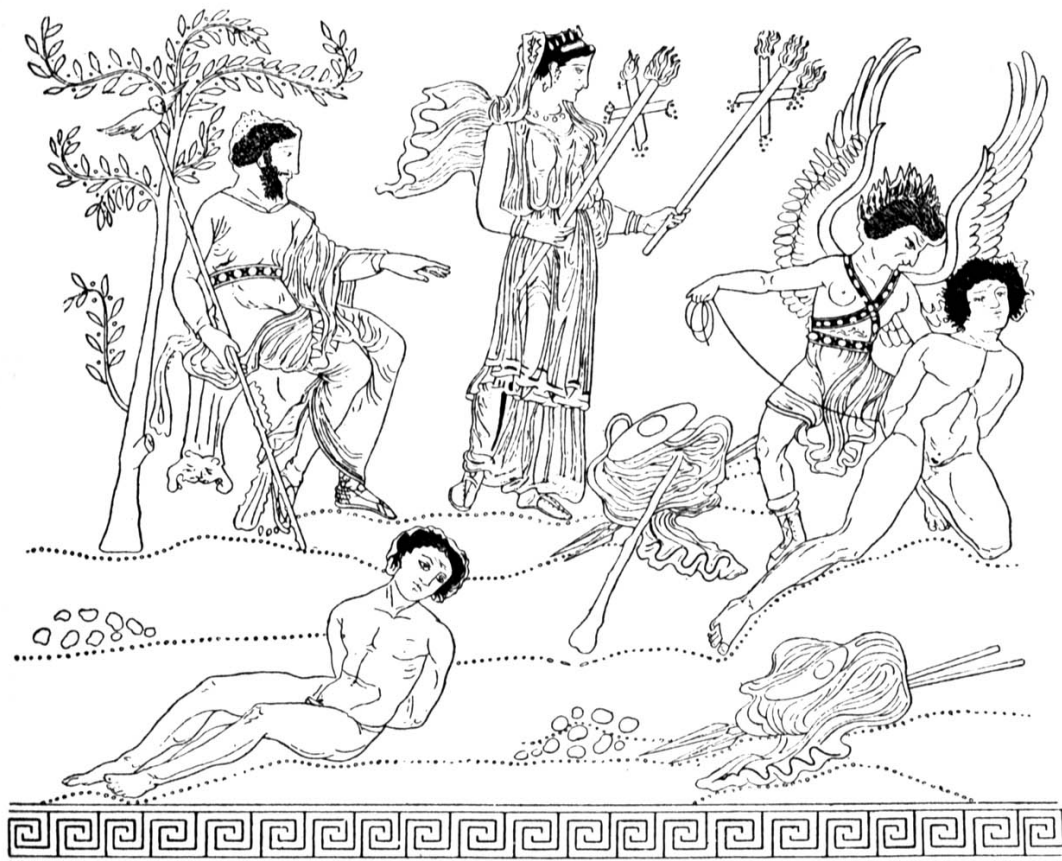
⁴ *Symp.* 202d-203a. E.R. Dodd’s translation; quoted in Diamond 1996, 69.

⁵ *Il.*, 19.86-137. See also Dodds 1951/1973, 3.

⁶ Dodds 1951/1973, 15; this view was established by Bruno Snell (in 1931; see Bremmer 1983/1993, 8). Bremmer presents evidence which supports the view that the dualistic division between thinking mind (soul) and non-thinking body had not yet developed in archaic thought. Each person was a holistic unity, body and mind – thinking and feeling were not separate from each other, and could be ascribed to such organs as heart, gall, diaphragm or lungs. (Bremmer 1983/1993, especially pages 53-63.)

⁷ Dodds 1951/1973, 17.

ness is a daimon's doings;⁸ in *Hippolytus* Phaedra believes that her senseless love is spurred by some malevolent daimon – when the audience is informed by Aphrodite herself that the “terrible Eros” is a divine punishment, directed towards Hippolytus.⁹ The Furies, or Erinyes, haunt those who have committed violence towards blood relatives, such as Orestes in Aeschylus' trilogy. Cassandra, cursed with the gift of prophesy, sees them dancing on the rooftops as vampiric spirits, swollen with blood.¹⁰ Clytaemnestra, on the other hand, does not feel herself to be the wife of Agamemnon, but as the incarnation of an avenging spirit.¹¹ These ancient characters are constantly surrounded by spiritual beings, embodiments of forces that operate in their thoughts and actions.



*Theseus and Pirithous as prisoners and bound by an Erinys
(from an Etruscan vase; Carus 1900/1996, 203).*

⁸ *Med.* 115-130. (Unless otherwise noted, I have used the Greek editions and English translations accessible as electronic texts through the Perseus Project; www.perseus.tufts.edu.)

⁹ *Hip.* 27, 241.

¹⁰ *Agam.* 1186-97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1497-1504.

The particular effect of tragedies (pity and fear, followed by a catharsis, as Aristotle characterised it) is often based on violent conflicts that oppose different, but equally justified, interests or values. Jean-Pierre Vernant has studied this aspect of tragedies, and paid special attention to the relationship between *ethos* and *daimon*.¹² He has noted how difficult it has been for modern critics to understand such characters as Eteocles, in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*; in the beginning of the play Eteocles embodies all the virtues of a rational citizen – only to rush madly into a deadly fight with his own brother. As the chorus comments: “For the spirit of madness brought them together, / And their understanding was taken from them.”¹³ Vernant claims that conflicts at various levels of tragedy significantly contribute to its special economy. Such characters as Eteocles conform to different models of subjectivity simultaneously. They present human existence as a painful vacillation or conflict between the rational course of *homo politicus* and the irrational twists of mythical action (*muthos*).

At every moment the life of the hero will unfold as if on two planes, of which each, taken in itself, would suffice to explain the episodes of drama, but which in fact the tragedy aims at presenting as inseparable: each action appears in the line and the logic of a character, of an *ethos*, at the same time that it reveals itself as the manifestation of a power from beyond, of a *daimôn*.¹⁴

Neither *ethos* or *daimon* by itself would be enough to produce a tragedy. Both are needed and tragedy's specific artistic power relies on the tension between these two incompatible models. It should be noted here, that much of contemporary horror is an inheritor of this double logic (even if it is otherwise derived from much later sources). The action and characters of ancient tragedies or modern horror should not be interpreted under one term – irrational or rational – but perceived in its conflicting movement between the opposites. Vernant illustrates this nicely in his double translation of Heraclitus' famous formula “man's *ethos* is his *daimon*”: “(1) man's character is what is called a demon; and, inversely, (2) what is called man's character is really a demon.”¹⁵

Many of the above mentioned features of the daimon can be gathered together under the topic that is named *liminal* in the anthropological literature; the daimon has a borderline character, it is categorically interstitial, it is frightening and fascinating, something acting in person but not recognised as a part of his or her self, and positioned in a conceptual scheme with internal tensions and ambiguities. Arnold van Gennep introduced the term “liminal” in his classic study *The Rites of Passage* (1909) and applied it to describe the transition periods in various cultures. Anthropologists have de-

¹² Vernant 1969; for a fuller treatment see Vernant - Vidal-Naquet 1973.

¹³ *Seven* 756-7; Aeschylus 1961, 111.

¹⁴ Vernant 1969, 112.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113. See also below: Vernant's reading strategy is discussed in page 72.

scribed how traditional societies organised life and reality into meaningful units and orders; an individual's life, for example, would be divided into separate periods. The powers of chaos were constantly surrounding and swaying such ordered life, and they were acknowledged – given a symbolic role and function – in the rites of passage. Van Gennep's examples include territorial passages, times of pregnancy, birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and finally funeral rites. He subdivides the rites of passage into rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation.¹⁶ These form together a symbolic representation (and appropriation) of a potentially threatening break of order: after the separation from the old order and before the integration into a new one there exists a special moment, *limen* ('threshold' in Latin). The significance of the moment is dramatised to emphasise the consequences of the transition; the initiation rites often involve a period of separation as the "old self" of the initiate is considered dead. The presence of something sacred, supernatural and terrifying, is suggested; sometimes daimonic beings are faced in this dangerous phase. After undergoing all the ordeals, the initiate is reborn in his or her new role in the community.¹⁷ On the imaginative level, an alternative level of reality is evoked during these periods, one with different rules than the profane one.

