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SATAN MAKES HIS ENTRY

Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries



Every human society poses the problem of evil, and attempts to resolve it. The philosopher may formulate the question in terms of the concept of human nature, when the reply will vary according to the optimism or pessimism of the questioner: dog eats dog, or the opposite, as the case may be. But historians, whose method is not fundamentally oriented towards moral assessments of this type, tend to steer clear of this sort of approach. They see a civilization not as an aggregation of individuals but as a system of relations oriented towards one or more collective goals and acquiring the means to attain them, in the face of all the natural or human dangers it encounters. The great cultures, the most brilliant and the most enduring, produce strong and numerous social ties. In other words, they weave around their members relational webs made up both of powerful, interconnected symbols and of concrete practices which strengthen the collective cement binding the individual to the whole, from the cradle to the grave.

No clue, therefore, however tenuous, is without its value in the attempt to understand how a civilization holds together, evolves and survives. And nothing is more prejudicial to the historical process than to analyse separately the different levels of human existence. The notion of culture, whether it refers to art, literature, the objects of material life or the devil, can be defined as a hidden link which gives overall meaning to the human universe to which it is applied. In whatever direction it is unwound, the same Ariadne's thread leads to the heart of this civilization. To isolate religion from politics or the economy from mental representations is to risk an unacceptable distortion of meaning. A society has to be perceived as a whole, without concealing its weaknesses and without refusing to explore its darker side.

Satan became a power to be reckoned with at a relatively late date in Western culture. The disparate elements of his image had long been in existence, but it was only in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries that they acquired real significance in representations and practices, before developing into the terrible and obsessive images of the end of the Middle Ages. Far from being confined to the theological or religious spheres, these developments were directly linked to the painful but vigorous emergence of a common culture. The unstable solutions in suspension since the time of the Roman Empire changed rapidly in the laboratories of a fast-evolving Europe; this was a continent in the process of developing its principal original features, while producing a symbolic language that was creative of identity and able very gradually to establish itself in a politically and socially highly fragmented area, a veritable linguistic and cultural Tower of Babel. The invention of the devil and of hell on a radically new model was far more than just a religious phenomenon of considerable importance. It reveals the emergence of a unifying conception shared by the papacy and the great kingdoms alike, even if they competed vigorously to monopolize the benefits to their own advantage. The thought system that developed a triumphant image of Satan is a sign of a great surge of Western vitality. The autumn of the Middle Ages was here the springtime of modernity, because new conceptions of Church and State emerged, which gave rise to previously unknown methods of achieving the social control of populations. The diabolic triumphs and macabre events should not be allowed to obscure the chaotic beginnings of a process destined to promote the West on the world stage. In fact, the devil dragged Europe forward because he was the hidden face of a massive dynamic that would meld together the imperial dreams inherited from ancient Rome and the vigorous Christianity defined by the Lateran Council of 1215. It was a movement from the top down, that is, it started with the religious and social elites who were seeking to bind together these many threads. It was not the devil who called the tune; it was the men responsible for his image who invented a new West by developing cultural links that became ever stronger during subsequent centuries.

Satan and the myth of primordial combat

The devil was an unobtrusive presence during the first Christian millennium. He was of interest to theologians and moralists, but he rarely featured in art,¹ one sign among others of the absence of a

major diabolic obsession in society at large. Personifications of evil existed, but in a variety of forms that corresponded to the fundamental polytheism of the mass of the population. Many of them were gradually to merge into the great demonological flood of the end of the Middle Ages, introducing very varied and sometimes contradictory elements into the image of Lucifer, king of hell. The theologians themselves found it very difficult to unify Satanism, faced not only with the lessons of the Old and the New Testament but the many Eastern legacies on the same theme. If they were to construct a theological system capable of frustrating those of the pagans, the Gnostics and the Manicheans, the Fathers of the Church had to give a coherent meaning to a variety of diabolic traditions deriving from different narratives. They had to harmonize the story of the serpent with that of the rebel, the tyrant, the tempter, the lascivious seducer and the powerful dragon. It has been suggested that Christianity was so successful in achieving this because it adopted one of the most important narrative models of the Near East, that is, the cosmic myth of the primordial combat between the gods, in which it was the human condition that was at stake. This version may be summarized as follows: a god rebelling against the power of Yahweh made earth an extension of his empire in order to reign there by the power of sin and of death. 'God of this world', as he was called by St Paul, he was opposed by the son of the Creator, Christ, in the most mysterious episode in Christian history, the Crucifixion, in which both defeat and victory combined. The function of Christ in this battle, which would end only at the end of time, was to be the potential liberator of humanity, in the face of Satan, his chief opponent. Elements of this mythic synthesis are implicit in the New Testament, but in so obscure and fragmentary a form that theologians, and even the humanists of the sixteenth century, were for a long time able to ignore or minimize the role of the devil in Christian thinking.²

St Augustine subtly transformed this vision of the cosmic battle by arguing that God had permitted evil so as to draw good from it. Sin, it followed, was a structure of the universe, but a benign structure for whosoever has grace. The bishop of Hippo thus reinterpreted the cosmic myth of the fall of Satan as an element in the 'divine plan' leading to Redemption. In this system, the devil is an instrument for the correction of human error, in other words, the enemy of God is turned into a means of conversion.³

The theological construction of the figure of Lucifer was fairly rapidly completed, without major social or cultural consequences. The Augustinian theory constituted a sort of reservoir of meaning

for thinkers throughout the Middle Ages, moulding the Christian elite. But it came up against beliefs and practices that were too diverse and too powerful for it to have much impact on society as a whole. It was clarified and adapted without being fundamentally altered until the thirteenth century. Gregory the Great, pope at the end of the sixth century, had promoted a hierarchical conception of the kingdom of God, divided into nine levels, with the seraphim at the top. This notion spread in the West, where some scholars argued that Lucifer had been the greatest of the angels, hence a seraph.⁴ Demonology was still only a preoccupation of scholars; it was a subject for meditation among monks and hermits and an issue in doctrinal debate. The second Council of Nicaea, in 787, recognized that angels and demons possessed subtle bodies of the nature of air and fire, but the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 asserted that angels, good or bad, were purely spiritual creatures, without any relation to bodily matter.⁵ Such doctrinal shifts were accompanied by a relative indifference to the issue outside the very narrow circles concerned. There was a similar situation with regard to the world of magic and even sorcery. Popular practices were well known, and they were denounced in penitentials such as that of bishop Burchard of Worms. But they were the subject of neither systematic criticism nor even sustained interest, and in any case the devil did not play a major role in them. The relative silence or indifference of scholars and theologians with regard to popular magical traditions until the twelfth century suggests that the Catholic Church did not feel under threat from the superstitious beliefs of the people, even less from some hypothetical satanic counter-religion of the sort that was to be fiercely denounced three centuries later.⁶ Satan was seen by the most learned men of the day as an obscure force subject to divine omnipotence; he had yet to step into the terrifying role earmarked for him since the Bible.

