

8. *The (Un)Traditionalist: Clive Barker's Devil*

POLYXENE: (*To Yapshi*) What have you got there?

YAPSHI: Lady?

POLYXENE: In the bundle?

YAPSHI: A dead god, lady.

POLYXENE: Surely you mean dog. (*To Lysias*) He means dog. Take it away, Yapshi.

YAPSHI: (*Bowing*) Lady.¹

“The History of the Devil; or Scenes from a Pretended Life” is the full title of one of the earliest published plays by Clive Barker (b. 1952). Barker became instantaneously famous with the publication of a three-volume short story collection *Books of Blood* in 1984. Since this he has published eight novels, four more short story collections and several novellas, as well as scripted, directed and produced several movies. The earlier work by him has also gained attention, and *Incarnations: Three Plays* is one of the most recent and most interesting additions to his *oeuvre*, consisting of three plays written and produced in the early 1980s.² “The History of the Devil” (1980; “HD”) exhibits several of the key features of Barker’s fiction – especially his love for the grotesque, the demonic and his dark sense of humour – but is also unique in its reliance on the fantastic theatre tradition and adaptation of the Christian figure of the Devil. I am particularly interested in analysing how different layers of ambivalence are constructed in the script. I want to see how the demonic figures are connected with or set apart from the humans – to examine the specific role that Barker has cast for the Devil and his demons to play.

The opening citation from the play is a good signpost. The joke with the inversion of letters from “god” to “dog” match the general atmosphere of the work.³ It is irreverent, often grotesquely comic, and directs special offences towards good taste, proper conduct and Christianity. The figure of the devil is in a central role in the play, but it has gone through a radical re-

¹ Barker, “The History of the Devil” (1995, 283).

² For more of Barker’s playwriting, see also *Forms of Heaven: Three Plays* (Barker 1996).

³ *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Obscenity & Taboo* also points out that ‘dog’ relates to ‘a male prostitute’: “This euphemism is a reference to anal intercourse carried out ‘doggy-fashion’” (McDonald 1988/1996; q.v. ‘Dog’). Such connotations were probably not missed by Barker (well familiar with the homosexual and sadomasochistic subcultures).

writing from its traditional sources. As a study of evil this early work clearly has had an effect on how evil is depicted in Barker's influential horror stories and movies. He also makes use of the devil in a more general context, to characterise the aims of his work.

I think one of the things that's been missing from monster movies of recent years is that, for the most part, the monsters themselves have been dumb. [...]

Evil is never abstract. It is always concrete, always particular and always vested in individuals. To deny the creatures as individuals the right to speak, to actually state their cause, is perverse – because I *want* to hear the Devil speak. I think that's a British attitude. I like the idea that a point of view can be made by the dark side.⁴

Clive Barker is not simply advocating here an interpretation of the Devil as a real individual; the play partly contradicts and complicates such ideas. In many points in the play it is emphasised that the Devil is not a human being and to conceive of him as such would be a mistake.⁵ The structure of the play is fragmentary, it consists of four acts that divide into over twenty scenes. These take place over the span of three thousand years and cover various geographically unconnected sites such as ancient Russia, a Greek settlement in North India, and sixteenth century Lucerne. Barker's Devil is interesting precisely because it is not a fixed individual with clear-cut boundaries, but rather takes different guises and is constantly changing.⁶ In this respect it is a liminal creature and closely connected with the questions discussed in the first chapter.