The liminal state exists between orders, or systems of meaning, and it has continued to inspire research. Victor Turner has called it "anti-structure" in his study *The Ritual Process* (1969). In his view, the exceptional status of the anti-structure has important regenerative and creative significance. A male shaman dressed as a woman, or the prankish devils or skeletal figures in carnivals all break the normal order of things, but they also vent the pressures within a community in a particular, limited ritual.¹⁸ Turner relates the liminal to our own time and culture; he thinks that one single system of rituals has fragmented in our society into different cultural forms, some of them with *liminoid* potential. The liminoid features of art, sports occasions and other forms of entertainment (Turner mentions such customs as Halloween) are filtered through their more playful and marginal character.¹⁹ Applying the liminal thematics to the needs of cultural criticism, Mary Douglas' study *Purity and Danger* (1966) has proved especially influential. She has stimulated many writers to pay special attention to the way identity is produced by articulating the limits of such an identity, and by rejecting or suppressing transgressive figures.²⁰ The attitude towards liminal areas has not always been as tolerant as in the case of the ancient Greek daimon. I return to these aspects in chapter two, in the discussion of the "daimonic."²¹

¹⁶ van Gennep 1909/1977, 10-11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65-115.

¹⁸ Turner 1969/1987, 166-68. See also Doty 1986, 81-95.

¹⁹ Turner 1981, 162; 1969/1987, 172; Doty 1986, 93-95.

²⁰ Douglas 1966/1991; see also e.g. Stallybrass - White 1986/1993, 193-94.

²¹ See below, pages 65-80.

AMBIVALENT DEMONS IN THE FOLK TRADITION

The florescence of the daimonic in the Greek poetry and thought was a product of particular historical conditions, and tied in particular to the potential interactions and tensions between the old and new ways of conduct and thinking in fourth century Greek societies. The dark forms of liminal imagery, however, are older, and used in many different historical situations by different cultures to present the painful dynamism evoked by deep conflicts. There are no reliable sources available to record the oral tradition and the folk beliefs connected with demons in antiquity, but demonic figures are useful and important as opponent figures even nowadays in many (mainly oral) cultures.

The Bengali culture of modern Bangladesh and the state of West Bengal in India is a good example. Many of the stories told in this area gain narrative momentum by juxtaposing humans with supernatural beings, such as *devata* (deities), *bhoot* (ghosts) and *rakshash* (demons). An important feature of the Bengali society is the ambivalent position of women; the meaning of family is essential, and woman holds a central position in family life. At the same time, however, the position of women is dependent and subordinate to men. As Sayantani DasGupta and Shamita Das Dasgupta write, “the construction of Bengali womanhood is inherently oppositional in character: simultaneously powerful and powerless.”²² It is easy to relate this social condition to the fact that Bengali folk tales portray female demons in abundance. In the title story of the collection of folk tales by the DasGuptas, *The Demon Slayers*, a powerful *rakshashi* is the wife of a king, and mother to one of two brothers (who are the double protagonist of the tale). The complicated and fantastic plot of the story offers an opportunity to explore some of the fears evoked by negative potentials in powerful women – as a threatening wife this demon paralyses her husband and rules his kingdom, and as a punishing mother-figure she devours her own child. The *rakshashi* is eventually destroyed only by the joint operation of the reborn brothers, the one human, the other half-demonic.²³ The demonic imagery and narratives are here employed to give a mythological shape to the tensions and conflicts inherent in the social structure.

From the earliest written evidence, literary demons have an ambivalent role. Neil Forsyth has studied the early history of the demonic from the standpoint of the oppositional structure in his book *The Old Enemy* (1989). There were many stories told about the mythical king Gilgameš by the ancient Sumerians, and later by the Assyrians and Babylonians. In his quest for immortality he had an important battle with a monstrous opponent (named Huwawa or Humbaba), and Neil Forsyth has seen this as the earliest record of a confrontation with a demonic adversary. It is an important characteris-

²² DasGupta 1995, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21, 137-46. – For more on the demonisation of the female, see below, chapter four.

tic of demons that they cannot be rejected off-hand; they are marked by a supernatural threat which makes them mediators of special meanings. In the case of Gilgameš, his fight with the demon launches his final perdition; Huwawa was actually a servant of the supreme god Enlil, and the quest that had initially seemed a success, ends in Gilgameš resigning himself before the power of death.²⁴ Fighting with the demon initiates a conflict in the ancient story that finally questions the king's ability to tell right from wrong, and to know his own limits (and limitations). The ambivalence of the demon in the case of Gilgameš is further heightened by the fact that, according to the Sumerian lists of kings, Gilgameš' own father was a *lillu* demon.²⁵

In order to understand the various functions of the demonic tradition, it is important to pay special attention to this intimate connection that demons have with an individual self. There are many reasons to believe that interaction with spirits, especially the possession behaviour, has been an important part of many times and cultures. T.K. Oesterreich's pioneering study *Possession: Demoniactal & Other* (1921) makes this point most forcibly. As Raymond Prince has noted, for a long time Western anthropologists documented cases of voluntary possession (in which individuals seek possession) without being able to explain why anybody would desire such a state.²⁶ The Western conception of demons has long been exclusively negative and dismissive, and this has not failed to leave its mark in the history of scholarship. A quotation from Cyril of Jerusalem, a fourth century Christian author, illustrates the discourse that set the tone for anthropological accounts of possession, too, far into the nineteenth century:

the unclean devil, when he comes upon the soul of man ... comes like a wolf upon a sheep, ravening for blood and ready to devour. His presence is most cruel; the sense of it most oppressive; the mind is darkened; his attack is an injustice also, and usurpation of another's possession. For he tyrannically uses another's body, another's instruments, as his own property; he throws down him who stands upright (for he is akin to him who *fell from heaven*); he perverts the tongue and distorts his lips. Foam comes instead of words; the man is filled with darkness; his eye is open yet his soul sees not through it; and the miserable man quivers convulsively before his death.²⁷

²⁴ Enkidu, the friend of Gilgameš asks him: "Why must you set your heart on this enterprise?" Gilgameš answers: "Because of the evil that is in the land, we will go to the forest and destroy the evil; for in the forest lives Humbaba whose name is 'Hugeness', a ferocious giant." (Sandars 1971, 69.) The designation of the adversary as "evil" removes the need for any other consideration.

²⁵ Forsyth 1989, 31-43.

²⁶ Prince, "Foreword"; Crapanzano - Garrison 1977, xi.

²⁷ Cyril, in Oesterreich 1921/1974, 7; Vincent Crapanzano points out how this basic attitude can still be found in Edward Tylor's 1871 description of the possessed ("Introduction"; Crapanzano - Garrison 1977, 5-6).

The trance state (or epileptic fit), which is here depicted in extremely negative terms, has a different character for the many shamanistic cultures that have survived from antiquity into our time. Many oracles received their messages in a similar trance from gods or from intermediary spirits, daemons. Often the spiritual, mental and physical health of a society was in the hands of a shaman, who used trance states and interaction with spirits to solve problems and effect cures.²⁸ It is possible to differentiate between spirit possession, spirit mediumship and shamanism according to the degree of control in the behaviour; the possession metaphor is, however, very flexible and it is impossible to draw any rigid lines between 'victim' and 'master' in a typical situation.²⁹ Spirit possession can be interpreted as harmful and caused by evil spirits, or beneficial, or ambiguous in its status, but in any case it is a universal phenomenon that offers ways to dramatise the (dis)integration of the self and the social group. I.M. Lewis has paid special attention to the way women and socially oppressed groups utilise possession behaviour to force their societies into facing their strain and bad feelings.³⁰

Spirit possession is effective as a "protest" because it is not perceived as an offence on part of the possessed; he or she is the victim and the real subject of antagonistic behaviour is the demon. As far as all social interaction is based on acceptable behaviour coded in "social roles" that individuals respect, the possession by a demon initiates a crisis of representation. Instead of mimicking "a good wife," "a dutiful son," or some other accepted role, the possessed starts to imitate completely different ideas in her or his behaviour. Bruce Kapferer has analysed this process in his article "Mind, Self and Other in Demonic Illness" (1979). Following the work of G.H. Mead, he sees "Self" as a social construction, and demonic possession as a radical way to alter the reality that is constructed between social selves. Typically in this process, the abnormal behaviour of the patients is attributed to a demonic or ghostly attack, and an exorcism ritual is staged in order to return the patient from the world of the supernatural to that of ordinary people. According to Kapferer, this means that the initial Self of the patient is negated (in a "loss of Self") and then reconstructed in a ritualistic interplay. The exorcism ritual negotiates with the reality as perceived by the patient (the terrible and chaotic world of demons) and offers ways for a "nonhuman Self" to come into contact with a social Self.³¹

²⁸ In Greek Pythagorean thought the demon was closely identified with the soul in the context of shamanistic practices. Following M. Detienne, Søren Jensen writes: "To separate the soul from the body [an important element in the shamanistic technique] is precisely to create or realize the immanent demon. It is, in a sense, to become a demon" (Jensen 1966, 72). In this line of thinking, demons were closely associated with knowledge.

