The Epilogue

> If there are answers to these questions, they will not be less dialectical than the questions themselves, or than the Idiot Questioner within us that silently plots all such questions as a pragmatic malevolence.
>
> – Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*[1]

This century has been a time of radical change; literary demons bear witness to this change, in the semi-heroic roles they are given to play, and in the changing attitudes of people towards such monstrous "others." Yet, the very fact that demons have survived in our cultural vocabulary and continue to flourish in the postmodern world is a testimony of some permanency. There is always potential for conflicts and confusion, feelings of resentment among neighbours, or room for self-accusation and inner dissonance. The proliferation of demonic imagery may capture the anxiety of contemporary life, but it demonstrates, too, how we are constantly trying to face these anxieties and express them in constructive ways. We might remember from history that classical Greek culture was not only embodied in an elevated Olympian edifice, but contained also the pain and madness of the daimonic; it was the Third Reich that tried to eliminate both all "decadent" art and all the other "impurities" – that otherness which had intermingled in human stock.

The turmoil surrounding *The Satanic Verses* proves that the demonic has still retained its capacity for shock and outrage, especially if its polyphonic and parodic characteristics are displaced and read from a different cultural and religious context. The Western audience, however, seems to have learned how to tolerate demons. The recent examples of texts employing the supernatural, Satan and demons, are often actually quite humorous. *Practical Demonkeeping* (1992) by Christopher Moore is a warm and witty tale of Travis, a seminar student who accidentally invokes a powerful demon and spends seventy years trying to send it back to hell. This "comedy of horrors" is packed with details that affectionately connect with the experience of a generation that has grown into adulthood with modern horror as one important element in our pluralistic worlds: Catch, the demon, irritates Travis by doing Pazuzu-impersonations ("Your mother sucks cocks in he-el […]. Then he would spin his head around several times for effect").[2] Or,

[1] Bloom 1973/1975, 112.
[2] Moore 1992, 22.

when Travis comes to a cafe, it is presided over by the sombre, convoluted verbosity of its owner, "Howard Phillips," who tries to keep the Old Ones at bay by treating his customers with such Lovecraftian specialities as "Eggs-Sothoth – a fiendishly toothsome amalgamation of scrumptious ingredients so delicious that the mere description of the palatable gestalt could drive one mad."[3] As might be expected from a comedy, *Practical Demonkeeping* does not take metaphysics very seriously. The King of Djinn might remark that "Jehovah is infinite in his snottiness," and that he created the human race as a parody of angels, just to drive Satan mad.[4] The real impetus of this novel is an unashamed engagement in fantasy as wish-fulfilment; the supernatural is cherished in its imaginative possibilities. A demon or a Djinn enriches everyday, prosaic reality, and reveals the diversity of possibilities for finding something "magical" or original in one's life.

Another example of this current trend, Elisa DeCarlo's *The Devil You Say* (1993) uses as well demonic materials for comedic purposes, but the results are no match for the inventiveness of Moore's novel. The protagonist, Aubrey Arbuthnot, is a "psychic detective" from 1930s' London who with his valet Hornchurch becomes involved in a case relating to a powerful tome of magic and a coven of Satanist witches. Most of the fun is made out the inversion of identities: Mr. Arbuthnot is cast in the role of Hornchurch's servant, and British class society offers a convenient rationale for a plot filled with double play and amusingly tangled love affairs. The appearance of the Devil in the end is a perfectly conventional Medieval Black Sabbath fantasy, gleaned from the literature of this area.[5] The most interesting work in the subgenre of psychic detectives is done in a more dark and violent tone. The investigations portrayed in *Eye of the Daemon* (1996) by Camille Bacon-Smith are one example. It operates with a demonology (or daimonology) derived from the ancient Pythagoreans, creating a complex and ambitious structure that bears only a distant relation to the Christian framework that most readers are familiar with:

> *Of the second sphere, each Prince is not a being, but a mass comprised of a host of lords of daemonkind, of which each host must convoke in quorum, being 833 daemon lords, to call upon the powers of a Prince of daemons*.[6]

The relationship of fantasy literature to demons and the demonic would need a book-length study of its own; I should point out that I have left out many important works belonging to this popular area. J.R.R. Tolkien, to start with, has a fascinating demonology interwoven in the dense mythological structure of his Middle-Earth (Melkor and Sauron as important Satanic figures, such creatures as the Balrogs, the Nazgûl and the Orcs