At the same time this specific incarnation of the Devil (one should remember also the title of the book, *Incarnations*) develops some personality during the play. This demonic character is unique in its position both as a subject with human attributes and an individual history, and as a superhuman principle, or force. In this latter, impersonal role the Devil is shown to be a mere narrative device, "a point of view" to borrow Barker's own phrase. He is an actor constantly taking up different roles on life's stage, taking part in human suffering, but definitely not the origin of all evil acts, as in reli-

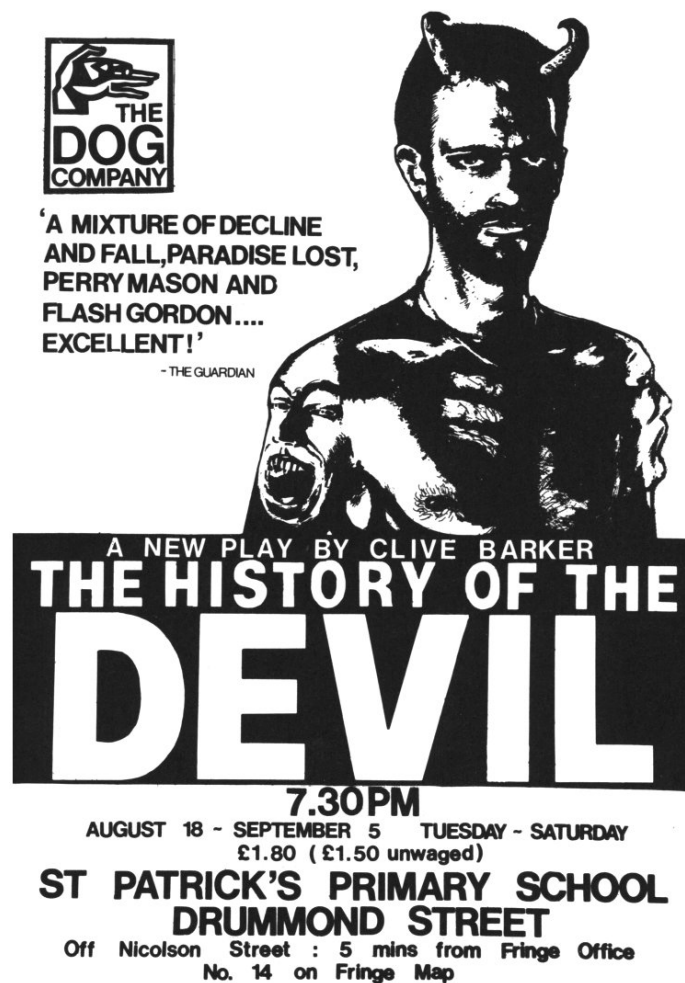
⁴ Clive Barker, interview with Phil Edwards ("Hair-Raiser," *Crimson Celluloid* No. 1/1988; Barker - Jones 1991, 11).

⁵ These include: "THE DEVIL: I have no self to be certain of. Understand that, and you understand me." "SAM KYLE: A wife cannot testify against her husband. That's the law. POPPER: That's true. CATHERINE LAMB: M'lord, this is no natural husband and wife. [...] THE DEVIL: She's too cruel. Too petty. SAM KYLE: (*Quietly*) Good. She'll humanize you. Make you look a little more human." (HD, 293, 350-51.)

⁶ Barker's Devil could easily have used as his motto the same quotation as Salman Rushdie from the study by Daniel Defoe (and not just his title, *The History of the Devil*): "Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode; for though he has, in consequence of his angelic nature, a kind of empire in the liquid waste of air, yet this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is ... without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon." (Quoted as the epigraph of *The Satanic Verses*.)

gious fundamentalism. The Devil is there to guide the reader's attention towards all the cruelty that human beings have been able to inflict on each other throughout history. Through his point of view we get a dark version of history – which overlaps with the “history of the Devil” in this play. A mythical, immortal creature is evoked to give the audience a means of access into History on a superhuman scale. It is one of the paradoxes of “The History of the Devil” that the superhuman perspective reveals an uninterrupted tradition of inhumanity in humanity itself.