Good and bad devils

Ideas do not float in disembodied form up above societies. They only become important when they respond to a society's needs, and adapt to them as they change. It is quite mistaken to see the image of the devil as immutably fixed in relation to a human nature eternally split between good and evil. Such a conception has haunted a number of civilizations, however, in particular those of the ancient Near East, in the form of the primordial combat between rival gods, and it emerged in a very specific form in Europe less than a thousand years ago. We

need to take a longer view if we are to avoid being misled by a universalist definition promoted by our culture, when the subject at issue is an imaginary construct which is both datable and fundamental to an understanding of the original aspects of our continent, but relative and closely bound up with the Western way of perceiving the visible and invisible worlds.

In very broad outline, the history of the devil in the West is that of a gradual growth of his influence on society, accompanied by a total transformation of his assumed characteristics. The Fathers of the Church and the theologians had defined him in a highly intellectualized manner as a principal, a fallen archangel become a sort of god, flying through the air in the company of demons disguised as angels of light (St Ephraem in the fourth century). It was by no means easy to represent him concretely, which probably explains why he is totally ignored in the art of the catacombs. He insinuated himself, nevertheless, into the heart of monastic life in the early Middle Ages, so gaining new vigour in a world which defined the religious norm and transmitted the core elements of contemporary culture. He was the eternal tempter determined to seduce St Jerome in the desert, and prepared the ground for the success of a major pictorial theme of modern times, but without as yet displaying the dreadful features he would then acquire. Before the rise of Romanesque art or the growth of towns, Lucifer lacked the means to penetrate society as a whole. The science of the demon, demonology, remained a narrow theological specialism. This scholarly approach became more obsessive, certainly, around the year 1000, with predictions of a new diabolic outburst once the millennium had ended, destined to scatter the army of the good. But the image of the devil was still lacking in conviction and power if we are to judge by the stories of the monk Raoul Glaber, who claimed to have met him on three occasions. This is how he described his first experience:

When I was living in the monastery of the blessed martyr Leger, which is called Champeaux, one night, before matins, there appeared before me at the foot of my bed a sort of manikin, horrible to see. He was, as far as I could tell, of small stature, with a scrawny neck, an emaciated face, jet-black eyes, a bumpy, wrinkled forehead, pinched nostrils, a protuberant mouth with blubber-lips, a receding and very narrow chin, a goatee beard and pointed hairy ears; his hair stood on end and he had fangs like a dog, a pointed head, a puffed out chest, a humped back and wobbling buttocks; his clothes were dirty, he was overheated by his exertions and his whole body was bent forward. He seized the end of the couch where I lay, gave the whole bed a series of terrible jerks and

said, at last: 'You won't stay much longer in this place'. Terrified, I woke up with a start and I saw him just as I have described him here.⁷

Though unappealing, this is hardly a figure to inspire unspeakable terror, whatever has been claimed by those apparently disconcerted at not finding the genuinely frightening features of the devil of the late Middle Ages. What the narrator describes is really a sort of devilish human, deformed, misshapen and aggressive, someone you might actually meet (even today, in a city street). The emphasis on such physical features as the small stature, chin, pointed head and hump clearly expresses a notion of abnormality, but on a human scale, with no direct evocation of the supernatural. His agitation only makes him more real, even if it also serves to mark the superiority of the monastic way of life based on an ideal of serenity. A few touches suggest animality, though only metaphorically, namely the goatee beard, the hairy ears and the pointed teeth. This devil has neither tail nor cloven hooves, nor is he distinguished by a dreadful stench, abnormally brilliant eyes (they are merely 'jet-black') or truly superhuman capacities. In fact, he is no more than a nasty little devil, a deviant, a reverse image of the good monk of the age. He is more incarnation of the evil in the human heart than terrible prince reigning over a sulphurous hell.

Raoul Glaber stands at the critical meeting point between the theological tradition of the devil and the concrete representations of the supernatural developed by the various European populations. A thousand years of Christianity had not been enough to eradicate a whole range of beliefs and practices that came to be called 'popular' in the broad sense of the term, but which were not confined to the people, as they were often shared by the ruling elites, including men of the Church. The real demarcation line lay between the tiny minority who could read and ponder religious writings in Latin and the rest of society, who made up a spectrum ranging from the orthodox norm to practices syncretizing the biblical message and the old traditions of pre-Christian origin. The dividing line was not always absolutely clear, as Raoul Glaber's description of the devil reveals, his conception being closer to the folkloric practices of his day than to scholarly theology. From the latter, he took the moral lesson and the emphasis on the ubiquity and reality of demons, in the hope of terrifying his readers so as to lead them towards good. From popular tradition, he took a more ambivalent notion, that of fear of the supernatural and of powers superior to the human being, which might equally well be terrifying or appear ridiculous or impotent. The horrible dwarf

he describes makes him frightened, but not excessively so, and prompts him to mend his ways. But some of his features are more reminiscent of the disgust or contempt such a figure would have aroused had he knocked at the monastery door, instead of abruptly interrupting the sleep of his victim, who remained capable of describing him coolly and in detail.

It is hardly surprising to find many different descriptions of the devil in Europe up to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The different cultures of the continent still retained their pronounced specific features, which Christianity had found it difficult to cloak with a mantle of uniformity. Mediterranean peoples, Celts, Germans, Slavs and Scandinavians had been penetrated to very different degrees by Christian ideas, before partially reformulating their earlier traditions in the new context. Jeffrey B. Russell has shown that the properly Christian concept of the devil was strongly influenced by folkloric elements drawn from what had become unconscious practices and traditions, in contrast to a more coherent, more deliberate and more conscious popular Christian religion.⁸ The 'folklorization' of the devil sometimes gave him Celtic characteristics, for example taken from Cernunnos, god of fertility, hunting and the underworld. This was not enough to allow the survival for centuries of a secret cult dedicated to the 'horned god of the West', as Margaret Murray claimed in explanation of the witch craze.⁹ The Christian religion might accept borrowings, under pressure from the faithful, but it would hardly have tolerated the existence of a parallel religion. The principal demonic features described below did not in any way constitute an organized whole. They were scattered over the surface of the continent, emerging in different worlds and at different periods; but they were nevertheless integrated without too much difficulty until the twelfth century into the more or less syncretic systems of belief existing among the different populations, in the context of a Christianity that felt little need to purge itself of the multiple 'superstitions' sheltering under its protective roof.