²⁹ Raymond Firth, "Individual Fantasy and Social Norms: Seances with Spirit Mediums" (*Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 1967); quoted and commented in Crapanzano - Garrison 1977, 9-10.

³⁰ Lewis 1971/1989, 26, 90-113.

³¹ Kapferer 1979, 110-19.

It should be noted, that demonic discourse is not the exclusive frame of reference when traditional societies deal with possession. Kapferer, who has witnessed over fifty exorcism rituals in Sri Lanka, states that “reasons for demonic intervention are sought at work, disputes over land and status, in political and intercaste hostility, in the failure to fulfill ritual responsibilities, and so on.”³² Demons are a powerful element in mythical thought, but, in practice, they are only one of the elements that traditional societies use to make sense of and to organise some otherwise chaotic and pathological conflict situations. The narratives and rituals which transmit this tradition from generation to generation are conventional, but the exact meanings of demonic elements are bound up with the specific conflicts at hand.³³ Nevertheless, the structure and logic of the situation remains rather stable: demons are ambiguous or evil figures who act as embodiments of conflicts. They give voice and mythical guise to such problematic and rejected sides of subjectivity that cannot be directly incorporated as a part of social Self. Therefore they are ambivalent – they are simultaneously hideous opponents and enemies of humanity, and something very intimate and close to the tormented individual, too. Kapferer notes that a demonic possession creates “an energy,” or “an intensified sense of the Other,” and this can be interpreted as meaning both the social Other (of the society as a whole) and the nonhuman Other (possessing the patient).³⁴

INHABITANTS OF LIMITS

Demons are needed to dramatise limits. Ivan Karp has written:

The spirits themselves are preeminently creatures of the wilderness. Underlying the rituals of possession is an attitude and concept of the bush as containing disordered potentiality, which is ordinarily kept separate from the home because of the danger of disorder but which must be brought into contact with order in order to revive a failing world.³⁵

The contrast between order and chaos is one that is frequently employed in order to decipher demonic imagery. Many creation myths portray the beginning of the universe as a victory over ruling chaos. In the Mesopotamian cosmogony *Enuma Elish* Tiamat was the mother of gods, but also a primordial monster. She is portrayed as a dragon who was eventually destroyed by her children, and her body was cut up to create the world. In Hesiod’s *Theogony* Chaos is the abyss before the time of gods and order; she is also the primeval goddess who gives birth to Night, Erebus (Darkness), Tartarus (Hell), and Eros. Robert Detweiler, who has summarised these myths

³² Ibid., 121.

³³ Of shamanistic world view, mythical thought and its metaphors, see Eliade 1951/1989 and (in Finnish) Siikala 1992 (especially pages 38-53).

³⁴ Kapferer 1979, 122.

³⁵ Jackson - Karp 1990, 88.

in his article “From Chaos to Legion to Change: the Double Play of Apocalyptic and Mimesis” (1990), claims that horror of the meaningless, of the unformed, is a more profound threat than even that of suffering and death. “If the world could have a plan, suffering and death might have meaning, but chaos is disorder, planlessness, and prevents meaning.”³⁶

The most notable feature in the iconography of demons is their heterogeneity; there is no fixed set of features that would define a demon. Instead, they may adopt whatever monstrous attributes suit the occasion. In that sense they are “formless.” However, there are some tendencies that structure the demonic, and which help to interpret demons’ roles and functions. For example, in the demonologies of many cultures the demonic beings are predominantly presented in human forms marked with the features of animals: horns, wings, long teeth, and so on. This can be connected with the fact that animals reigned in the wilderness outside the boundaries of human settlement. For a very long period of time people had to compete with animals for survival; a confrontation with a dangerous predator could easily lead to death. This antagonism could not have passed without leaving its traces in the symbolic sphere of our cultures. The ambivalent value of the surrounding nature was figuratively embodied in spirits that could assume animal shapes – both gods and demons have been figured as animals.³⁷ They have stood as signs for the terrifying unknown powers looming outside the bounds of community. Mary Douglas writes that “the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors.”³⁸ The powers of chaos have been needed to articulate the boundary line between the spheres of significance and nonsignificance.³⁹

Folk traditions have ample stories about demons, and according to most of them demons are monstrous beings whose aim is destruction and death. The primitive threat associated with demons is most evident in accounts of demons capturing and eating humans – they act like predatory beasts. The specific horror associated with these mythical beings, though, is not equal to the pragmatic and realistic fear stirred by dangerous animals. Rather, it is an irrational mixture of horror and fascination evoked by a suggestive idea: a being combining human and animal characteristics in a heterogeneous mixture. In its monstrous composition the demon is a violation

³⁶ Detweiler - Doty 1990, 1-3.

³⁷ Anthropology traditionally used to apply the term ‘animism’ to characterise religious features similar to those of the ancient Egyptians. See G. Foucart, “Demons and Spirits (Egyptian)” in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (1911, 584-90; based largely on Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*).

³⁸ Douglas 1966/1991, 3.

³⁹ While finishing this work, I came across *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen) which outlines starting points for the study of monsters adopting a theoretical approach that has many similar emphases to this study. (The focus of its essays is the discourse on monstrosity in the Middle Ages and early modern period.) See especially “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (*ibid.*, 3-25).

of the basic boundaries that produce identity; the separation of the human “us” and the animalistic “them” is presented as dangerously confounded in this distorted figure.

T.O. Ling, in his study of Theravâda Buddhism, has gathered together some central features of demons from the rich demonology of India’s folklore. For the most part, demons inhabit deserted places, outside the community. They are at their most active during the night. Their man-eating habits, inhuman strength and terrifying appearance (red eyes, hairiness, sharp teeth, plus some supernatural attribute, such as casting no shadow) mark their demonic nature.⁴⁰ In other words, they are complete opposites of the common, civilised human beings. Edward Langton has noted how places that were formerly populated, but now desolate, are especially susceptible to be inhabited by demons.⁴¹ There seems to be a structural logic at work, one which situates demons at the “grey zone” between two different systems of order; those of the human world and nature. A ruin or a graveyard as a *topos* expresses analogous logic compared to the logic characterising most descriptions of demons: human reality is brought to its limits and faced (and mixed) with something Other. Ruins and graveyards retain signs and traces of meanings that are going through a transition into something else, and this “margin of the unknown” is utilised in demonic discourses.

The interest in these marginal areas and figures has endured, even up to our own days. As an important recent example, Noël Carroll has incorporated the anthropological insights of Mary Douglas into his work, *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990). His starting point is the thriving modern horror culture with its innumerable monsters and supernatural threats. A classic horror monster, such as Dracula, elicits strong reactions in those mortals it faces, both in its novelistic and movie incarnations. Carroll names this reaction “art-horror” and divides it into three distinct components: the *thought* of such monster as Dracula has properties which make the audience feel abnormal, *physical agitation*, and it evokes a *desire to avoid* the touch of such monsters. The most important properties that evoke this reaction are the monster’s credible presentation (that it is “possible” even if not really existing in reality), and that it is regarded as both *threatening* and *impure*.⁴²

The impurity of the monster is not literal dirtiness but a conceptual feature derived from Mary Douglas’s theory. Carroll suggests that “an *object* or *being* is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless.” His examples include beings that are both living and dead: ghosts, zombies, vampires, mummies, the Frankenstein’s monster. Other entities “conflate the animate and the inanimate: haunted houses, with malevolent wills of their own, robots, and the car in [Stephen] King’s *Christine*. Many monsters confound different species, too: werewolves, humanoid insects, humanoid reptiles, and the inhabitants of Dr. Moreau’s is-

⁴⁰ Ling 1962, 16-18.

⁴¹ Langton 1949/1982, 5.

⁴² Carroll 1990, 27-8. Italics in the original.



Assyrian-Babylonian demon of disease and evil (after a wall carving at Nineveh; Lehner - Lehner 1971, 1).

land [in H.G. Wells's novel]."⁴³ Carroll comments in this context on the demonic:

Horrorific monsters often involve the mixture of what is normally distinct. Demonically possessed characters typically involve the superimposition of two categorically distinct individuals, the possessee and the possessor, the latter usually a demon, who, in turn, is often a categorically transgressive figure (e.g., a goat-god).⁴⁴

Modern horror seems to follow a similar structural logic in its interest in ambivalent objects as the "traditional" cultures; such things that violate the boundaries of some deep conceptual schemes evoke specially intense reactions. Good candidates for such a position would situate themselves ambiguously at the limits of categorical oppositions, as "me / not me," "inside / outside," "living / dead."⁴⁵ The demonic tradition has been eager to exploit all of these – as my analyses in the second part of this study also point out.