“The History of the Devil” is not realistic theatre; the fast changes in scenery and fantastic events are implied by stylised action, changes of lighting and sound effects. In his production notes the author stresses that the play should not sink into caricature. “This is not a dream-play; not a medieval mystery play, parading semi-symbolic figures for a moral purpose. It's a history.”⁷ In its combination of archetypal figures, such as the Devil, a



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“The History of the Devil” (the poster by Clive Barker; Barker - Jones 1991, 4).

witch, a soldier lost in a forest, with a story-line of historical pretensions, it is of course – both. Its central subject-matter is fantastical and symbolic: the trial of the Devil after all his years of banishment. This very special session of law takes place in suggestive surroundings. The court is assembled on the shores of Lake Turkana, in Africa. We are told that the exact spot is “sixty miles east of where Eden stood.”⁸ At the same time the mythical and biblical context is contrasted with the opposing register of concrete realism. The place stinks (“So did Eden” comments an assisting demon) and crocodiles and a local pagan tribe contribute to an impression of desolate “godlessness.”⁹ Mythical and realistic, Christian and non-Christian, high and low registers are mixed in the play from the beginning. This contributes to the various aspects of ambivalence dominating the play. The settings have an important role in determining the initial tone; actions take place in the context of the great narrative of the Garden of Eden (connoting original sin and its punishment), but this place is empty – filled only with the random cruelty of crocodiles and the Turkana people who live in iron shackles and make necklaces out of tin cans.¹⁰

The main character is the Devil, whose entrance is described in the stage directions:

*ENTER THE DEVIL, SMILING. HE IS A STAR IN HIS OWN ROTTEN FIRMAMENT. AS GLAMOROUS – AND AS ARTIFICIAL – AS ANY HOLLYWOOD ICON. A COAT OVER HIS SHOULDER, PERHAPS. SUNGLASSES, PERHAPS. PERHAPS NOTHING.*¹¹

The description is again in humorous contrast to the mythical context in which it is situated. The devil's entrance is anticipated by darkness at noon, a boiling lake and a cloud of thousands of birds. A human observer whispers in terror: “Pazuzu.” The reference is to *The Exorcist*, which gave the demonic entity this name (of an Assyrian god).¹² Because of the best-selling qualities of the Devil in the 1970s, it is only proper that the Devil should be called a “Hollywood icon.” The popularity of personified evil among the mass audience points also towards the carnivalesque, or low, discourse of the demonic. “The History of the Devil” particularly relishes this part of the demonic tradition. As a play it is characterised by fast and witty dialogue, rapid changes of setting, fights and cruel laughter over painful and serious subjects. Parts of a character eaten by crocodiles are handled on the

⁷ HD, 246.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁹ This indeed seems to have been Barker's intention; in his notes he explains that he used *Eyelids of Morning: the Mingled Destinies of Crocodiles and Men* by Alistair Graham and Peter Beard while writing the play (it has pictures of Lake Turkana and its inhabitants). Barker also emphasises that Satan comments in the play on the “Godless” quality of this scene. (*Ibid.*, 245.)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹² See above, page 149n19.

stage (“Is that his head?” – “Some of it.”), and a boxing match complete with a sports commentary is left to be improvised by the actors.¹³ In his introduction Clive Barker remarks approvingly on a review that described “The History of the Devil” as “a mixture of *Decline and Fall*, *Paradise Lost*, *Perry Mason* and *Flash Gordon*.”¹⁴ Barker combines themes and material that are classified in our culture as “high” with elements that are decidedly “low” – metaphysical speculations with farts and extravagant violence. In this he is a self-conscious heir to the spirit and methods of *commedia dell’arte*, *Grand Guignol*, and *Punch and Judy* puppet shows. Barker especially comments on the English Christmas pantomime, and its “riotous indifference to any rules of drama but its own; its guileless desire to delight.”¹⁵ The demonic elements are, once again, put to the use of entertainment.