Called Satan, Lucifer, Asmodeus, Belial or Beelzebub in the Bible or the apocalyptic literature, the devil had many other names, even surnames, all over Europe. Many applied to lesser demons, sometimes heirs of the minor deities of pagan times: Old Horny, Black Bogey, Lusty Dick, Dickon, Dickens, Gentleman Jack, the Good Fellow, Old Nick, Robin Hood, Robin Goodfellow in English, Charlot in French, Knecht Ruprecht, Federwisch, Kinkebeib, Heinekin, Rumpelstiltskin and Hämmerlin in German. The use of diminutives (Charlot and the German endings in -kin) or nicknames (Old Horny) brought these

devils closer to humans, and presumably made them less alarming. For an ordinary Christian of this period, the invisible world was populated by an infinity of more or less frightening figures, saints, demons and dead souls. Their respective positions in the universe were probably not precisely defined in relation to good or evil, since saints might avenge themselves on the living, and the latter might seek the assistance of demons. A powerful cultural vein of familiarity with the supernatural ran right through the Middle Ages. The devil of the theologians was a cold fiction, often concealed by more concrete and more local images of little demons that were almost human. Consumed by passions, quivering like the devil of Raoul Glaber, they were frequently the playthings of humans. The Evil One did not always have the last word; far from it. Tricked, vanquished, made fun of, he was reassuring to those who liked to picture him this way. The motif of the devil mastered by humans was a powerful antidote to anxiety. It never wholly disappeared from European culture, and it returned in force after the great witch hunt, in popular stories, legends and even Goethe's *Faust*, an ancient myth transposed in grandiose fashion, since God eventually forgives the scholar for yielding to Satan's temptation.

Before the end of the Middle Ages, the devil was remarkable for his variety. The unifying flow of Christianity carried along with it all sorts of foreign elements, the precise historical and geographical origins of which are usually impossible to trace. It is not enough to explain this in terms of the Evil One's ability to transform himself at will. It is rather that in Christianity's thousand-year-long battle against pagan practices and beliefs, certain hard cores resisted total destruction but were nevertheless gradually assimilated, cloaked in a new veil, re-oriented in a different context, while retaining a peculiar evocative power. The rising tide of theological Satanism submerged fragments of many demonic cultures without destroying them entirely. The devil, as a result, took innumerable forms. As an animal, he wavered between the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the gods associated with living forms by the pagans. The strong imprint of Christianity might exclude the lamb, and even the ox and the ass, but it was unable to impose St Peter's vision of the devil as a roaring lion. At a different level, the serpent of Genesis was easily confused with the pagan dragon. The he-goat, one of the commonest forms assumed by the devil, may owe this privilege to its old association with Pan and Thor. The dog was another preferred form.¹⁰ But the appearance of dogs at the foot of tombs, in particular those of women and especially towards the end of the Middle Ages, demonstrates the difficulty of

establishing firm principles in this area, since here the image expressed loyalty and faith. We should in any case be wary of over-rigid definitions based on a handful of examples or on later cultural presuppositions. Were monkeys, cats, whales, bees and flies the demonic animals par excellence in the early Middle Ages? The same might almost equally well be said of the whole animal kingdom, with special reference to the owl, the pig, the salamander, the wolf and the fox. Detailed local studies in this field, without preconceptions, are needed if we are to trace the filiations and the ruptures since pre-Christian times.

Historians have noted other characteristics of the devil, deriving from different heritages.¹¹ Together they present a picture that is too generalized to correspond to reality, but in which it is possible to identify features remembered by those accused of witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when they had to respond to the specific questions of the judges. The devil was believed capable of appearing in every imaginable human form, with a preference for clerical status. He could make people believe he was an angel of light. He might assume gigantic proportions, speak through an idol or spit out his venom in a blast of wind, but he did not invariably advertise his difference or his monstrousness. He seems to have borrowed some iconographical features – the horns, the abundant goat hairs covering his body, the powerful phallus, the big nose – from the god Pan.¹² He was often black, according to a symbolism common to many civilizations and not only Christians, but he was sometimes red, dressed in red clothes or sporting a flaming beard; he might even be green. The Council of Toledo, in 447, described him as a tall, black creature, horned and clawed, with asses' ears, glittering eyes and gnashing teeth, endowed with a large penis and giving off a sulphurous smell. It is difficult to unravel the respective contributions of theology and popular beliefs in this area. The green devil probably reflects a distant memory of fertility gods such as the Green Man of the Celts or the Teutons. Verdelet or Verdelot was still one of the names given to the devil in seventeenth-century Artois. It is unlikely, however, that such expressions and descriptions still evoked clear and conscious pagan notions in the first half of the Middle Ages. Nor did references to the devil's family amount to a specific mythology, such ideas surviving more like fragments of wreckage floating on a Christian ocean. Unlike historians, contemporaries can hardly have known that Satan's grandmother, who is mentioned much more frequently than his mother (called Lillis or Lilith), actually derived from memories of the terrible goddess Cybele, or Holda, a sort of monstrous and

voracious maternal image. The devil was sometimes provided with a wife, who is often described in the sort of terms once applied to fertility goddesses. His marriage was often unhappy, because his wife was a shrew, in line with the vigorous tradition of the devil deceived, fooled and beaten. The men who told such stories perhaps derived some comfort from them as they contemplated their own conjugal miseries. The saying that thunder rumbled when the devil beat his wife, preserved to our day, belongs to the same tradition. So do the legends telling of the devil's seven daughters, who incarnated the seven cardinal sins, and those telling of his two children, Death and Sin, with whom he produced the seven vices in incestuous relations, before sending his seven grandchildren out into the world to tempt human beings.

Though able to be everywhere at the same time, the devil had a preference for certain places and times. The night was his chosen domain, in contrast to the divine light that shone on the earth. Desolate and cold places were directly associated with him, accordingly, as were nocturnal animals. Of the four directions, north, home of cold and obscurity, was his especial favourite. In fact all civilizations fear the dangers associated with this desolate zone, including the Aztecs of the sixteenth century for whom it was the native land of their god of death. Christian writers added an explanation that was logical to them alone: churches were oriented towards the east, so, on entering, you had the north on your left; this side of the human body or of the universe created by God was dedicated to the devil, 'sinister' in the full sense of the Latin word. The Evil One liked to seduce living creatures, in particular women and inveterate sinners, but he also recalled the gods of the pagan dead. This vestige is one of the most enduring in Western culture, at least in the form of legends and literary works, not forgetting the Breton *ankou*. The 'wild hunt', or *mesnie Hellequin*, is found throughout the Middle Ages. Originating in a belief in the flight of demons led by their chief and accompanied by diabolic dogs, even wild women, it tells that this is how the dead were carried off, in a terrible storm, towards a last resting place which had little that was Catholic about it. It was neither a pure survival of Germanic religions, nor even a conscious reminder of the rides of the Valkyries, messengers of Wotan, carrying the souls of dead warriors to Valhalla; even less was it a survival of real shamanic practices. At most, it may be that traditions uprooted from their place of origin retained a sufficient symbolic power to evoke powerful images in a Christian world, so enriching diabolic imagery and adding to its contradictions.