Carroll's serious and systematic probing into the logic of such creations as "The Creature from the Black Lagoon" or "Green Slime" has its undeni-

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵ Douglas 1966/1991, 121-28; Carroll 1990, 31-2.

able virtues (such as pointing out that there really is some logic in these areas), but it also has its drawbacks. Perhaps the most serious of these is Carroll's inability to link his theory of art-horror convincingly to an explanation as to why many people find these horrors irresistible. Carroll writes:

The argument has been that if horror is, in large measure, identified with the manifestation of categorically impossible things, works of horror, all things being equal, will command our attention, curiosity, and fascination, and that curiosity, as well, can be further stimulated and orchestrated by the kind of narrative structures that appear so frequently in the genre. Moreover, that fascination with the impossible being outweighs the distress it endangers can be rendered intelligible by what I call the thought theory our emotional response to fiction, which maintains that audiences know horrific beings are not in their presence, and, indeed, that they do not exist, and, therefore, their description or depiction in horror fictions may be a cause for interest rather than either flight or any other prophylactic enterprise.⁴⁶

From the perspective of this study, informed as it is by research of demons and the demonic in their various functions in different cultural contexts, I have to consider this explanation as somewhat unsatisfactory. Stories and dramatic performances inspired by threatening supernatural entities fascinate and terrify even such audiences that consider such beings as "real" and actual parts of their world view.⁴⁷ An exorcist who explains the patient's symptoms in terms of demonic discourse aims to cure by convincing; running away from him would do no good. Carroll attacks radical theorists' (such as Rosemary Jackson's) attitudes that horror's (or fantasy's) ability to question cultural categories is subversive or emancipatory – according to him, culture should be celebrated as "a means by which we come to know reality." He also adds that many of the divided selves in the fantasy or horror genres just "literalize popular religious and philosophical views of the person (as divided between good and evil, between reason and appetite, between human and beast)."⁴⁸ The implication is, that a reading which derives from horror some form of the critique of subject, or unitary self, is a conventional, perhaps even reactionary attitude, and therefore not a really interesting way to proceed. My hope is to prove in this study something of the opposite; it is an important feature in the tradition of demons and the demonic (which has played a central part in the creation of horror as a genre) to offer means of exploring the limits and limitations inherent in our subjec-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁷ Belief in demons and the supernatural continues to exist even among contemporary, dominantly non-religious people; various "demonic attacks" are from time to time treated in the popular press and media, and the need to believe in them seems to sustain even the most severe contrary evidence. See, e.g. the account of the hoaxed "Amityville" case in Nickell 1995, 122-29.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

tivity.⁴⁹ A simplifying statement like ‘we enjoy them because they are frightening but not real’ is not doing justice to the full complexity of the demonic tradition.

This can be best demonstrated by a reading of the Christian attitudes to demons, which form a central part of our heritage in this area.

THE CHRISTIAN DEMONIC: THE NEED FOR AN OPPONENT

The Christian demonological tradition is a complicated product of promiscuous historical sources. It is usually maintained that ancient Israel was a strictly monotheistic society, and that this monotheism was inherited by Christianity as an element that separated it from the pagan environment. The situation can also be interpreted in different terms; polyphonic, polytheistic impulses were repressed, but they actually found a new expression in the area of the demonic. Mary Douglas refers to the classic study by Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (1889), which claims that the ancient Semitic religions had two characteristics: “an abounding demonology, rousing fear in men’s hearts, and a comforting, stable relation with the community god. The demons are the primitive element rejected by Israel; the stable, moral relation with God is true religion.”⁵⁰

There is no clear adversary figure for God in the Old Testament. From the Christian perspective, this can be interpreted as nondifferentiation: the demonic elements were not separate, but a part of the figure of God. Yahweh in the Old Testament is a coincidence of opposites in himself; he is an active, personal and frightening power, capable of destruction as well as creation.⁵¹ As God is presented as saying in the book of Isaiah: “I form light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”⁵² The book of Job tackles the problem of suffering and evil explicitly, and it affirms the destructive potential as an important element in God’s greatness. As a ruler of all cosmos he governs both rain and storms, he has created all the animals, from the wild goats to the eagle. As the mightiest of his creations, however, God presents the monstrous Leviathan: “His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.”⁵³ The monster’s strength and fierceness finally proves God to be beyond and above all human understanding – and beyond the moral standards of Job, too.

⁴⁹ For an introduction into the demonic in the horror genre, see below, chapter four.

⁵⁰ Douglas 1966/1991, 17. An alternate interpretation holds that there are relatively few demons in the Old Testament, and that “devils infected Judaism” only sometime between 150 B.C.E. and 300 C.E. (Messadié 1993/1996, 234.)

⁵¹ Cf. Russell 1988, 28-30; *Encyclopedia of Religion*, q.v. ‘Demons’; *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, q.v. ‘Devil.’

⁵² Is. 45:7. The “Authorized King James Version” used here. (“Revised Standard Version” translates this as “I make weal and create woe.”)

⁵³ Job 41:21.

The figure of Satan, who makes one of his rare appearances in the book of Job, is part of Yahweh's court (*bene ha-elohim*, "the sons of God"); the association, for example, between the snake of Paradise and Satan is a later interpretation. Satan did not really have an independent role in the Old Testament.⁵⁴ The Hebrew word, '*satan*,' derives from the root meaning "oppose," "obstruct," or "accuse." 'Satan' appears in the Old Testament numerous times as a common noun referring to a human opponent, or even to an obstacle on the road.⁵⁵ Satan was an instrument of God, an angel carrying out destructive and opposing tasks – the divine accuser. Destructive potential was an important part of the character of Yahweh, the God of an aggressive nomadic tribe. In the Old Testament's words:

For I lift up my hand to heaven,
and swear, As I live for ever,
if I have whet my glittering sword,
and my hand takes hold on judgment,
I will take vengeance on my adversaries
and will requite those who hate me.
I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
and my sword shall devour flesh –
with the blood of the slain and the captives,
from the long-haired heads of the enemy.⁵⁶

The historian Jeffrey Burton Russell has written the most comprehensive modern study of the Devil in his series of books *The Devil* (1977), *Satan* (1981), *Lucifer* (1984) and *Mephistopheles* (1986). He comments on the different theories of Devil's origin, arguing that the best historical explanation would interpret the development of this idea as "the personification of the dark side of the God, that element within Yahweh which obstructs the good."⁵⁷ Any historical account of the origin and development of an independent figure of evil should also include such foreign influences as Persian Zoroastrianism or Hellenism on late Judaism and early Christianity.⁵⁸ There is no room, nor need, for a comprehensive presentation in this study; it suffices to notice that there were internal tensions in the Jewish religion focusing on the morally ambivalent character of Yahweh, as the life and values of his people went through a change. Less ambiguous moral standards were needed, and dualistic impulses offered a solution. However, they were never

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Kurtén 1992, 6. For a more thorough discussion, see Russell 1977/1982, 174-220; 1988/1993, 28-42; McGinn 1994, 22-6.

⁵⁵ Russell 1988/1993, 33. "So Balaam rose in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. But God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary [*satan*]." (Num. 22:21-22.)

⁵⁶ Deut. 32:41-42.

⁵⁷ Russell 1977/1982, 176-7.

⁵⁸ Russell gives a concise and clear account of this in his *The Prince of Darkness* (1988/1993); see also McGinn's *Antichrist* (1994) and Bernstein's *The Formation of Hell* (1993).

fully developed in the Old Testament, and it remains for Yahweh both first to “harden the heart” of Pharaoh, and then to punish him for not yielding.⁵⁹

The Christian demonological tradition is mostly derived from Jewish apocalyptic literature, written from 200 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. These writings were never included in the official religious canon (they were called *pseudepigrapha*, “false writings”), but they were nevertheless popular and had a wide influence. Their historical context was the sufferings and humiliations under Syrian and Roman occupation, and their subject matter is acutely concerned with the power of evil in the world. The Apocalyptic (i.e. “Revelation”) of their content was centred on visions of the end of this world; they reformulated the previous religious tradition radically in many ways. During this period, two significant traditions of interpretation were developed.