The mode of entertainment Barker’s play celebrates is openly self-reflexive and ironic; every act opens with an announcement made by an “actor.” In these opening lines the main action and subject matter of the play are anticipated and commentated upon. The play should have a good, captivating beginning – thus the actor announces that “History always begins with a cry” (and a panicking woman enters crying “The ground’s opening up”).¹⁶ Pretension and acting are also the Devil’s traditional skills, as fiction can be aligned with a lie and opposed to the absolute truth. Barker notes that the Devil “has the best collection of personae of any character in Western culture.”¹⁷ The relationship between actors and the Devil is treated ironically in the play. The Devil constantly demands the services of the actors; he is especially fond of insisting that they give him “the obscene kiss.” This becomes one of the comic sidelines in the play’s twisted plot. At the same time it also functions as a mark for the connection between the demonic and (forbidden) sexuality.

ENTER THE DEVIL, UNSEEN.

THE DEVIL: Would you care to kiss my ass?

1ST ACTOR: How did you know?

2ND ACTOR: Know what?

1ST ACTOR: What he said to me. Would you care to kiss my ass?

2ND ACTOR: Are you offering?

1ST ACTOR: Me?

2ND ACTOR: Yes.

1ST ACTOR: Why not?

2ND ACTOR: Your tent or mine?¹⁸

The immediate context of this incident reveals the intimate relationship the Devil gradually enters into with the humans in the play. The court of law

¹³ Ibid., 321-22, 340.

¹⁴ Ibid., xii.

¹⁵ Ibid., x.

¹⁶ Ibid., 251.

¹⁷ Ibid., xii.

¹⁸ Ibid., 316.

that should release or condemn the Devil consists of the Devil's attorney (Sam Kyle), the judge (Felix Potter) and two female prosecutors, Catherine Lamb and Jane Beck. If one studies the specific role of the demonic in the play, the nature of the trial alters: the real judgement is made by the reader, or by the audience – only they are able to perceive the invisible role that the Devil is given in scenes like the one quoted above. The play opens up a discursive space that invites the reader to re-evaluate and reflect on the role of evil in our history. In the next scene the Devil meets with the second prosecutor, Jane, and they have a twisted love scene: misunderstandings, cross-talk and misunderstanding each other's words (or understanding them in surprising new ways) – this is the simultaneously tragic and comic horizon of communication where the Devil is most at his own.¹⁹ In his relations with the humans the Devil is consistently articulated as being morally ambivalent. In this example this means simultaneous and contradictory relationships to sexuality: at first the Devil plays the traditional role of Tempter. He seduces the two actors into a (homo)sexual relationship, and thus propagates (in the traditional, moralistic sense) immorality and depravity. Then he reacts to Jane's unwilling attraction to himself with a confused exchange of words. ("JANE BECK: Wait: you *are* telling me you're in love with me? THE DEVIL: No, I thought you – [...] There seems to be a misunderstanding."²⁰) The rejection and temptation are connected by the Devil's only soliloquy. This offers the audience an "authentic" glimpse into the Devil's perception and attitude to humans. As the Devil, however, is constantly characterised as a great liar, we can never be certain of these shows of emotion.

THE DEVIL: I've seen men and women in the throes of bubonic plague, lying beside each other on diseased blankets under a dirty lamp, suddenly overcome with passion for each other's bodies, sores notwithstanding. I've seen them grind their last moments away, grunting out their lives, then collapsing on to each other, dead. When that's the way most of you touch Heaven, if at all, how can you believe that I, who didn't make you, am more malicious than the God who did?²¹

The sexual body appears here as the grotesque body of the "low" demonic tradition: a body transformed by disease and overcome by lust. As the Devil (speaking from his immortal position as a fallen angel) degrades humans into mindless animals, he mixes the "high" with the "low" demonic. The description of men and women making love on their deathbed romantically elevates sexual desire into an answer for death's absurdity. The sexual

¹⁹ Many writers have noted the suggestive parallelism between the demonic tradition and the displacing and "disseminating" effects of language, especially the written language. (See the discussion of the "devil's language" and demonic polyphony in chapter three.) Barker's play toys with this thematics: language can be very slippery and if we are using language to construct our identities or to build human relationships, they can be very slippery, too. (See also Derrida 1972/1981.)