The frontier between good and evil, contrary to what theologians wanted people to believe, was neither clear-cut nor fixed. The majority of the population of Europe probably found it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff with such ease. It is unlikely that the demonological discourse created a widespread obsessive social fear around the subject of the devil, even with the approach of the year 1000, except when it was embodied in concrete threats posed by heretics or Jews. The eschatological anxiety of the Christian elites seems to have made little impact on the mass of the people because it was not complemented by a powerful demonological culture capable of provoking a systematic response in the face of a unified threat. The theory of centralized evil lacked ways of reaching the fragmented social worlds of a highly diversified Europe. The multiple images of the devil then existing on the continent acted as so many screens preventing the penetration of theological theories. The Antichrist was more of a distant concept than an active accomplice of Lucifer, who, in any case, lacked sufficient coherence to be a cause of general panics. His ubiquity was not yet that of an internal emperor and autocratic leader of his 1,111 legions, each of 6,666 demons, making 7,405,926 henchmen in all according to the calculations of the physician Johann Wier, in the sixteenth century. He was adapted to an age of political fragmentation and of de facto religious tolerance in the face of the many 'superstitions' inherited from the pagan past, and he was if anything weakened by the need to be everywhere at the same time and by the sheer number of his appearances. In the year AD 180, Maximus of Tyre had calculated that there were 30,000 demons, which were probably too few for their task and certainly failed to allow for the innumerable popular forms they might assume. The satanic world was lacking in cohesion, order and power.

Monsters were not necessarily part of this world. They were often distinguished from demons, since dwarfs, giants, humans with three eyes and suchlike were believed to have been created by God in order to demonstrate to humans what it was to be deprived of a physical feature; it was even debated whether or not they had souls. Similarly, attitudes to the spirits of nature of the Germans, the Celts and the Slavs, regarded as minor demons by doctrinaire Christians, often remained ambivalent in the minds of most people, in spite of the growing pressure to demonize them. These little people, the sprites, trolls, elves, goblins and other dwarfs, made the supernatural world more familiar. Some of them looked after treasures or killed thieves, others liked to lead unwary travellers astray, or were the stuff of nightmares (the *mares*, or incubi); elves shot their arrows at humans

or animals to make them fall ill. But they could often be captured or frightened, or deceived or cajoled, once they had been made into familiar little imps. The same was true of the too-human devils so often described in tales and legends.

Despite the rise of a terrifying image of Lucifer, a more commonplace conception of the supernatural world continued to flourish. Many beliefs and practices were designed to make it less traumatic, or at least to assert the possibility of exerting some influence on the invisible spirits so as to escape their wickedness or even obtain their valued assistance in a variety of circumstances.

The story of the devil deceived was hugely popular. Originating in tales of the stupidity of trolls or giants and extended to the whole demonic realm, it encouraged a general belief that the clever and courageous human was superior to the so-called Evil One. Ordinary folk capable of getting the better of the Prince of Darkness frequently appear in medieval fabliaux and tales. After all, had God himself not granted humans the possibility of overcoming the devil's temptations? The theologians said that Lucifer was immensely powerful, but also fundamentally incapable of understanding very much, which was basically a not dissimilar way of explaining him. So, far from calling the tune, Satan was both constrained by divine will and challenged by human mischievousness. He might lead the wild hunt, but he also rode animals back to front, a practice strongly associated with cruel derision in contemporary eyes. The donkey-ride was a way of socially humiliating weak-minded persons, in particular cuckolded husbands, paraded before the gibes of spectators as punishment for their feebleness in the face of a fickle wife. The mere fact that the demon and his henchmen could be imagined in this posture reveals the extent to which his sting had been drawn. The idea lived on, in a far more tragic context, in the witchcraft trials, when to admit to having ridden, walked or danced backwards was taken as proof of belonging to a malign universe.

Until the twelfth century, the world was too enchanted for Lucifer alone to be the focus of dread, fear and anxiety. The poor devil had too many competitors to reign supreme. The twelfth-century theatre presented a parodic or a frankly comical image of him, in line with the popular vein of the devil deceived. A literary tradition of Irish origin, most notably the *Voyage of St Brendan*, even portrayed neutral angels who sided neither with God nor the devil. Whatever the theoreticians claimed, the devil did not rule the infinite population of little people or fairies, any more than he exercised real power over monsters. In this thickly populated and very diverse world, the battle between

good and evil was dependent not on two superior entities in permanent conflict, but on the daily courage, goodwill and cunning of humans. People at least imagined that their actions, choices and desires had an important role to play in relation to supernatural beings who were more often ambivalent and opportunist than good or bad on principle. After all, was it not by ordeal that the worst crimes were judged? Divine intervention could easily be deflected by the passions of humans or by their talent for finding invisible allies in the immense forest of symbols they saw all around them. Nevertheless, the time of a vigorous Christian offensive destined to portray the world in black and white would come. Jeffrey B. Russell attributes the change to the powerful upsurge of scholasticism that engendered a more vigorous diabolology.¹³ The figure of the devil grew steadily more important from the thirteenth century on. But ideas have little impact if they do not respond to social changes. Lucifer gained in stature at a time when Europe was seeking greater religious coherence, inventing new political systems and about to embark on an expansion beyond its own boundaries, including world conquest, beginning in the fifteenth century.

Instilling fear: the diabolic obsession at the end of the Middle Ages

The figure of evil is a product of what may be called the collective imagination of a society, and it always espouses the most active values operative within that society. To understand it, therefore, we need to have some understanding of the broader picture. In the last four centuries of the Middle Ages, the West was first and foremost Christian; religion is therefore crucial to any explanation. But religion does not exist in isolation. It is closely bound up with political, social, intellectual and cultural phenomena. Lucifer's rise to power could not be a consequence of religious developments alone. It was part of a general trend in Western civilization, a germination of powerful symbols that created a new collective identity, though it retained major contradictions. Europe was slowly acquiring unifying factors other than Christianity, strictly speaking, though it was still in the thick of the vigorous local tyrannies that reduced it to a host of rival social and political entities. The unifying factors were much less apparent than the centrifugal tendencies, especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which have generally been regarded as a period of crisis, even the 'autumn of the Middle Ages'. Nevertheless, deep down in a

society that shared a growing number of common cultural symbols, subtle links were being formed. These unifying tendencies began to spread beyond the narrow confines of ecclesiastical and monastic society. They took root in the towns, especially where they were most powerful, for example northern Italy, and they influenced the great monarchies; they also pervaded art and literature. New models of human relations were emerging, often expressed in the language of religion or culture, but essentially destined to strengthen the social cement. The real issue was power, whether defined in terms of ecclesiastical institutions or princely ambitions. Conscious efforts were made to summon up the energy necessary to emerge from an atomized and unstable situation, with frequent references to the prestigious models of the Roman Empire and Charlemagne. It is to this long period that we should date the beginnings of the civilizing process in the West so brilliantly analysed by Norbert Elias.¹⁴ These centuries of contrasts had an overall coherence, which was to prepare for the projection of the West beyond itself, of crusades to discover the Americas. Europe came of age, though this was obscured by crises and internal rivalries, and the seeds of this development are to be found in new ways of seeing the world, the human body and the means by which societies could be more effectively bound together; all of these were to become the strong points of a triumphant Western civilization.