[3] Ibid., 53.
[4] Ibid., 43.
[5] DeCarlo 1993, 162-78.
[6] Bacon-Smith 1996, 13. Italics in the original.

as their demonic servants).[7] The early Sword & Sorcery stories (most importantly the Conan tales by Robert E. Howard) also included demonic adversaries in their adventure formula. Modern fantasy literature generally accepts the existence of multiple realities or universes as a given, and it is easy to accommodate demons within such a plural ontology; they are inhabitants of some "abysmal dimension" of this universe. While some readers seem to lose their interest if alternate realities are made elemental parts of narrative, others are drawn to the endless possibilities such a premise opens. One could mention the subculture of role-playing games, which has repeatedly come under attack by religious fundamentalism because of its supposed links with demonic powers and Satanism. Basically this is a similar conflict of attitudes as in the Rushdie affair (even if it has not such a dramatic status): one side claims that there are some things that one should not play with, and the other cherishes the unrestricted freedom of make-believe.[8]

Science fiction continues with its experiments in personification and exploration of demonic potentials of technology after *Neuromancer* and cyberpunk. Some of it, dubbed "post-cyberpunk," retains most of cyberpunk's stylistic density and emphasis on body-alteration and information technologies. Such novels as *Hot Head* (1992) by Simon Ings and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) introduce futures saturated by technology, but their real interests are directed towards the ambiguous promise/threat of altering the self through the use of technology. In *Hot Head* the "Von Neumann machines" embody demonic technology: they are systems that feed and procreate autonomously. They are also susceptible to madness, but such madness and uncontrolled propagation is prefigured already in the destructive human culture and twisted personalities surrounding the protagonist, Malise, a young Muslim girl. The alien datafat (brain transplant) is also an ambivalent part of herself; she finally has to learn to understand her own unconsciousness to communicate with the non-human others. *Snow Crash* has its "daemons" as personified subroutines of its Metaverse, a realistically outlined cyberspace. The "death" of a person's representation ("avatar") is relegated to the "Graveyard Daemons":

> The Graveyard Daemons will take the avatar to the Pyre, an eternal, underground bonfire beneath the center of The Black Sun [a Metaverse bar], and burn it. As soon as the flames consume the avatar, it will vanish from the Metaverse, and then its owner will be able to sign on as usual, creating

[7] See Tolkien 1977/1979; 1954-55/1983. Verlyn Flieger explores some of Tolkien's metaphysical beliefs and constructions in his *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* (1983).

[8] The company that made their name with the *Dungeons&Dragons* role-playing game, TSR, Inc., has downplayed the potentially subversive and transgressive features in their products (one of their main attractions for their young customers, but problematic in the eyes of the parents); the clearly demonic elements have been the first to be cleaned out. Gary Gygax, the co-creator of *Dungeons&Dragons* shows his own fascination for the demonic in his numerous adventures and novels (see, e.g. *Dance of Demons*, 1988).

> a new avatar to run around in. But, hopefully, he will be more cautious and polite the next time around.[9]

In a wild imaginative leap, *Snow Crash* unites neurolinguistics, cultural and religious history and virus engineering to create the ultimate demonic technology. The myth of Babel was, according to this scenario, actually based on an actual case of neurolinguistic hacking in ancient Sumer; with the help of *nam-shubs* (holy words, or incantations) it could be possible to "program" the deep structures of human brains, and even write viruses that would spread such a program to unsuspecting victims. The demonic alternative is represented in this scenario as the loss of self and individuality: the opponent of the novel's (self-consciously named) hero, "Hiro Protagonist," is spreading an information virus to make humans susceptible to his Pentecostal cult and control.[10] Language is a virus, but it is also a demonic power, taking possession of ourselves, inseparably intertwined in our "software" and "hardware," or the mental and biological dimensions of our selves.