The first takes off from the brief mention in Genesis which relates that “the sons of God” were drawn to daughters of men, married them and how they created a mixed offspring (the *Nephilim*, or giants of old).⁶⁰ An early apocalypse called the “Book of Watchers” (1 Enoch 1-36) evolves this into a detailed account of two hundred corrupted angels who marry human women as an act of rebellion against God. The ancient combat myth is incorporated into the tale in an account of a leader (called variously Semihazad or Asael), who heads this revolt. Alan E. Bernstein summarises the tale as follows:

After this vision [of the angels’ eternal punishment] in his dream, Enoch was rapt before the divine throne (14.8–25), where God explained that the Watchers had “abandoned” their spiritual, eternal lives, in order to defile themselves with women, with flesh and blood. They had not needed wives in heaven, “for the dwelling of the spiritual beings of heaven is heaven” (15.7). But their offspring were now of the earth, and they would live on the earth and in it. From the bodies of the Watchers had come evil spirits (15.8–10), which would oppose the human offspring of the women until the consummation of the age (15.12–16.1). Because they had revealed some of heaven’s mysteries to women, the others would be hidden from them and, for their betrayal, they would “have no peace” (16.3).⁶¹

The mythical unity of the Jewish-Christian heritage became gradually divided, and a war in the heaven began to mirror the conflicts at earth. It is especially interesting from the viewpoint of demonology to note how the demons were doubled even at this early state: there were (1) the fallen angels who had names and active personalities, and (2) the anonymous “evil spirits” who were created in intimate connection with corporeal reality. This duality would stay and develop in the later Christian tradition; the “high demonic” discourse is concerned with the “Prince of Darkness” and his fallen angels –

⁵⁹ Ex. 7-12. – See Räisänen 1972 for a comparative study of the idea of divine hardening in the Bible and the Koran.

⁶⁰ Gen. 6:1-4.

⁶¹ Bernstein 1993, 184-85. *The Other Bible* (Barnstone 1984, 487-94) contains selections of this text in English translations. Cf. also Russell 1988/1993, 31-5; McGinn 1994, 24-5.

and the “low demonic” contains the folk tradition of anonymous demons inflicting harm and spreading disease in the world.⁶²

The second apocalyptic interpretation of the Old Testament did not emphasise the carnal lust of angels as the reason for their rebellion; instead, it concentrated on individual pride. A parable in Isaiah offers a starting point here: the fallen king of Babylon is mocked by comparing him to the morning star (Lucifer) that is wiped into invisibility by the rays of the rising sun.

How are you fallen from heaven, O Day Star [Lucifer], son of Dawn!

How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!

You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north;

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I make myself like the Most High.’

But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit.⁶³

The original meaning of the parable had been lost (or ignored) by the Apocalyptic period. “Lucifer” became an important angel who turned away from the position assigned by God, and “conceived of an impossible thought, to place his throne higher than any clouds above the earth, that he might become equal in rank to any power.” This “impossible thought” of an angel valuing himself above anything else roused the wrath of God, and the rebel with his cohorts was cast from heaven.⁶⁴ The theme of a battle in heaven and the fall of angels was explored in several apocalyptic texts, and it is also referred to in the New Testament: “And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”⁶⁵ Yet, the actual accounts of the battle were never canonised.

The Christian conception of evil was formed in this apocalyptic context. An active personification of evil highlights the significance of struggle and choice. Jeffrey Burton Russell has pointed out that Christianity systematises the complex materials of the apocalyptic literature in its Devil. The universe is in a state of war, Christ commanding the troops of light and Satan the armies of darkness. If one is not following Lord, one is under the rule of Satan. With his terrifying powers, Satan becomes almost another, dark god, ruler of this world; he tempts Christ by showing him the kingdoms of the world and promises: “All these I will give you, if you will fall

⁶² The “low” tradition finds its mythical expression in the story of lust, the “high” in the narrative of excessive individuality and pride. Everett Ferguson (1984, 70, 75) discusses these accounts and notes how the influential version of Milton was based especially on the latter.

⁶³ Is. 14:12-15. – For the origins and evolution of ideas concerning Hell, see Bernstein 1993 and Turner 1993.

⁶⁴ “The Book of the Secrets of Enoch” (2 Enoch); quoted in Russell 1988/1993, 35. See also the translated selections in *The Other Bible* (Barnstone 1984, 4-9, 495-500; the relevant section on page five).

⁶⁵ Lk. 10:18.

down and worship me.”⁶⁶ The cosmos itself is in tension between light and darkness, good and evil, spirit and matter, soul and body. The only thing averting complete dualism, however, is the faith in the second coming of Christ and the final defeat of the Devil’s dominion. This victory has been announced, and outside the temporal universe it is already a fact. The division of the world in two is healed, and united in a more profound sense as the common time of this world is replaced by sacred time.⁶⁷ This solution means also the consolidation of a tension: the ideally perfect world of Jesus is defined by its difference from reality – which stands as a proof of Satan’s power.

These tensions in the sense and symbolic structure of the cosmos did not come from nowhere. Job, in his righteous questioning of his suffering, is already leading the way toward new dimensions of self-assertive individuality. Critics have been quick to note this; Hannes Vatter’s Jungian interpretation explains the lasting attraction of the rebelling Devil by discussing the needs of psychic differentiation. Satan can be seen as an archetypal image of the individuation process that breaks the “original harmony” into the will of Self (Satan) and the will of Other (God). Vatter emphasises further that this sort of demand for originality has been especially accentuated in the areas of artistic creativity.⁶⁸

There are good reasons for reading the demonic in Christianity in terms of ambivalent individuality. These are particularly related to the role of the demons as ambiguous guardians of limits. Elaine Pagels has highlighted the internal tensions of early Christianity to explain the need for strong demonological elements. Pagels reads the gospels as wartime literature, created under the Roman power during the cruel oppression and defeat of the Jewish nation. She rejects faith in their historical accuracy, and instead sees a consistent tendency to create an identity for “God’s people” by rejecting others as “Satan’s people.” The gospels were created in order to persuade, to express the views of a group which essentially was (in those days) a suspect minority. Pagels thinks that there are no convincing reasons to believe that the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus, with the Romans acting just as their reluctant agents. The Roman governor Pilate was famous for ordering “frequent executions without trial,” but the trial scenes incorporated in the gospels indict the Jewish leaders for Jesus’ death. Pagels writes:

The gospel writers want to locate and identify the specific ways in which the forces of evil act *through certain people* to effect violent destruction [...] – the violence epitomized in the execution of Jesus, which Matthew sees as the culmination of all evils. The subject of cosmic war serves primarily to interpret human relationships – especially all-too-human conflict

⁶⁶ Mt. 4:9.

⁶⁷ Russell 1988/1993, 49-50.

⁶⁸ Vatter 1978, 16-7. – C.G. Jung has written that the figure of Christ is “so one-sidedly perfect that it demands a psychic complement to restore the balance” (*Aion*, 1951; CW 9 [Part II], 42).

– in supernatural form. The figure of Satan becomes, among other things, a way of characterizing one’s actual enemies as the embodiment of transcendent forces. For many readers of the gospels ever since the first century, the thematic opposition between God’s spirit and Satan has vindicated Jesus’ followers and demonized their enemies.⁶⁹

Pagels’s analysis draws out a story of mutual hostilities between groups that were all oppressed, but who channelled their most acute hatred against each other – “here, as in most human situations, the more intimate the conflict, the more intense and bitter it becomes.”⁷⁰ Leadership and religious authority was the question in first century Jewish communities; Jesus’ execution needed an explanation and his followers found it in the demonic nature of those who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. Ironically, the Christians themselves were soon accused of demonic crimes. Their secret gatherings were characterised according to a similar demonising formula: Christians were rumoured to murder children in their meetings, drink their blood and eat their flesh, and to indulge in sexual orgies. In their sectarian quarrels, the Christians, in their turn, would accuse other Christians (the “heretics”) of similar deeds. Norman Cohn has described in his work *Europe’s Inner Demons* (1975) how this formulaic fantasy was developed, incorporated into the Christian view of Satan, and finally accepted as a doctrine by the authorities. At the end of the Middle Ages it finally became an autonomously functioning mechanism, as tortured people were forced to confess their alliance with Satan according to a formula, and these confessions, in turn, lead to new charges.⁷¹

DEMONS OF IDENTITY

Internal antagonisms seen in social and historical context can be very enlightening. They serve to highlight how significantly demonic opponents are entangled in the definition of self through negation; demons are something so close to “us” that they have to be most forcibly rejected, otherwise the limits could become blurred, the right and wrong identity indistinguishable. As Christianity adopted Hellenistic elements and separated the higher reality of ideas from the lower and corruptible material world demonic discourses gained fresh applicability.