Far from happening in isolation, the transformation of the image of the devil was part of this wider dynamic. It became a lever of change, because it was integrated into a unifying system for explaining life, which gradually brought more closely together the most enterprising elements in the West, in increasingly sharp opposition to the massively enchanted, infinitely fragmented world in which the rural population and the urban masses still lived.

The Romanesque sculpture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries incarnates Satan in a variety of human and animal forms.¹⁵ He was no longer a theological abstraction, but a man-eater, perfidious vassal or beast of the *Apocalypse* of St-Sever. He was still, however, a product of the monkish imagination. At Saulieu, his portrayal as a winged human with a pointed snout like an anteater derives directly from a vision that had appeared to a monk of Cluny, as reported by Peter the Venerable, while the giants of Autun, with their tiny heads and unnaturally elongated limbs, come from a description in Guibert of Nogent. Grimacing and terrifying, the Romanesque devil struck fear into the religious elites and tried to impose his obsessive presence on ordinary Christians. They saw him on capitals, but they also

encountered him in the grotesque forms of popular traditions or the theatre. The message, consequently, was confused, too full of scholarly allusions to make the population as a whole tremble with fear. The Gothic art of the thirteenth century then reduced the devil to a bit part. Crushed by the Christ in majesty of the cathedral tympanums, relegated to the role of foil to point the contrast with the bliss of the elect on their way to Paradise, he became almost human; he was merely rather ugly, sniggering or mocking. He was picturesque, recalling the popular devil people liked to make fun of; he adorned a variety of buildings, eventually becoming fossilized as an impotent gargoyle under the eye of a God who was his master and left him little room for manoeuvre.

The devil was feeling his way, or rather the men who imagined him were hesitating between the grotesque lesson which was pleasing to so many and a more terrifying definition deriving from a theological meditation dating back to Gregory the Great. The accentuation of the devil's negative and baleful features only really began in the fourteenth century, when this version of him spread beyond the narrow monastic world to become increasingly influential in the lay world where the problems of power, sovereignty and modes of dependence were concretely posed. The discourse on Satan acquired a quite other dimension with the emergence of new theories of centralized political sovereignty, which gradually forced the world of feudal and vassalic relations into retreat. The cross-contamination between these two apparently distinct worlds is clear, especially in those countries most actively engaged in a modernization of monarchic government, such as France and England, and in those where great urban entities were developing, such as Italy. In each case, art provided the necessary link, by defining the power of those who commissioned the works, and by portraying, among other themes, hells and devils of a superhuman type that had previously been very rare, even unknown. 'From the beginning, the question of sovereignty – in the form of a rebellion aimed at achieving absolute power – is at the heart of the inaugural episode of the history of the world' as told by sixty-three English and French miniatures from the end of the Middle Ages devoted to Satan, according to Jérôme Baschet.¹⁶

The signs of Lucifer's power are now heavily emphasized: he is bigger than the other demons, seated, and even, exceptionally, wears a crown, as in the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* of the Limbourg brothers (1413). The insistence on Satan's large size is an innovation of the fourteenth century. In Italy, it can be seen in Florence, Padua and Tuscania, where the devil is even more imposing than Christ.¹⁷ It

was accompanied by an increasing monstrousness and dazzling evocations of a teeming hell in which the devil holds centre-stage, like a king on his throne. On the walls of the Campo Santo of Pisa, or the church of San Gimignano in Tuscany (where the frescos of 1396 are the work of Taddeo di Bartolo), his gigantic horned figure dominates those of the demons busy punishing sinners and of the minuscule damned he crushes between his fingers before greedily gulping them down.¹⁸ In Florence and Padua, two serpents emerge from his long ears, and his three mouths each seize one of the damned; Dante seems to have been inspired by the Florentine mosaic to describe an infernal emperor with three voracious faces. A bestial belly, the terrible devil never stops swallowing and spewing out sinners, who are relentlessly harried by the dragons or serpents who serve as his seat and by the innumerable diabolic henchmen sadistically tormenting bodies racked with excruciating pain.

Hell and the devil were no longer metaphorical. Art produced a very specific and highly figurative discourse on this demonic kingdom, very deliberately emphasizing the notion of sin in order to drive Christians to confession: 'Fear produced an emotional shock which impelled people to act and to confess.' Put another way, the portrayal of Satan and the related pastoral message encouraged not only religious obedience, but recognition of the power of Church and State, cementing the social order by recourse to a strict moral code.¹⁹

It is hardly possible to measure with any accuracy the social impact of the demonological discourse, but it is at least clear that it influenced ever wider circles, from the entourages of kings to the prosperous men and women who discovered hell in their books of hours; nor should we forget the many citizens who entered the churches adorned or the peasants who heard preaching of this type. The common lesson it made available to all was not solely religious, because the mental images devoted to hell and the devil also made statements about the law and about government. From the fourteenth century on, the detailed descriptions of the torments of hell gave a warning of an implacable justice willed by God, from which there was no appeal, in contrast to an often ineffective earthly practice. It slowly and insidiously accustomed people to see the power of the punitive sword as the very hallmark of sovereignty. The process that led to a state that administered a harsher justice, and a king able to draw on an arsenal of torments graded according to the gravity of the crime, in the name of God, slowly got under way. The idea of punishments forming a graduated chain of meaning linking human actions to divine will began to be expressed in the spectacle of the implacable

punishment reserved for sinners, before crystallizing in the sixteenth century in the form of the concept of lese-majesty. Those who thought they could play tricks with the devil, hence with God, were informed by the new infernal imagery that they could not escape their fate. The threat was stepped up, driving the guilt-ridden faithful to try to protect themselves by confession and devotion. The intensification of the fear of hell and the devil probably resulted in an increase in the symbolic power of the Church over the Christians most affected by these messages. Baschet correctly refers to a mechanism for instilling a deeper sense of individual guilt which was not exactly a Christianity of fear, but rather a drive to persuade believers to overcome their fear and find reassurance in keeping more closely to the paths laid down for them. The threat of hell and the terrifying devil was a weapon in the battle to reform Christian society in depth; it served as an instrument of social control and the surveillance of consciences by urging the faithful to reform their own behaviour.²⁰