The division lines between mainstream and different genre or subgenre fictions are continually shifting and mutating; influences travel fast in many directions. Most of the grotesque and transgressive aspects of the demonic are still being exploited in the areas relating to horror, science fiction and fantasy. There have been experiments in such "sub-subgenres" as "cybergoth fiction," represented by *Demon Download* (1990) by Jack Yeovil. The trashy, post-apocalyptic setting of this piece of cybergothic is capable of accommodating both demons and hi-tech, the US Cavalry and Sister Chantal Juillerat, papal ninja agent and beautiful "cyber-exorcist" kick-fighting the powers of evil. The fusion of fantasy and hi-tech have been approached also with much more style and artistic ambition, as in *Hermetech* (1991) by Storm Constantine. This novel presents the daimonic as "potentia," orgasmic energy that fills the universe and that can be tapped into with symbols (such as deities), in altered states of consciousness, through dance and song, or – as in this case – with extensive sexual experimentation and body-alteration.[11]

I do not intend to repeat here everything I have already said in my conclusions to the individual chapters. Instead, I want to discuss the outcome of this study in more general terms. What I have to say relates to the self doing research as much as to the textual demons and demonic texts as objects of research.

Contemporary demonic texts strive continuously to transgress limits, break boundaries and reach towards otherness. Their mutual diversity and

[9] Stephenson 1992, 96.
[10] Ibid., 369-81.
[11] Constantine 1991, 444-51.

internal tendency to mix incompatible materials, even at the risk of becoming incoherent, soon makes coherent summaries or overviews appear to be dubious undertakings. I have adopted the pluralistic strategy: to quickly parallel and contrast different texts in order to convey also the *sense* of such plurality and heterogeneity, not only my own theories of them. To this effect, I have also extensively quoted the original texts whenever I have deemed this as a useful thing to do; in this I agree with Clive Barker's above-quoted point that to "deny the creatures [or: texts] as individuals the right to speak, to actually state their cause, is perverse." A point of view can indeed be made by the "dark side," but that is not a single point of view. In order to establish a dialogue one should have at least two interlocutors: a study of the demonic is necessarily also as an exploration of a particular self, revealing and researching itself while reading a text.

Facing plurality does not mean that one ought to completely discard and deny the pursuit of knowledge, appeal to reason, evidence to support one's judgements or any such thing. On the contrary, I would claim that demonic texts teach us particularly the importance of listening carefully even to visions and voices that are uncomfortable and uncommon. Richard A. Shweder has made a similar argument in support of "postpositivist" science and epistemology in his *Thinking through Cultures* (1991):

> Postpositivists are no less concerned with what is real than are the positivists, and among sensible postpositivists it is understood that science is good and successful. Yet in a postpositivist world it is also understood that it is possible for us to have important knowledge of the world even if the objective world is subject-dependent and multiplex and even if we give up trying to describe the world independently of our involvement with it or reactions to it or conceptions of it. Hence, the continental chorus singing with Kuhnian overtones that it is our prejudices and partialities that make it possible for us to see, if not everything, then at least something.[12]

Writing from my own – necessarily imperfect and partial – point of view, I have chosen to focus on the borderline character of demons, and on demonic discourses as cultural and textual articulations related to such a liminal position. This is not *the* truth about demons, I still want to emphasise, but *a* truth, one dimension or interpretation.

I have supported my view with evidence, and in the process developed the initial view into something more complex and diversified. The ancient daimons, the supernatural beings inhabiting the interspace between men and gods, offered a suggestive model of both the psychological and cultural position of the demonic. They were associated with the powers of Eros, madness and uncontrollable rage – and, on the other hand, with supernatural knowledge, delivering messages from areas beyond human consciousness. The frightening forms they were capable of adopting pointed towards something that was alien, unhuman, but not completely. It was the heterogeneity and

[12] Shweder 1991, 66.

interstitial mixture of the self and the Other that has made the daimonic, and the demonic as its inheritor, fascinating and enduring.

My reading of the Christian demonological tradition confirmed that it was the negative, "dark" aspect of the daimonic that was located in our Western conception of the demonic. Yet, even as degraded and suppressed, the connotations of energy, sexuality and forbidden, subconscious communication guaranteed a lively interest in the area. Sometimes this took pathological forms, as in the transition period from the Middle Ages to the New Age (or Renaissance) when witch-hunts were raging throughout Christianity. Art and literature nevertheless continued to acknowledge the existence of these problematical areas, and gradually their portrayals changed from mute and totally rejected "evil" towards something more ambivalent and articulate.