The ambiguous play of rejection and desire circulating around demons in the New Testament can best be illustrated by an example. The following text extracts the most prominent confrontation between Jesus and demons from the gospel of Mark (cf. analogous versions in Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39). It is enhanced by the key concepts in original Greek, pro-

⁶⁹ Pagels 1996, xxii, 8, 10, 13 [quotation]. Pagels’s italics.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁷¹ Cohn 1975/1993; cf. Kleits 1985, Roper 1994.

vided by Ken Frieden's article "The Language of Demonic Possession: A Key-Word Analysis."⁷²

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Ger'asenes. And when he [Jesus] had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit [*pneumati akathartô*], who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit [*to pneuma to akatharton*]!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they [all the demons; *pantes oi daimones*] begged him, "Send us to the swine, let us enter them." So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits [*ta pneumata ta akatharta*] came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac [*daimonizomenon*] sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood. And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons [*ho daimonistheis*] begged him that he might be with him. But he refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in Decap'olis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled.⁷³

The interesting logic of this story has been extensively analysed; the whole anthology of writings collected in *The Daemonic Imagination* takes this episode as its starting point; *The Scapegoat* by René Girard is another example. Ken Frieden pays special attention to the polyphonic character of the text in his article: the New Testament tells about events in occupied Palestine in Greek (mixing in occasionally some words of Aramaic). The text itself is "possessed" by foreign influences – as Palestine was occupied by the tenth Roman legion. Some phrases (such as "the Most High") are translations from Hebrew, *satan* is sometimes retained, sometimes translated with *diabolus* (slanderer, accuser). The Greek substantives *daimôn* and *daimonion* were already used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Sep-

⁷² Frieden 1990.

⁷³ Mk. 5:1-20.



*Christ exorcising a demon (from a thirteenth-century Armenian gospel;
Russell 1988/1993, 34).*

tuagint) to denote foreign gods or spirits with a negative connotation. According to Frieden, the gospels modify and alter the existing meanings by “employing the words *daimones* and *pneumata* to denote independent evil spirits, rather than false gods worshipped by idolaters” – not to mention the ambivalent divinities of archaic Greek culture.⁷⁴ The New Testament text is both using old words to convey its message, and modifying their meaning, or fighting against the old significancies, at the same time.

How does this relate to the subject matter of the quoted scene? Jesus’ activity in this fragment is fundamentally shamanistic: he performs a cure by his mastery of spirits. Shamanism, consultation of spirits, and similar techniques were part of folk religions and were popular among the Pagans; there

⁷⁴ Frieden 1990, 45.

was a danger in Jesus' action, pronounced by the scribes of Jerusalem, who claimed: "He is possessed by Be-el'zebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."⁷⁵ There was no need for an exorcist in the Old Testament, with its ambivalent Yahweh.⁷⁶ The frame of reference in the New Testament is not the tribal or nationalistic context of Israel; instead, Jesus is presented as a universal figure with answers to a troubled individual. There is a real *need for demons* in the gospels; they are the universal opponents of a universal Messiah. The Jewish clergy turns against Jesus – but the demons are described as declaring: "You are the Son of God!"⁷⁷ They recognise the divine identity of Christ, and are necessary for the divine/demonic logic of the gospel narratives. As the gospel text is intertwined with Pagan concepts and Pagan ideas, so there is a profound ambivalence towards demons in the narrative.

The repeated references to the "impurity" of the possessing spirits is another interpretative guide for the meaning of demons. The impure elements confound the limits of some important cultural categories, and Jesus performs a catharsis at these boundaries through his actions. The key-word is "purity": there should remain no ambivalence after this story. The unpredictable and chaotic features of Yahweh verged on the bestial in such declarations as "my sword shall devour flesh," quoted above; in an act of Oedipal textuality, Jesus is expelling such elements in pigs, which are then destroyed. God the Father still had his demonic side, but his Son is here shown as repudiating demonic elements, and destroying them. This process can also be interpreted in Jungian terms: the New Testament narratives of Son supply answers to the ethical and psychological questions evoked by the Old Testament tradition.⁷⁸ The story contributes to a model for constructing proper, Christian subjectivity. In this process, it is necessary to recognise the existence of chaotic impulses, and then to repulse them. The modern critics, however, have started to claim that such elements cannot ever be totally dismissed; *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, for example, pays special attention to the enduring role of the pig as a beastly "Other," a necessary element in our cultural vocabulary.

René Girard's analysis in his book *The Scapegoat* (1982) goes in somewhat the same direction. He compares the basic structure of Christ's passion to the *Pharmakos* ritual in ancient Greece: a sacrificial victim is taking the sins of society with him. There is an analogous ritual described in the Old Testament. Aaron is given orders to cast lots upon two goats, "one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for Aza'zel." Azazel's goat was sent to wilderness to "be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement over it

⁷⁵ Mk. 3:22. – See the discussion on "Beelzebub" below (page 48).

⁷⁶ An interesting vestige of the shamanistic practices is related in 1 Samuel (28:3-25): the "Witch of Endor" acts as a medium, and evokes the spirit of Samuel on Saul's request.

⁷⁷ Mk. 3:11.

⁷⁸ See Jung, *Answer to Job* (1952; CW 2).

[...].”⁷⁹ Girard reads the scene from Mark along these lines as a story of collective guilt and ritualistic atonement. There is some evidence in the story to justify this; the demons made the man run into wilderness and graveyards, even if the Gerasenes had repeatedly tried to fetter him. Girard notes on scapegoats how these “victims are the spontaneous agents of reconciliation, since, in the final paroxysm of mimeticism, they unite in opposition to themselves those who were organized in opposition to each other by the effects of a previous weaker mimeticism.”⁸⁰ Girard sees a close connection between language and violence, and mimeticism is for him the original source of all man’s troubles; in this case, at least, mimetic logic seems to be at work.⁸¹ After all, the Gerasenes turn against Jesus after he has deprived them of their demons (and their livelihood in pigs, as well, but Girard does not put weight on that factor). The demonic Other is important for society, and Jesus’ cure of the demoniac takes away their mimetic symbol of violence and chaotic limits – the functions that the possessed man had repeatedly performed in his madness.

Another example of Christian possession narratives from a completely different historical context serves further to emphasise the ambivalent functions of demons. The possession epidemic in Loudun, France, began with the possession of Jeanne des Agnes, an Ursuline nun, in 1633. The case is relatively well documented and has received ample attention, in *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) by Aldous Huxley, *La possession de Loudun* (1970) by Michel de Certeau, and in the analysis by Sarah E. Miller. Jeanne and her exorcists believed her to have been possessed by seven different demons (Grésil, Aman, Asmodée, Leviathan, Balaam, Isaacaron, and Béhémot). In time, the entire convent of nuns became possessed, and one of the exorcising priests became insane and died. Jeanne and the other nuns had had dreams of Urban Grandier, and accused him of bewitching them and making them fall in love with him. Grandier was tried in court and burned at the stake. Jeanne’s spectacular disorders, however, remained; she became victim of a supernatural pregnancy, tried a self-inflicted Caesarean, but God himself stopped her. After the demon Isaacaron was made to confess (with Jeanne’s mouth) the

⁷⁹ Leviticus 16:8-10. See Langton 1949/1982, 43-6.

⁸⁰ Girard 1982/1989, 165.

⁸¹ Girard writes of the need for a “monstrous double” as a fundamental element needed to enter the cultural order; “social coexistence would be impossible if no surrogate victim existed, if violence persisted beyond a certain threshold and failed to be transmuted into culture. It is only at this point that the vicious circle of reciprocal violence, wholly destructive in nature, is replaced by the vicious circle of ritual violence, creative and protective in nature.” (Girard 1972/1989, 144.) – Another, less polemical, view on mimeticism is presented by Kathryn Hume in her *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984); she proposes that literature is the product of two impulses, fantasy and mimesis. The desire to imitate with verisimilitude is as fundamental and common as is the opposite desire to “change givens and alter reality – out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience’s verbal defenses.” This is what we identify as fantasy, but these impulses typically mix and coexist. (Hume 1984, 20.)

demonic nature of the pregnancy, Jeanne has “an oral miscarriage” and vomits blood. For several years Jeanne strove towards penitence, beating herself, wearing a belt of spurs, lying on thorns or fiery coals. Jeanne’s spiritual battle was visible in the sufferings of her body, and finally, after the demons departed one by one, their signs were replaced by a series of divine names (e.g. “Jésus”, “Maria”) appearing miraculously in her palm. Sarah E. Miller recounts how Jeanne made “a triumphal pilgrimage” through France. The country was tortured by plague and religious schisms between Protestants and Catholics. Jeanne was admitted even to cities closed in fear of plague; she carried signs that had made her a “public monument bespeaking the power of the Catholic God.”⁸²