²⁰ HD, 318.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

act is a way to touch Heaven, and perhaps the only way that exists. The sinful, human body that tempts people to forget their spirituality has here gone through a demonic inversion. The specific target is the ascetic tradition of Christianity that can be traced back to Paul and his writings in the New Testament (e.g. “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live”).²² The fallen angel ostensibly pities the grotesque sight of diseased humans copulating in their throes of death – but the situation hides a double irony. As he uses the “high” discourse and starts talking about Heaven, the Devil is also forced to face his loss. A fallen angel is dismissed from Heaven, and the “way of the flesh” might be the only way for himself, as well. The boundary between demon and human starts to erode.

This indeed seems to be the case. The first flashback scene into the history of the Devil goes back to the day Lucifer was cast down from heaven with the other rebel angels. With ironic realism this event is meticulously pinpointed in place and time: November 1212 B.C.E., in the area that is now known as Russia. Barker’s rewriting of the myth is emphatically corporeal; the Devil is naked and his wounds are bleeding – his wings have been torn off. He is treated by Ulla Shim (a tough, practical woman who intended to feed her pigs with Lucifer’s body if he were dead) and her retarded daughter, Pia. Pia teaches the Devil knots, and the Devil teaches her words. Knots and words become intermingled as Pia wants to make love: the Devil has forgotten the meaning of words like “Heaven” but as their bodies are tightly tied together, he remembers. The ambiguous thematic bond between sex, death and Heaven is repeated here as well; the Devil accidentally strangles Pia with the rope she carried on her neck as they are making love.²³

The intimate connection between the Devil and the humans is linked with the problem of making moral judgements in a world without pure and absolute ideals, and, on the other hand, with the shared desire to cross boundaries. Sex and death are such liminal moments in the play, and the combination of both marks the Devil’s ambivalent role as a desirable and frightening transgressive figure. “He’s [a] monster: The Devil himself. Of course I want him,” is how Jane Beck explains this paradox.²⁴ The dual nature of a monster is here very acutely felt. Stallybrass and White comment that the “grotesque physical body is invoked both defensively and offensively because it is not simply a powerful image but fundamentally constitutive of the categorical sets through which we live and make sense of the world.”²⁵ In “The History of the Devil” the role of this specific “monster” is subtle – as he is associated with death, cruelty and suffering, he breaks through the limit between life and death. But as an immortal creature who is fighting for his right to return into Heaven, he also carries opposite mean-

²² Rom. 8:13.

²³ HD, 278-79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 351.

²⁵ Stallybrass - White 1986/1993, 23.

ings. The positive and negative aspects are inseparable from each other, the good and evil blend, and the Devil becomes more human as the play proceeds. This is aptly presented in the actor's announcement opening the second act:

ACTOR: (*To the audience*) In law, there are no certainties. Suppose we tried our loved ones? Made a list of offences against us. How long before we'd amassed enough resentment to hang them by? Now, we put the Enemy on trial. How long before we find enough reasons to love the Prince of the World?²⁶

The sympathy for the devil goes very far in Barker's play, but it does not settle for a blank acceptance of irremovable evil as a part of "human nature." Barker's warning against reading his play in the tradition of moralities is here well worth heeding. As the Devil is granted a separate existence and some individual personality in the play, he also gains an individual destiny: he is not reduced to allegory, even if he carries a heavy burden of symbolism and metaphysical speculation. In the end, the Devil is fated to become a tragic character.

This aspect is made especially clear in the Easter episode. The trial is progressing in time to modern days, and the prosecution accuses the Devil of challenging God himself, of making a parody of humanity.

THE DEVIL: I made a doll, if that's what you're driving at.

CATHERINE LAMB: You confess to it then?

THE DEVIL: Confess? There is no guilt here; I'm an engineer. I'd read Descartes. One of his heretical papers especially, the "Traite L'Homme". In it, he makes the analogy between the physical body and a machine: the nerves are pipes, and so on. I myself had seen beautiful hydraulic automata in the royal gardens in Germany: the work of one Solomon de Caus. To a creature such as myself, rejected by all and sundry, what better solution than to construct a companion of my own, without will except my word? Twenty years, it took me, building from the marrow outwards.