If we widen the perspective, it becomes possible to speak of the beginning of the modernization of Western behaviour. The drive to instil individual guilt in certain levels of European societies by this transformation of the image of the devil and hell had a number of consequences. It spread the monastic conception of death and the body increasingly widely among the laity, at the expense of popular notions based on a 'continuity beyond death'²¹ and the perception of a massive, dense, supernatural world, where good and evil were not absolutely differentiated on principle. The assault on this enchanted world marked a resumption of Christian conquest rather than a new diabolic proliferation. The assertion of the autonomy of hell can be seen as an immense effort to make the Christian divine more comprehensible, by clearing away the jungle of 'superstitions' in which it was too often concealed. A more precise definition of death and the other world also made it possible to show more clearly what this world should be, that is, what form relations between peoples and governments should take. By dismissing the many gods in favour of the sole Christian God, by elevating Satan to a key position, though still subordinate to divine will, and by insisting on the notion that sinners and criminals could not escape just punishment, the Church helped to mould the distinguishing features of a dynamic Europe, driven forward by a collective force linked to individual guilt. This feeling produced a religious alchemy, says Jérôme Baschet, by reorienting the destructive impulses at the heart of religion: 'The subject exchanged his pardon for the statement of a belief (his or her own) and the recognition of a power (that of the Church and, to a certain

extent, of the state which here insinuated the carbon copy of its Law).²² This is to attribute too large a role to religion, in my view. It might be more accurate to speak of the birth of a triumphant culture, which integrated individual guilt, moral and religious in origin, into a global interpretation defined by a sense of superiority and a desire for expansion. Europe invented the tools for its future world domination by abandoning the inertia of the enchanted universe and creating a fundamentally hierarchical social model, around a God even more powerful than the terrible Lucifer. It was a model that could be endlessly adapted to every sphere of human activity, so as to strengthen the power of individual guilt and make it a weapon of collective development.

The first link in this chain consisted of the world of lay power. In France, the monarchy assumed an extreme sacrality, drawn from imperial Roman sources and based on the notion of a sovereignty that was unique, indivisible, inalienable and imprescriptible; it was made systematic by Bodin in the sixteenth century. This was very much more than the superiority of one individual over a group; it was a new concept which contributed to a spectacular increase in royal power from about 1200 on. It was not universally accepted, certainly, even at the end of the Middle Ages, and it was frequently challenged up to the time of Henri IV. Indeed, such ideas raised political consciousness and 'provoked fascination and unease in equal measure'.²³ But the development of political ideas outlined here in very broad terms was echoed by that of the Satanic Majesty. No contemporary seems to have remarked on the concordance between two so diametrically opposed spheres. But the diabolic fantasies were produced by the same artists who were so powerfully portraying royal sovereignty. It is hardly surprising that they should rig Satan out in the most emblematic marks of what they saw as the most important of earthly powers, while dutifully adding a negative symbolism so as to devalue his power. The majesty of the ruler of hell was most clearly stated in the fifteenth century. In 1456, the homage of Theophilus to the devil showed the latter on a throne set on a platform, crowned, sceptre in hand, clothed in princely white and surrounded by counsellors equally richly arrayed. But their demonic faces and Satan's animal hooves indicate that appearances can be deceptive. Other iconographical representations assert the sovereignty of the Prince of Darkness, and it was also portrayed in the theatre: in *Le Mystère de la Passion* of Arnoul Gréban, in 1450, Roy Lucifer issues a general command to all his subjects, who promptly obey. Apart from the classical idea that he was aping God, or humans,

these images conveyed a hierarchical conception of the infernal world, modelled on that of royal sovereignty. Indeed, the political thought of the period sometimes explicitly associated the two reigns, in connection with excesses or perversions of power and the issue of tyrannicide, as in the writings of Bartolo di Sassoferrato in Italy, or at the time of the murder of the duc d'Orleans in France. The omnipotence of Satan evoked both the obverse of a well-regulated sovereignty and the threat of evil machinations which only an even stronger government could frustrate.²⁴ Either way, the devil was central to contemporary debates. He was decked out in the insignia of sovereign power as a way of criticizing its excessive increase or, on the contrary, of calling for it to be even further strengthened. Conveying a corrupted majesty, he represented a dread of subversion expressed in the form of an excess of power, whether his own or that of an execrated tyrant.

The voracious fantasies that now came to be associated with the devil may be explained in rather the same way, as a transposition of a fear of the political 'cannibalism' of kings or, in Italy, of ambitious men seeking to seize urban power for their own ends. Lucifer became an all-consuming monster around 1200 in France and England, and in the second half of the thirteenth century in Italian frescos. He begins to be shown with two voracious mouths, the second in his belly, or even with other terrible mouths scattered all over his body. Oral and anal at the same time, he ceaselessly gulps down and ejects the damned.²⁵ In addition to the possible allusion to excessive political power, the theme conveys a bestial conception of the Satanic body. The difference in kind from the ordinary human, already emphasized by the princely attributes, was greatly accentuated by these features. Whereas Raoul Glaber and the Gothic sculptors had imagined the Evil One as a deformed human being, the people of the late Middle Ages placed him very firmly outside their own sphere, closer to the animal world; this world had begun to be a source of unease in the twelfth century.

The Evil One and the Beast

Throughout the Middle Ages, repeated efforts were made, at various levels of European society, to define the devil. The vigour of the many popular traditions made it impossible to ignore all the forms of pre-Christian origin, and the Church had to content itself with attempting to tone down their excesses and incorporating them as best it could

into the lesson it wanted to deliver to the masses. At the other end of the spectrum, theologians, hermits and saints developed very different views, focused on the concept of evil. But in order to make them visible and credible to the mass of the population they had to take some account of the popular forms attributed to the devil. The growing complexity of society, as a consequence of economic growth, the rise of towns and the soaring ambitions of kings, emperors and popes, together with the penetration in depth of Christianity over the centuries, slowly shifted the balance between these two spheres. Though it was never wholly successful in destroying certain hard cores of popular belief, the scholarly offensive aimed at refining the life and faith of ordinary Christians made steady progress. The ideal of monastic purity made increasing inroads into the world of popular 'superstitions', even if the latter returned in force whenever the opportunity arose. What was new was not so much the desire to pursue this policy, which had been apparent for centuries, but the emergence of intermediaries capable of assimilating the message and of disseminating it by example in worlds that were gradually growing in importance. Kings, princes, great lords, clergy trained in the schools and universities, scholars, physicians and the enterprising urban bourgeoisie, together with the artists and artisans from whom any of them might commission works designed to spread the faith or adorn daily life, formed the heterogeneous core of a 'milieu' that was open to the ideas pouring out from centres of scholarship or sanctity to enlighten the profane world.

