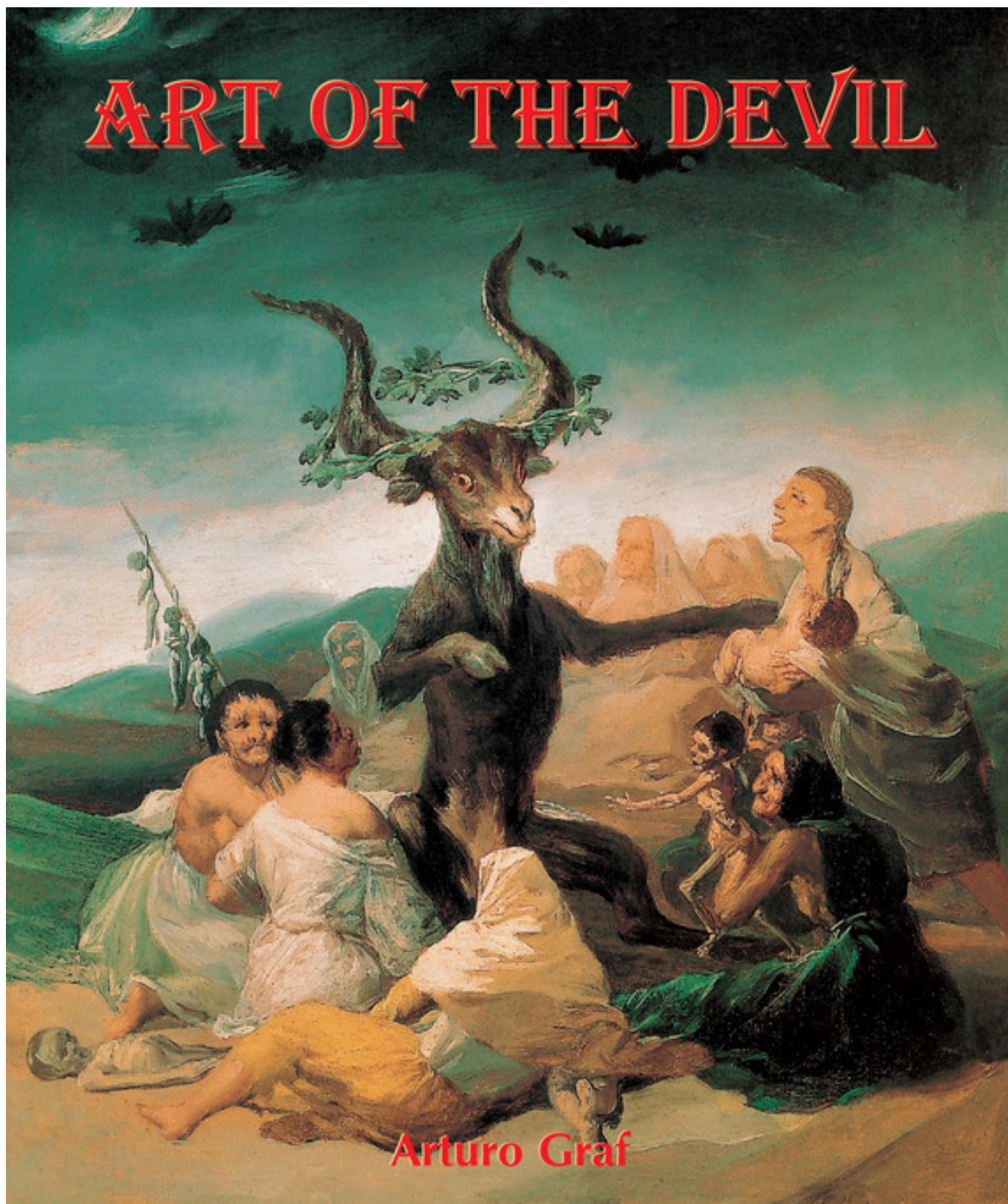


# ART OF THE DEVIL



Arturo Graf

Temporis

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**Art of the Devil**

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2016

## **Graf A.**

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“The Devil holds the strings which move us!” (Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 1857.) Satan, Beelzebub, Lucifer... the Devil has many names and faces, all of which have always served artists as a source of inspiration. Often commissioned by religious leaders as images of fear or veneration, depending on the society, representations of the underworld served to instruct believers and lead them along the path of righteousness. For other artists, such as Hieronymus Bosch, they provided a means of denouncing the moral decrepitude of one's contemporaries. In the same way, literature dealing with the Devil has long offered inspiration to artists wishing to exorcise evil through images, especially the works of Dante and Goethe. In the 19th century, romanticism, attracted by the mysterious and expressive potential of the theme, continued to glorify the malevolent. Auguste Rodin's *The Gates of Hell*, the monumental, tormented work of a lifetime, perfectly illustrates this passion for evil, but also reveals the reason for this fascination. Indeed, what could be more captivating for a man than to test his mastery by evoking the beauty of the ugly and the diabolic?