Jeanne’s story has been read in many ways. One of these would be to emphasise political and religious conflicts and see Jeanne’s illness as their dramatisation – the victimisation of Urban Grandier is an important subplot in this direction. In an other kind of reading, the demonic voices and effects experienced by Jeanne would be interpreted as conflicting impulses and demands heightened by Jeanne’s sensitivity. In her *Autobiographie*, Jeanne notes how she and her demons are indistinguishable: “un demon et moi estoit la mesme chose.”⁸³ This “moi” is profoundly problematic, starting from the ambiguous status of Jeanne’s *Autobiographie*; her nineteenth century doctors and editors simultaneously claim that Jeanne was illiterate, and that she was unconsciously but knowingly altering the facts – she could not have written the text, which, however, is full of her mistakes, that her editors have to put right.⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray’s view of women’s role as empty mirrors permitting man’s speculation is both fortified, and (partially) critiqued by Jeanne’s seventeenth-century story.⁸⁵ Sarah E. Miller unlocks “Jeanne’s” text by applying the psychoanalytic theory of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. In this theory it is possible to have symptoms from events that have never happened; they are inherited anxieties and fears transmitted by the introjection and incorporation of language.

The first step in the child’s achievement of figuration, according to Abraham and Torok, occurs in the empty mouth [...] – a hunger which is filled by words [...]. Language is from the very beginning figural. Words arrive to replace the missing breast. [...] The proper passage through these steps constitutes introjection. The first time the breast is missed, the literal swallowing and assimilation of objects becomes the figurative enlargement

⁸² Miller 1988, 2-5.

⁸³ Soeur Jeanne des Anges, *Autobiographie d’une hystérique possédée*, Annoté et publié par les docteurs Gabriel Legué et Gilles de la Tourette (1886); quoted *ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁵ See Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974/1986), especially “La Mystérique” (pages 191-202). Irigaray’s female mystic (“perhaps”) finds her “purity” again, after “the most shameful and degrading behavior” (*ibid.*, 199). Miller notes that Jeanne articulated no such optimism. “For Jeanne to cleanse and empty her ‘I,’ she must empty it of itself, remove the ‘I’ in all its stains from the ‘I’; the ideal state would be one in which self-referentiality could find no footing.” (Miller 1988, 9.)

of the “I,” as it expands to include objects transfigured into words that belong to and are inherited from the mother [...].⁸⁶

Jeanne’s troubles focus on oral problems: she confesses her sinful thoughts, spews out blasphemies as a demon, vomits blood on the floors of mother Church. She is giving, in fact, a perfect display that she cannot swallow something – the conflicts between her desires and the Christian vocabulary of sin, of the impurity of the female body and a women’s proper silence are driven in a nauseating struggle. The constant self-inflicted violence towards Jeanne’s body gives an impression she is trying to eliminate her impure corporeal side. One needs only to think of another seventeenth-century writer, René Descartes, to find the same impulse to see identity as something totally independent of anything corporeal: the self was (or should be) “entirely distinct from body.”⁸⁷ The demons tormented Jeanne with visions of unborn or dead children, they threatened to bring her a dead infant, indicating that she was “blessé” and had killed her own child. Miller’s analysis follows Abraham and Torok’s theory, and sees Jeanne’s trouble as a failure of introjection; her incorporation materialises in fantasmatic children, indicating a desire that had been banned from introjection.⁸⁸ A prolonged exorcism and bodily torture was needed to incorporate Christian vocabulary properly into Jeanne’s self; the dialectic of possession and exorcism dramatised the limits of female identity as imposed by the society. In the process, Jeanne became a public display of some of the complexities implicit in such a Christian self, of its conflicts and their eventual reconciliation.

THE GROTESQUE OTHERS

The examples taken from the Christian demonic tradition in Europe demonstrate an ambivalence that did not always serve the aims of theological clarity; instead, various social and psychological conflicts could find their dramatic expressions in demonological discourses. Partly this is inherent already in the starting points of Christian demonology. As Edward Langton writes in his study *The Essentials of Demonology* (1949), ancient Semitic demonology was never completely suppressed by the Yahwistic movement. There are numerous points in the Old Testament that suggest popular attention and worship for ambiguously divine or demonic beings like the hairy *Se’irim*,⁸⁹ or which mention the curious ceremony of *Azazel* (scapegoat), or fear of *Lilith*, the night demon.⁹⁰ The formidable aspect of Yahweh was emphasised, but the existence of other gods was not totally rejected – they

⁸⁶ Miller 1988, 11; she refers here to the essay “Introjection – Incorporation” by Abraham and Torok (in *Psychoanalysis in France*, 1980).

⁸⁷ Descartes 1637/1985, 54.

⁸⁸ Miller 1988, 12.

⁸⁹ Mentioned in Leviticus 17:7 and 2 Chronicles 11:15.

⁹⁰ Alluded to in Isaiah 34:14 (“the night hag”), and portrayed at length in the Rabbinic literature. (See, e.g. *Lilith ou la mère obscure* by Jacques Bril [Paris, 1981].)

were reduced to the rank of demons.⁹¹ The Christians applied a similar approach. The fascinating and fecund narratives and imagery developed by the heathen peoples were adopted as elements of the Christian demonic.

The mirroring relationship between “us” and “them” is nothing new in the history of cultures. The legacy of the ancient Indo-Iranian religion is a particularly good example; this religion had two sets of gods, the asuras (or ahuras) and the devas (or daevas). Zoroastrianism and the Hindu mythology in India were inheritors of this divine duality, and interestingly later developments went into opposite directions: the ‘demon’ in Avesta is *daeva*, as in the Sanskrit *deva* means ‘deity.’ The names have been preserved, but the gods of the one people have become demons of the others.⁹² Jeffrey Burton Russell writes about this process that “when a culture replaces one set of gods with another, it tends to relegate the losing set to the status of evil spirits.”⁹³ Even if this does not always happen, it is one of the most basic mechanisms generating demonic figures and myths.

The conflict between early Christianity and paganism largely centred on the polytheistic features of the surrounding religions. Many of them still carried traces of magical thinking (or “animism”) with them, and “gods were smaller”: they took care of some specific tasks or spheres of life.⁹⁴ From the perspective of competition it is no surprise that the plurality and the practical (or “magical”) interests of the religious rivals became demonised and evil. Among the older religious adversaries was Baal, the popular god of the Canaanites, who was also known as “Baal-ze-boul” (Lord of the House). Under the name of “Beelzebub” this god has become known as the “chief of the devils” for the readers of the New Testament.⁹⁵ However, the role and imagery of the demonic was actually adopted from older religions. The Bible contains accounts of God slaying Leviathan, “the dragon that is in the sea,” and Christ is depicted as a warrior that defeats a seven-headed dragon.⁹⁶ This element is taken from Canaanite mythology: Leviathan was a seven-headed

⁹¹ Langton 1949/1982, 52.

⁹² “This direct opposition between the Indian and the Persian terms is generally ascribed to a presumed religious schism in pre-historic times between the two branches of the Indo-Iranian community” (A.V. Williams Jackson; *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, 620).

⁹³ Russell 1988/1993, 8.

⁹⁴ Javier Teixidor remarks in his study *The Pagan God* on the tendency of scholars to overemphasise the significance of the classical authors as guides to ancient religious life. The study of the actual inscriptions that can be found among ruins points out that the mystery religions, for example, never were that important for “the uneducated masses.” Theological coherence was not essential, and the gist of religious life was the altar, the ritual and the sacrifice. Often the inscriptions end by saying that the offering was made “because the god has listened to the prayer.” Practical and material questions were of paramount interest, and often local cults, even the worship of demons, were accepted in the temples dedicated to some higher god. (Teixidor 1977, 3-6, 116.)

⁹⁵ See Mt. 12:24, Mk. 3:22, Lk. 11:15. In *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie “Baal” is given new life as the name of the poet who opposes the power of Prophet. (See chapter ten.)