It is probably too simple to credit these developments to scholasticism alone, especially with regard to the definitions of hell and the devil.²⁶ Rather, there was a sort of dilution of clerical influence, and the beginning of a process by which the Western imagination was taken over by thinkers, slowly establishing the importance of intellectuals in the world. Men of power increasingly began to question men of learning, not only about political theory and religious doctrine but about more complex matters such as the meaning of life, even everyday faith, often still influenced by the belief in magic that remained widespread among the people. This implicit contract between scholars and rulers created a more aggressive dynamism than the old conception of a massively enchanted world, within which human beings could change only with great caution. It introduced transcendence into the human order, linking the men of power, wisely advised by the clergy, to the thrilling designs of a sovereign Providence. The sense of divine mission provided to Christianity, from the Crusades to the Spanish Reconquista, including the definition of an

imperial French monarchy and other European powers, was its most visible sign. But the transcendence was not confined to these forms; it extended to humanity itself, defined in an increasingly sacralized manner in the common Western culture spread by the Latin of the clergy. The revamped image of the devil was the antithesis of this ideal creature destined to walk in the paths of God. For the perfect subject should be the echo of the prince, himself modelled on divine perfection, in order to produce the harmonious hierarchy of beings necessary to rule the visible and invisible worlds. The kingdom of Satan was the exact opposite of this system. It had not yet made a deep impression on popular culture, as it would in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the urgency was still less to suppress behaviour that had long been tolerated than to inculcate in the lay elites and townspeople the notion of the extreme sacrality of humankind.

This very abstract idea was conveyed chiefly by art, literature and the theatre, and it took concrete form in its opposite: the figure of the devil. The diabolic discourse began increasingly to refer to the human body as it ought not to function. In the purely intellectual sphere, the break came in the twelfth century, when the boundaries between humans and animals began to be blurred in scholarly culture. Till then the clergy had believed that demons were immaterial and so unable really to act on living creatures, which ruled out all sexual relations between them. The twelfth century saw a radical change.²⁷ On the one hand, the idea developed that incubi and succubi really could seduce human beings, usually by appearing to them in the form of a handsome young man or beautiful young woman. Such unnatural relations were then defined as bestial and closely linked to heresy. Ecclesiastical historians have noted the concordances with the growth of the theme of purgatory, for, if souls could be punished, the demons then had time to act sexually on bodies. On the other hand, the animal kingdom began to appear much more disquieting than in the early Middle Ages. The clear boundary between beasts and humans became blurred in the twelfth century. Scholars began increasingly to imagine and fear sexual relations between the two species. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) defined bestiality as the worst of all sexual sins, because it failed to preserve these very differences. It is true that contemporary justice was far more concerned with homosexuality, but the idea would have its day. Bestiality was regarded as a capital crime in a Spanish code of the late thirteenth century, and grounds for many executions in Majorca in the fifteenth century; it was declared punishable by death in England and also in Sweden in 1534. This new repressive severity has been seen by many historians as a consequence

of the new unacceptability of transgressions of the boundaries between the species, human and animal.²⁸

This obsessive fear might at first sight seem both very banal and very old. Ancient texts had already accepted a permeability between the two worlds, as is apparent from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid and *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, and there were many popular beliefs to this effect. Nevertheless, the standard doctrinal line of the medieval Church was that the metamorphosis of a human into an animal was an illusion. This theory was defended by St Augustine, reaffirmed by Thomas Aquinas and accepted by Henri Boguet, great sixteenth-century witch-hunter, and it never wholly disappeared. It was simply obscured by a different opinion of scholarly origin which spread in literature, explaining the huge success of the work of Ovid between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. It also appealed to many scholars interested in the transformations of nature, not forgetting the alchemists seeking the philosopher's stone.²⁹ It is possible that this new line was intended to make further inroads into the popular magical beliefs that had resisted the teaching of St Augustine, by giving some ground, but linking the mystery in question to divine will. It was, in any case, part of a wider trend towards a more precise and more concrete definition of the actions of Lucifer in this world. This demonological vein, visible in the realistic representations of hell, led in the fifteenth century to the witch hunt manuals I will discuss in chapter 2. It could be impressed on people's minds only by an extreme dramatization of the figure of the devil. Too subject to the divine will in the teaching of St Augustine, too timeless or, on the contrary, too human in the vision of Raoul Glaber and Gothic sculpture, he had lacked the necessary emotive charge to be the focus of a major campaign of execration.

Once a deformed human, Satan now appeared as an inhuman power and mighty king, but also an elusive being capable of assuming an animal or hybrid form and able to enter any living body. If he could become a beast, might he not also invade human beings?

In the medieval mind, animals were seen essentially as sources of food or beasts of burden. A study of animal representations in over 6,000 illuminated manuscripts reveals that these functions remained dominant, but that there appeared at a later date a metaphor making animals act like people, so as to illustrate the best and worst of human nature. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, an increasing amount of space in the margins of manuscripts was devoted to this motif, anthropomorphizing in particular the monkey, the dog and the fox; but there was also a hybrid, the centaur, the second most

frequently portrayed, and a wild man with both animal and human characteristics comes fifth. Toads and serpents, associated with death and the devil, were more common than the wild man in the miniatures, but never appear in the margins.³⁰ This analysis reveals the growing success of scholarly books which enriched the traditional bestiary by the addition of monstrous men and various hybrids, for example the work of Thomas of Cantimpré; an important milestone on the road to demonology as a basis for a systematic witch hunt. This book was translated into German by Conrad of Megenberg and taken up by a scholarly movement in the fifteenth-century Rhineland, from which came many monstrous figures and, in 1487, the famous *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*), advocating the extermination of witches.³¹ Albrecht Dürer drew these disturbing creatures with genius; before him, Martin Schongauer (died 1491) had engraved an amazing *Temptation of St Antony*, in which a veritable mandorla of heterogeneous and terrifying creatures displaying a few vaguely human features composes a sort of swirling nimbus around the figure of the saint.³²

The origin of these erudite visionary descriptions, which gradually pervaded the mental world of the social elites, is to be found in the apocalyptic prophesies of Joachim of Fiore at the end of the twelfth century. They were spread throughout Europe by Anglo-Norman Gothic imagery and given new life by the infernal scenes described by Dante or painted by the greatest Italian artists of the fourteenth century, before being enthusiastically taken up by the often rather less well-known painters of the next century. The phenomenon was accelerated by the transition to printing and the development of engraving. The close links between Italy and Flanders spread these themes to the Rhineland, at the heart of the second largest urbanized area in Europe at that time. Against a background of unease, heresies and attempts at religious revival, from which the young Erasmus benefited with the Brothers of the Common Life at Deventer, fear of the devil grew, encouraged by the aggressive realism of sermons and artistic depictions. Born in the middle of the fifteenth century into this world saturated with Satanism, Hieronymus Bosch took from it the forms and symbols of his famous paintings. They teem with the reptiles, insects, nocturnal animals, hybrid demons, malevolent grylles (grasshoppers) and a dog-headed Satan that were now among the images that haunted his contemporaries.