In textual terms, the self was no longer perceived as a monologic unity, but rather as an intertextual field, threaded together from various, often mutually warring or conflicting sources. As Victor Frankenstein's creation, modern man became aware of himself as a combination or assemblage; and he was horrified by what he saw. The "irrational others" (children, women, non-Western "brutes") were excluded from the rational and autonomous subjectivity which this man constructed as his support and protection. Gothic literature responded by portraying the return of the repressed: the demonic woman of the Victorian literature or the demonic child of modern horror convey efficiently those fears and anxieties that this (professedly totally rational and male) subject is incapable of facing in his own self. Daimonic impulses are articulated through demonic imagery; the emotions, the urgent need to receive those forms of affective gratification that this culture has stigmatised as "feminine" or "childish" are pictured as demonic powers that are threatening the integrity and existence of this self. A condemnatory reading might find this as yet another reason to dismiss these texts; I am defending dialogue and interpretation. An ethical reading should not perceive demonic violence and blasphemy only as attacks on some real-world "enemy" – the demonic drama is always symbolic. The Other of a demonic text should be interpreted in relation to a particular, demonic self and its own conflicts.

Those theories of the self and the text that I have discussed in these pages have the tendency either to consecrate the demonic conflict and proclaim the necessity of living in contradiction, or to aspire to resolve the conflict and reach a healing, integrating resolution. In my own reading I have emphasised that committing theoretically to either cause is not really what the reading of the demonic calls for. One cannot read *The Exorcist* as one reads *The Satanic Verses* – to pick these two as representatives of my analysed texts – even if both of them deal with religious imagery, conflicts in the self and are using demonic discourses to achieve their goals. The context of a dark Catholic fantasy, written by a Hollywood screenwriter who was educated by the Jesuits in his youth and directed to an American audience of

the early 1970s, is profoundly different from that of Rushdie's case with its dialectic of an Indian and Islamic heritage, European intellectualism and political commitment. My dialogue with both of these works revealed that they constructed a polyphonic and conflicting textual self, an ambiguous illustration of their demonic tensions and obsessions. But this reading also pointed out that they relate very differently to this condition that they articulate as demonic. Blatty's novel ends ambiguously; Father Karras, the spiritual "anti-hero" of this novel is killed as he invites the demon into himself. I interpreted this as a dubious victory in a novel that is filled with fear of material existence, not with signs of spiritual salvation. *The Satanic Verses* concludes in numerous directions: religious salvation does not concern Saladin Chamcha's atheistic character, but the narrative of Mirza Saeed ends in such a spiritual resolution. Rushdie's novel is much more self-conscious in its discussion and illustration of the plural condition, or our "mongrel selves" as Rushdie puts it. The conclusion is that while both texts reach certain resolutions and retain some dimensions of their conflicts as unsettled, the status of this outcome is different in these texts.

Such an attention to the positional character of knowledge and the role of differences (as much as similarities) in guiding interpretative activity might be named and criticised as pragmatism. If one means by pragmatism just that one renounces the possibility of "eternal truths" in one's systems of thought, then I would accept the nomination. If, however, this also contains the dimension of usefulness – "It is true because it is useful" – then I have reservations.[13] It is very difficult to see what is finally useful, useless or harmful knowledge for literary studies or for the human sciences in general. Emphasis on the unambiguous, intelligible and lucid goals for academic research may lead us to ignore such areas that yield to the conceptual and systematic standards only with difficulty, if at all. Art is capable of communicating such complex states and situations through mimetic and symbolic means, and I believe that I am not alone as I say that this is one of the principal reasons I find myself drawn to art. Art studies should never lose sight of the non-theoretical and non-conceptual aspect of their object. This is perhaps the most important lesson I have learned from my demonic subject matter: we are always engaged and intertwined with the Other – and to really learn something from the Other one has to be open to the unexpected, alien and nonconforming, not just to one's own ideas and interests. A respectful and ethical relationship of research and critique to the "object" of study should be an important concern for the academic community.

My final hope is that I have succeeded in letting the voice of my Other – the demonic texts – be heard, even while I have used them and profited from them in making my own argument. Balancing the needs of determined demonstration and respect for difference and diversity, I hope that I have

[13] This point is discussed in the classic study by William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Old Ways of Thinking* (1907).

avoided both the Scylla of incomprehensibility and the Charybdis of dogmatism.

The etymology of "method" is illuminating: the Greek *methodos* (pursuit) consists of *meta* (with, after) and *hodos* (way, journey). In the end, knowledge can not be found in the explications: it is embodied in the road itself. While on the way, we might also remember that – monstrous or not – the unknown always surrounds the structures of our understanding, things unsaid echo in those we are able to utter.

"St. Anthony Assaulted by the Devils"
(after Schoengauer's fifteenth-century copper engraving; Carus 1900/1996, 479).