CATHERINE LAMB: Easter.

THE DEVIL: Yes, I called him Easter, after the Resurrection.

The "pretended life" of the Devil gains another dimension with the creation of an artificial human being. The concept of a living doll thickens the multiplicity of references in Barker's play. German romanticism, especially E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Fantastic Pieces" are paid homage; "Nutcracker and Mouse King" (1816), "Automata" (1814), "Sandman" (1816-17) all figure animated dolls, automatons and demonic metamorphoses.²⁷ The mechanical man also invokes the stage tricks and violent puppet plays which Barker is drawing upon in his own work. The most important single tradi-

²⁶ HD, 268.

²⁷ See Lois Rostow Kuznets's study *When Toys Come Alive* (1994).

tion used here is, however, the story of Faust in its different versions. Barker has admitted that he repeatedly varies the Faustian theme in his works: *The Damnation Game*, *Hellraiser* and *The Last Illusion* are all according to him fundamentally Faust stories.²⁸ In this particular piece Goethe's *Faust* (1808-32) with its reference to the alchemists' dream of making a *homunculus* (a small artificial human) is important.²⁹ Goethe was interested in the "daemonic" spirit of Faust expressed in his ceaseless striving for more knowledge, more experiences, in his pursuit beyond all conventional morality or ideas of good or evil. The endless wanderings and experiments of Barker's Devil follow very much the same imperative.³⁰ Furthermore, the question of tradition and originality, of machine-like determination and free will, are central to both the form and content of the play.

Jeffrey Burton Russell calls the figure of Faust "the single most popular character in the history of Western Christian culture" – overtaken only by Christ, Mary and the Devil.³¹ This demands quite a liberal interpretation of a literary "figure" and opens up some problems, especially in a case like Barker's play. "The History of the Devil" attributes to the Devil some of the experimental curiosity that traditionally belongs to the figure of Faust. The Faustian tradition seems to have gone through a reversal. The original sixteenth-century version of the story was already an important modification of a medieval legend about the pact with the Devil. Russell cites the following changes from the earlier tradition:

[Faust's] story is homocentric. In the medieval tales the tension is between the Devil and the Christ, or the Virgin, or another saint. [...] But in Faust, the tension is between Devil and man [...].

Second, this homocentrism is closely tied to individualism. [...] Faust has no recourse to a community or a communion of saints. [...]

Third, the story is pessimistic [...] like the horror films of our own century [...].

Fourth, the story reveals a Protestant and modern ambivalence toward knowledge [...].

Fifth, the character of Mephistopheles begins a transformation of the Devil's character: he is at least a little sympathetic with his victim, and he shows some small signs of introspection [...]. The internalization and humanization of Satan's character became the main theme in the post-Faustian literature of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³²

²⁸ Ibid., xiii. Cf. Barker - Jones 1991, 113 ("The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus" [1988]).

²⁹ Goethe, *Faust II* (1832/1959, 99-106).

³⁰ At one point, for example, the Devil tries to justify his actions during the massacre at Bucephalus (the Greek settlement in India) as an experiment: "If you were given power over a species, wouldn't you want to examine its passions? It was my sentimental education." (HD, 293.)

³¹ Russell 1986/1992, 58. To reach his conclusion on the dominance of the Faust as a literary figure Russell is ready to include even the legend of Don Juan "with all its manifestations from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* to Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell*" as Faustian (ibid.).

³² Ibid., 63-64.