We cannot be sure of the precise reactions of those who watched or heard all this dramatic and now obsessional demonic imagery. At most, we may assume that its proliferation is evidence of a growing

consumption of the media and a deeper knowledge of the models, especially among the upper ranks of the town of Bois-le-Duc, who provided Bosch with his clientele. We have no way of knowing what precise impression these mental images made on ordinary people. It would surely be mistaken to assume a generalized terror, since deceived and parodied devils continued to appear in stories and in practices. In the mystery plays performed before churches, the sacred and derision mingled. In processions and festivals, the demons were ridiculous or stupid, and the monsters hardly frightening. In 1508, a venerable priest, Eloy d'Amerval, published in Paris a little book entitled *Le Livre de la Deablerie*, in which Satan and Lucifer are described with absolutely orthodox didactic intent. The demonic characters are not notably fantastic. Rather, they resemble humans, to the extent of trading insults and vulgarities, quarrelling fiercely and experiencing every conceivable state of mind, including rage, sadness, gaiety, boastfulness, tenderness, confidence and despair. The author gives his demons bodies; one threatens to cut off another's snout, ears and testicles, kick him up the backside and scratch out his eyes. Lucifer is several times driven to 'piss in his pants' by a sudden rush of passion. The devils heckle each other in a way that Rabelais would have approved, a few decades later, exchanging insults such as 'my sweet little bollocker' and 'my fine little piss-artist'. Satan had a long tail, certainly, but it was such a nuisance that he was proposing to wrap it around his head for hell's festival.³³

We need to keep the rise of Satanism at the end of the Middle Ages in perspective. The work of d'Amerval suggests more than resistance on the part of the old models, both among the illiterate masses and the urban readers at whom his message was primarily aimed. The terrifying shadow of hell was spreading over a society where many people, sometimes even priests like d'Amerval, retained a fondness for a familiar devil who bore a resemblance to humans. The superhuman image of Satan was primarily propaganda, produced by scholars and propagated by artists, writers and churchmen in their sermons and other contacts with the faithful. We may wonder whether the systematic exaggeration of demonic features proved necessary in order to obliterate the less than frightening characteristics of the devil deceived, who felt and suffered like a man, popular both among ordinary people and among the men of letters who had remained close to this tradition. The problem facing those who wanted to make the devil feared was not that one might meet him, since he was present everywhere in a world saturated with invisible forces; it was how to make people terrified at the prospect of meeting him. To do this,

terrifying but credible symbols were displayed wherever they were likely to be seen, read about or heard. The demonological culture under construction based its arguments, therefore, on ideas that were immediately and physically comprehensible to those at whom they were aimed. On the one hand, it vividly evoked the fate of the criminal punished by a prince who was increasingly powerful and terrible, but who was merciful to sinners who repented; hell was by antithesis an uncompromising vision of the supreme power to punish delegated by God. On the other, it extended this vivid realism by making everyone believe that it was in their own body that good confronted evil.

The second main theme was the construction of a new culture of the body in the West. This was not the holy body defined by theologians and unattainable to the majority, but that of ordinary people as primordial battleground. In the past, Satan had often born a resemblance to humans. He now became so monstrous and so bestial that the very idea that he might be about to slip into someone caused a feeling of extreme anxiety and a readiness to fight to keep him as far away as possible. The two elements that combined to produce this feeling were first the emphasis on the fundamental inhumanity of the devil, and second the insistent suggestion that he could enter sinful bodies in order to transform them in his image. The second idea only really took off at the time of the great witch hunts, by developing the idea of the totally diabolized carnal shell of the female witch. At the end of the Middle Ages the concept remained vague, often at odds with the humanized ordinariness of the devil, which made it difficult to take seriously the idea of his taking possession of another body, except at the level of metaphor.

It was the Beast that paved the way. The view that hybrids might exist had been gaining ground since the twelfth century. A further stage was reached when it began to be believed that demons could appear in animal or hybrid form. More and more of these metamorphoses were reported. The werewolf acquired a new dimension; he was no longer a predator who fed on humans but a creature of extraordinary intelligence, still a wolf but possessed by the devil, according to the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Joyce Salisbury believes that the new way of seeing animals at the end of the Middle Ages revealed to humans a fear of 'the beast within' (the title she gave her book), which was capable of destroying their qualities of rationality and spirituality to leave only the bestial appetites of lust, hunger and anger.³⁴ Old pagan traditions along these lines may have persisted within Christianity, which fought against them by interpreting the

growing fear of the beast within in unifying terms, with faith and devotion as the cure. Not every member of the flock could have the strength of mind of the saints, especially St Antony, but they all ought to protect themselves against the bestial element they carried within them. Between the sacred and the diabolic and between the saint and the devil, it was the duty of everyone to eradicate whatever aligned them too closely with the animals. True, the latter might demonstrate the continuity willed by God between the human and animal kingdoms, as in the *Life of St Francis* in the thirteenth century. But the saint had treated the animal part of himself harshly, calling his body 'Brother Ass', working it hard, eating sparsely and beating himself frequently. In this way, he had defined two opposed universes and made humanity the very opposite of bestiality. The mind ought to be capable of governing the passions and the appetites.³⁵

This conception, which survives to our day, has to be related to the civilizing process which Norbert Elias has argued is unique to the West. The erosion of a clear dividing line between humans and animals in the twelfth century led to a deeper fear than in the past of the animal part within humans, and to attempts to control it more effectively. In fact, it was fear of the self that was intensified, and probably more among the political and cultural elites than among the rural masses. The model of sanctity was, in a sense, made accessible to a wider public, though still only a tiny minority, by giving people a feeling of being part of an inspirational divine enterprise, reserved for the *crème de la crème*. This mental process was based on deeper guilt feelings, especially in those who had failed wholly to overcome the bestiality they knew was within them. The eye of God was in this imperfect and suffering body. The demon was at home there, too, unless he was expelled, or every point of entry closed firmly against him. Such ideas made a major contribution to the dynamism of the West and to its forward progress. The devil had ceased to be a disgraced or perverted man and become both the foul beast lurking in the entrails of the sinner and the terrible infernal sovereign reigning over an immense army of henchmen. It remained to connect the two notions, by the shocking discovery of a sect of unnatural humans who deliberately practised the most horrible bestiality, that is, who refused to master their animal side, for the greater glory of a Prince of Darkness set on destroying God's work.