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# Arturo Graf

## Art of the Devil

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## Introduction



**Francisco de Goya y Lucientes**, *The Bewitched Man*, a scene from *El Hechizado por Fuerza* ("The Forcibly Bewitched"), 1798. Oil on canvas, 42.5 × 30.8 cm. The National Gallery, London, United Kingdom.





**Anonymous,** *The Monstrous Spirit*, 5000 to 3000 B. C. Tassili-n'Ajjer, Algeria.

Every one is familiar with the poetic myth of the rebellion and fall of the angels. This myth, which inspired in Dante some of the most beautiful lines of the *Inferno* and in Milton an unforgettable episode of *Paradise Lost*, was, by various Fathers and Doctors of the Church, variously fashioned and coloured; but it has no foundation other than the interpretation of a single verse of Isaiah<sup>1</sup> and of certain rather obscure passages in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Another myth, of far different but no less poetic character, accepted by both Hebrew and Christian writers, tells of angels of God who, becoming enamoured of the daughters of men, sinned with them, and in punishment

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xiv, 12: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. II Peter ii, 4; Jude vi.

for their sin were thrust out of the Kingdom of Heaven and from angels turned into demons.<sup>3</sup> This second myth received lasting consecration in the verses of Moore and of Byron.<sup>4</sup> Each of these myths represents the demons as fallen angels, and connects their fall with a sin: pride or envy in the first case, criminal love in the second. But this is the legend, not the history, of Satan and his companions. The origins of Satan, considered as the universal personification of evil, are far less epic and at the same time far more remote and profound. Satan is anterior, not only to the God of Israel, but to all other gods, powerful and feared, that have left a memory of themselves in the history of mankind; he did not fall headlong down from heaven, but leaped forth from the abysses of the human soul, coeval with those dim deities of earliest ages, of whom not even a stone recalls the names, and whom men outlived and forgot. Coeval with these, and often confused with these, Satan begins as an embryo, like all things that live; and only by slow degrees does he grow and become a person. The law of evolution, which governs all beings, governs him also.

No one possessed of any scientific training any longer believes that the ruder religions have sprung from the corruption and decay of a more perfect religion; but he knows very well that the more perfect ones have developed from the ruder, and that in the latter, therefore, must be sought the origins of that gloomy personage who, under various names, becomes the representative and the principle of evil. If what we call the Tertiary Period in the history of our planet already saw man, perchance it saw him in so far like the brute that no religious feeling, properly speaking, could be discerned in him. The earliest Quaternary man is already acquainted with fire and understands the use of stone weapons; but he abandons his dead – a certain sign that his religious ideas, if he has any at all, are at best scant and rudimentary. We must come down to what is called by geologists the Neolithic Period, to discover the first sure traces of religious sentiment. What was the religion of our forefathers, in that age, we cannot know directly; but we can infer, by observing that of many savage races that still live upon the earth and faithfully reproduce the conditions of prehistoric humanity. Whether fetishism precedes animism or the latter precedes the former in the historic evolution of religions, the religious beliefs of those forefathers of ours must have been altogether similar to those still professed by tribal communities throughout the world. The earth, which, together with the traces of their dwellings, with their weapons and utensils, has also preserved their amulets, offers us proof of this. They conceived of a world crowded with spirits, souls of things and souls of the dead, and to these they attributed all things that befell them, whether good or evil. The thought that some of these spirits were beneficent, others maleficent, some friendly, others hostile, was suggested by the very experience of life, wherein profits and losses are constantly alternating, and alternating in such a fashion that, if not always, at least very often, the causes of profit and of loss are recognised as diverse. The sun that gives light, the sun that in springtime makes the earth once more green and blooming, that ripens the fruits, must have been regarded as a power essentially beneficent; the whirlwind that fills the sky with darkness, uproots the trees, tears apart and sweeps away the flimsy huts, as a power essentially maleficent. The spirits were gathered into two great hosts, according to men's observation of whether they received from them benefit or bane.

But this classification did not constitute a true and absolute dualism. The beneficent spirits were not yet the sworn and irreconcilable foes of the maleficent; neither were the former always beneficent nor the latter always maleficent. The believer was not always sure of the disposition of the spirits that held him in sway; he feared to offend the friendly ones no less than the unfriendly, and with like practices he sought to render all favourable to him, not putting too much trust in any one of them. Between good and evil spirits there was no moral contradiction, properly speaking, but only a contrast in their works. They could not possess a moral character that was as yet lacking in their worshipers, scarcely yet emerged from the state of animalism; and only in so far can they

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis vi, 1–4.

<sup>4</sup> Moore's *Loves of the Angels* and Byron's *Heaven and Earth, A Mystery*.



be called good and evil as to primitive man everything seems good that helps him, everything evil that harms. Their savage worshipers conceived them as in all respects like themselves, inconstant, subject to passions, sometimes kindly, sometimes cruel; nor did they regard the good spirits as higher or worthier than the wicked.