Barker's play is distinctly "post-Faustian" in the sense that it is both well informed by the Faustian tradition, and attempts to go beyond it. It dispenses with the figure of Faust altogether, and gives the Devil himself the centre stage. Barker's Devil could be called an (un)traditionalist; it focuses our attention on the traditional role that the Devil has played in legends and folklore, and invites our imaginative identification with the life of such a character. In this process the Devil is inevitably both a captive inside the tradition and a creative rewriting of it. Barker has himself commented on this dialogue between freedom and necessity that confronts genre writers with certain subjects which have long histories, such as vampires or devils. Every new vampire story will be compared to its countless predecessors, and the awareness of this acts as a spur to invention: "the writer drives his imagination to new extremes of form and content, honing his vision so that whatever else may be said of the resulting work it can at least be called uniquely *his*". However, Barker sees that the tradition has also another creative role:

But there's a greater pleasure yet. In traveling the road of a particular story – along which every town will have streets and squares in common, yet none looks quite like the other – the writer may see, with a backward glance, the way the essentials of the tale have been reinterpreted over the years, subtly hanging to reflect the interior lives of those who've gone before. The road becomes an index to the blossoming and decay of belief-systems; a book, if you will, of books, in which the subject is both the history of the story and the story of history.³³

Metafictional concerns may, of course, be interpreted as a hindsight on the part of an author writing within a controversial genre which has often been under attack. Both the intellectual content and the formulaic generic conventions of horror have received a fair share of scorn. In the case of "The History of the Devil" it is, however, quite accurate to characterise it as "the history of the story and the story of history." It devours a rich array of materials from the demonic tradition (the myth of the fallen angels, Jesus Christ, Dante, the witch hunts, Faust, the myth of Lilith, to name but a few) and subjects them to reinterpretation (albeit quite a schematic and fast-forward one). The intensity and graphical violence that characterise Barker's fiction in general derive their power in this particular play largely from the tensions between these diverse materials. The character of the Devil is not only the sophisticated and civilised Mephisto who puts into words the moral desperation of modern man. He is also – and perhaps more importantly – the comic and cruel, inconsistent devil of the "low" demonic tradition. After playing a simple trick on one human character in the play, and sending him to death among the crocodiles, he notes: "I am weary of this: sending innocents to their deaths." This is nevertheless the traditional role of the devil in

³³ Barker - Jones 1991, 111 ("The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus").

this sort of *diablerie*; one rule of this game is “If we play with the Leviathan, we must expect to be bitten” as the Devil comments a little later.³⁴

The episode with the man-machine is still worth a closer look: in it the ambivalent role of the Devil is heightened both in the areas of sexual thematics and in the struggle between freedom and determination. Easter is the Devil’s pride and joy, an artificial man which surpasses “real” humans in many areas. The carnivalesque climax of the play is a boxing match that the Devil arranges between the invincible Daniel Mendoza and Easter: a feast for improvised stage action. The apparent goal of the Devil is to break and destroy Daniel in this last battle of his. The motives for the Devil’s actions seem at this point to be simple resentment and bitter will to destroy. The real motive is not revealed, but in the light of Easter’s words this seems to be envy. Easter spies on the lovemaking of the Mendozas and then voluntarily loses the fight. The Devil destroys his rebellious creation – as a modification of the Frankenstein motive (discussed more closely in the next chapter). The Cartesian man-machine presents the Devil in his last speech with a critique of the division between “insignificant” materiality and meaningful spirituality:

JACK EASTER: You’re frightened because there’s something you haven’t taken account of; that makes me dream, that makes me bow my head to little Israel [Daniel Mendoza]. You’ll never be Prince of the World, you know that: because there’s a mystery here you can’t fathom. And if I dreamt it, who was never in a womb, who had no childhood, how much more certain is it that flesh has it in its head, this nostalgia? Can you explain, engineer? How is it an engine, mere mechanics, aches to hold in its works a half-remembered beauty?³⁵