⁹⁶ Is. 27:1, Rev. 12:3-20:3.

serpent destroyed by Baal.⁹⁷ Reference to the (dangerous and chaotic) sea goes back to the goddess Tiamat in Babylonian mythology. The most distinct features of the popular Christian conception of evil were nevertheless taken in from the Greeks. Jeffrey Burton Russell writes:

A few Greco-Roman deities had direct influence on the Devil. The Christians associated all the pagan deities with demons, but Pan more than others. Pan was feared for his association with the wilderness, the favorite haunt of hostile spirits, and for his sexuality. Sexual passion, which suspends reason, was suspect to both Greek rationalism and Christian asceticism; a god of sexuality could easily be identified as evil, especially since sexuality was linked through fertility to the underworld and death. Pan, hairy and goatlike, with horns and cloven hooves, was the son of Hermes. A phallic deity like his father, he represented sexual desire in both its creative and its threatening aspects. Pan's horns, hooves, shaggy fur, and oversized phallus became part of the Christian image of Satan.⁹⁸

Demonic imagery in its popular form adopted Pan within the satirical (or, indeed, “satyrical”) discourse or expressive register that this figure had been associated with in antiquity. The lascivious spirits of woodlands and field – fauns, satyrs, Priapus and Pan – were essential in the satyr plays that were performed at the Dionysiac festivals. The satyr plays were an important counterbalance to the serious tragedies, and they were written to give comical relief to the audience who had seen a series of three tragedies before it.⁹⁹ The satyrs were inhabitants of the borderline between wilderness and civilisation and their appearance corresponded to this role: half-human, half-animal they gave a fantastic shape to the “not-so-civilised” aspects of humanity. The god Dionysus himself may have originally been worshipped in the shape of a great bull, and his bacchanals and festivals were practical opportunities to take part in “otherness” – to experience how one can lose his/herself in animalistic frenzy, madness, or in religious ecstasy.¹⁰⁰ The medieval fantasy of the Witches’ Sabbath seems to owe much to this rejected sensual and orgiastic religiousness (the myth of the fallen angels, in comparison, was much more concerned with pride and intellectual questions).

In his study *The Ludicrous Demon* Lee Byron Jennings has focused particularly on this interesting combination of fearsome and ridiculous attributes. His aim is to explain how the grotesque has become an important (albeit often marginalised) part of art and literature. He sees that the power of the grotesque is embedded on its ability to evoke contradictory emotional responses, and to build a new ordering principle to incorporate this tension (an “anti-norm”). Personal identity, the stability of our unchanging environment, the inviolate nature of the human body, and the separation of the

⁹⁷ Cavendish 1975, 11.

⁹⁸ Russell 1988/1993, 17.

⁹⁹ The only satyr play that has been preserved complete is *The Cyclops* by Euripides.

¹⁰⁰ Many of Dionysus’ worshippers were women. See *The Bacchae* by Euripides; also (in Finnish) Simonsuuri 1994, 91-97.

human and nonhuman realms are transgressed and violated in this tradition. At the same time the mode of expression is “low,” approaching trivial. Jennings explains that the “grotesque is *the demonic made trivial*.”¹⁰¹ Wolfgang Kayser has made basically the same interpretation by stating that the grotesque is “AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD.”¹⁰² These theories suppose that the nature of the “demonic” is self-evident and can be used as an explanation; however, a more thorough analysis of the demonic has been mostly disregarded.

The comic or the grotesque aspect of the demonic tradition has not been the focus of theological or philosophical attention, but it has had a strong foothold in folk culture. It is possible to see the carnival as an inheritor to the ritual celebrations of so-called pagan societies: the nominal reason for celebrating a medieval carnival was as a preparation for Lent, its actual origin going back to Roman Bacchanalias and ancient fertility rites. In practice these festivals constituted an alternative world order during which time fools were crowned as kings and devils danced on the streets – it was a celebration combining parades, pageantry, folk drama, and feasting.¹⁰³ M. M. Bakhtin has been influential in relating the significance of the carnival to literary works which would be otherwise hard to classify, and of establishing the carnivalesque as a broader cultural category. Bakhtin is here important especially because he emphasised the polyphony of these literary works; the literary counterpart of the “high” epic was Menippean satire, which broke down the “epical and tragical integrity” of man and his fate.¹⁰⁴ Literary polyphony is for Bakhtin a metaphor for the inner complexities and tensions that can be traced especially in Dostoyevsky’s novels. He wrote about the profound pluralism of Dostoyevsky’s world view, and compared it to Dante’s vision.¹⁰⁵ Dante broke down the tragic seriousness of his Hell with a comic transgression of the carnivalesque in Canto XXI in the first part, *Inferno*, of his *Divina Commedia*. The combination of extreme human suffering with the clownish behaviour of demons (their departure is signalled with a fart) produces a grotesque mixture of (high and low) registers.¹⁰⁶

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have noted that “the primary site of contradiction, the site of conflicting desires and mutually incompatible representation, is undoubtedly the ‘low’.”¹⁰⁷ The two discourses of the demonic mentioned in this chapter are both contradictory and transgressive, but in different ways: the myth of the fallen angels situates evil in the space be-

¹⁰¹ Jennings 1963, 17-19.

¹⁰² Kayser 1957/1981, 188; see also Wright 1865/1968, xiv (an introduction by Frances K. Barasch). Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰³ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s study *Le Carnaval de Romans* (1979) illustrates the violent and subversive potentialities of the carnival (Ladurie 1979/1990).

¹⁰⁴ Bakhtin 1929/1973, 98.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 22. Bakhtin writes about “the communion of unmerged spirits” that the church or the “multileveledness” of Dante’s world is able to achieve.

¹⁰⁶ *Inferno* 21:139; Dante 1314/1984, 264.

¹⁰⁷ Stallybrass - White 1986/1993, 4.

tween god and man. In this “high” version the angels, the superhuman beings and messengers between god and man, are depicted as corrupted and led by an inverse authority, a Dark Prince (as a blasphemous analogue to Christ, or God himself). The second, “low” discourse articulates evil in terms that situate it between man and animal, or grotesque body. A demonic (an irritating, provocative, and trivial, at the same time) mirroring can be detected here: god–man becomes man–dog: the exalted becomes something abject and vile.¹⁰⁸ The use of demonic figures can usefully be understood as a particular kind of borderline discourse; as Julia Kristeva writes in the context of the abject, phobia and the splitting of the ego:

The “unconscious” contents remain here *excluded* but in strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established – one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration.¹⁰⁹

It should be pointed out that the category of holy implies the existence of the unholy; that the irreverent *diablerie* is a constant companion to the pious struggles of the devout. Neither can the two aspects (“lower” and “higher”) of the demonic tradition be clearly separated; instead, intermingling and heterogeneity seem to be the most distinctive aesthetic features of this tradition both in literature and the arts. The demonic may appear wherever there are unresolved conflicts – in the shape of a hairy devil as well as a Dark Prince; the devil is called “the father of lies,” which underlines the transformative character of demonic imagery.

As far as these two aspects can never be completely be set apart (as the “serious” impulse is constantly undermined by grotesque details, and as the ridiculous hides important concerns) we can speak about one demonic tradition. This tradition is rich and internally conflicting enough to fertilise even the most demanding imaginations and minds. Instead of having one fixed identity, the demon is an inhabitant of borderlands. It is characterised by the constant tension between the desirable and the repulsive, and also the discursive use of the demonic figures can be characterised as divided and discordant. The moral and ontological conflicts of self, dramatic transgressions of limits, as those between “us” / “them,” “inside” / “outside,” “desirable” / “forbidden” are given their conflicting expressions in the figurative and discursive level. The heterogeneous historical and cultural background of the demonic elements in modern literature and movies makes it impossible to establish any tight boundaries for the demonic imagination. The demonic (in its various forms as separate figures and as a thematic field) is set apart from the rest of fantastic elements by some reference to this tradition: this sort of reference acts as an interpretative guide for the reader, who may thus

¹⁰⁸ See below, analyses of Clive Barker’s play and W.P. Blatty’s *The Exorcist* (pp. 159–60 and 192).

¹⁰⁹ Kristeva 1980/1982, 7.

be able to expect questions about good or evil, spiritual or material, identity or falsity etc., to be thematised in the text.

The next two chapters take some distance from the colourful history of demons and engage in more theoretically oriented discussions. The main focus will be on the puzzling nature of the self; the previous introduction has already pointed out how the demonic is positioned as an enemy of a “proper” identity, trouble to the self. To approach the dynamics of this area (of non-identity, break-down of the self and language, of suffering and grotesque bodies) one has to create some understanding of what is negated, or troubled by it.

My analyses dealing with fictional narratives will begin in chapter four. These analyses are not “subjected” to theory; the relationship is reciprocal, and it should be possible for the reader to alter the order here, and read the more theoretical analyses after the analyses of fiction, for example. It could be claimed that the theoretical discourses have poetic and symbolic dimensions of their own, and it is my aim to question the opposition between theory and fiction. The “theoretical” texts dealing with the self and its troubles are also shown as contributing to its poetic and mythical construction.