The naively romantic pathos of Easter matches the grotesque soliloquy by the Devil quoted above. “The mystery of the flesh” is among the central concerns for Barker (as it was for Rice), and these two speeches well illustrate how it is sometimes articulated as a curse, sometimes as a blessing. The Devil and the demonic has clearly an important relationship to the body and material existence. They cannot simply be equated with each other – the Devil seems to be as troubled by human physicality as humans themselves. In fact, Barker has put a new type of paradox into the monster gallery of horror fiction; his Devil is so human that it seems to be troubled by some “inner demons” of its own. In its generic role as an adversary or tempter it cannot be fully human: its otherness is part of its definition as a demonic being, and bound up with its metaphysical and cosmological roles. In Barker’s play this role is unclear and labile. In a final show of irony the *prosecutors* demand that the Devil be destined for the rest of the eternity in Heaven (the advocate finally turned against his employer and demanded Hell). What the Devil ends up finding there is emptiness; the absolute ideal of perfection

³⁴ HD, 319, 322.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 344.

(and God as its embodiment) does not exist any more. However, the death of God is not perhaps metaphysically as interesting as is the figure of the Devil in itself; he seems to be as ignorant of his own best, of his true desires and of his self as any imperfect human being. Barker's Devil is the one truly possessed. In his deeply problematic condition and moral vacillation he becomes, if not admirable, at least a sympathetic and interesting, many-sided figure.

This "human interest" in the persona of Devil is apparent also in the denouement. The Devil betrays his fellow demons in order to have Heaven all to himself; after a while he returns in a terrible rage – having been betrayed. In the end of the play only the binds between people are affirmed as valid. (It is left unclear what power forces the Devil to respect the judgement, if God exists no more.) The play ends on a high note that is typical for an important part of contemporary horror: even the monsters are no longer totally others. The Devil is joined by Jane Beck, who gently leads her lover away. Even the Devil is not absolutely rejected in this context: the many voices on stage react differently to him and the end result is characteristically polyphonic.

Clive Barker is unquestionably one of the most important current authors working within the horror genre. His most recent novels have broadened the scope of horror and simultaneously dissolved the boundaries between horror, fantasy and mainstream writing. He is not alone in this development. He is, however, probably the most systematic in his use of demonic elements, especially as images of fantastic tortures and bodily deformations. As in the popular *Hellraiser* series, his demons are still recognisable as humans – what they were before their extreme desires lead them beyond the limits of humanity.³⁶ "The History of the Devil" is an interesting rewriting of the Christian diabolical tradition; the Devil is described as an ambivalent figure that in many different ways gives voice to the painful borderlines of humanity. Barker has identified his Devil particularly with the liminal areas of sexuality, death and violence. As the Devil is not completely rejected but given a possibility of defending his own position, the "monstrosities" and "perversions" of the traditional Devil are articulated as parts of ourselves, of humanity.

This project of adapting the rejected or the demonic into cultural production is on Barker's part a conscious decision. He has given in his numerous articles and interviews many justifications for this sort of art; the following comment captures his vision of horror stories, and well expresses the different levels of application and different functions that contemporary horror aims to serve.

Stories of the body: the doomed machine in which we awaken, prone to the frailties of age and corruptions of disease. Stories of the mind: a system striving for reason and balance while the ape and the lizard we were –

³⁶ See below, page 219.

and in our coils, still *are* – slink through its darker places. Stories of God and the Devil: the actors we have cast to play our moralities out. Stories heroic or absurd: epic or elegiac: but all, in their different ways, touching upon the fears that we live with day by day.³⁷

I would like to conclude by quickly outlining my main points from this short analysis. In “The History of the Devil” by Clive Barker the demonic elements are paradoxically intertwined with the humanity and the human history. This invites the audience (or the reader) to reflect on the role and nature of evil, and finally to interpret the demonic elements (particularly through the figure of Devil) as connected with the ambivalent borderlines of humanity (especially with sexuality, and death). In a characteristic gesture for a demonic text, the Christian diabolical tradition is both respected and travestied: the ontological and moral categories are presented as existing in continual conflicts.

The next chapter probes further the relation between the “artificial subjectivity” and the demonic that Barker opened in the case of Easter.

³⁷ Barker - Jones 1991, 5-6 (“Introduction: Night Visions 4”).