**Anonymous,** *Statuette of the Demon Pazuzu with an Inscription*, beginning of the first millennium B. C. Bronze, 15 × 8.6 × 5.6 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

True, in the wicked ones there already appears a shadow of Satan, an outline of the spirit of evil, but of evil that is purely physical. Evil is that which harms, and an evil spirit is one that brandishes the thunderbolt, fires the volcanoes, engulfs the lands, sows famine and disease. This spirit does not yet personify moral evil, for the distinction between moral good and moral evil has not yet been made in the minds of men; of the two faces of Satan, the destroyer and the perverter, one only is presented by him. No special ignominy attaches to this spirit; there is no one to stand over him and command him.

But, little by little, moral consciousness begins to be distinguished and determined, and religion takes on an ethical character, which, earlier, it neither had nor could have. The very spectacle of nature, where forces are opposed to forces, where the one destroys what the other produces, suggests the idea of two opposite principles that mutually deny and combat each other; then man is not long in perceiving that beside the physical good and evil there is a moral good and evil, and he thinks that he recognises within himself that same contrast that he sees and experiences in nature. He feels himself good or evil, he conceives himself better or worse; but this goodness or badness of his he does not recognise as his own, as the expression of his own nature. Accustomed to attribute to divine and demonic powers his physical good and evil, he will likewise attribute to divine and demonic powers his moral good and evil. From the good spirit, then, will come not only light, health and all that sustains and increases life, but also holiness, understood as the complexus of all the virtues; from the evil spirit will come not only darkness, disease and death, but also sin. Thus men, dividing nature with merely subjective judgment into good and evil, and kneading into that physical good and evil the moral good and evil that belong to themselves, fashion the gods and the demons. Moral consciousness already awakened, naturally affirming the superiority of good over evil and longing for the triumph of the one over the other, makes the demon appear subordinated to the god and marked with an ignominy that becomes greater the more that consciousness grows active and dominant. The demon, who in his origin was confounded with the god in one order of neutral spirits capable of good as well as evil, now gradually becomes differentiated from the god, and finally is entirely dissociated from him. He will become the spirit of darkness, and his adversary the spirit of light; he, the spirit of hate, and his adversary the spirit of love; he, the spirit of death, and his adversary the spirit of life. Satan will dwell in the abyss, God in the kingdom of the heavens.





**Anonymous,** *Siva Nataraja*, Tamil Nadu, Late Chola, 12th century. Bronze. National Museum of India, New Delhi, India.



**Anonymous,** *Winged Demon*. Red pottery figure. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.





**Abû Ma'shar**, *The Book of Nativities (Kitab al-mawalid)*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.

Thus is dualism established and determined; thus the concept of it develops through the slow travail of the ages from the concept that men have both of nature and of themselves. However, this history that I have hinted at is, so to speak, the schematic and ideal history of dualism, not the concrete and real one. Dualism is found, either fully developed or in embryo, either expressed or implied, in all, or nearly all, religions; but it moves in different planes, takes on various forms, and in varying manners it expresses itself, conforming to the diversity of the world's civilisations.



We have seen that maleficent spirits already appear in the rudest and least differentiated religions; but ill-defined and, as it were, diffused among objects. In the loftier religions, as their organic structure becomes circumscribed and complete, the maleficent spirits show themselves better defined, they begin to acquire attributes and personality. Among the great historic religions, that of ancient Egypt is the one of which we possess earliest and surest knowledge. Over against Ptah, Ra, Ammon, Osiris, Isis and others – beneficent divinities, bestowers of life and prosperity – are set the serpent Apepi, personifying impurity and darkness, and dread Set, the ravager, the troubler, father of deceit and of lies. The Phoenicians opposed to Baal and Asherah, Moloch and Astarte; in India, Indra the begetter and Varuna the preserver had, as their opposites, Vritra and the Asuras, and dualism even forced its way into the Trimurtri itself; in Persia, Ormuzd had to contend with Ahriman for the lordship of the world; in Greece and in Rome, a whole race of maleficent genii and monsters rose against the divinities of Olympus (themselves not always beneficent), and there appeared Typhon, Medusa, Geryon, Python, evil demons of every sort, lemures and larvae. Dualism likewise appears within the Germanic mythology, the Slavic, and, in general, in all the mythologies.

In no other of the ancient or modern religions has dualism the full and conspicuous form that it attained in Mazdaism, the religion of the ancient Persians, as revealed to us through the Avesta; but in all these religions it can be perceived, and in all, to some degree at least, it can be connected with the great natural phenomena, with the alternation of day and night, with the interchange of the seasons. The various concepts, images and events wherein it takes form and reveals itself furnish a picture, not only of the character and civilisation of the people that give it a place in the system of their own beliefs, but also of their climate, of the natural conditions of their soil, of the changes in their history. The dweller of a torrid region recognises the work of the evil spirit in the wind of the desert which scorches the air and blasts the standing corn; the dweller of the northern shores recognises it in the frost that benumbs all life around him and threatens him with death. Where the earth is rocked with frequent earthquakes, where volcanoes belch forth destructive ashes and lava, man easily imagines subterranean demons, wicked giants buried beneath the mountains, the vents of the infernal regions; where frequent tempests convulse the heaven, he imagines demons that fly howling through the air. If an enemy invades the land, subdues and conquers it, the conquered people will not fail to transfer to the evil spirit, or spirits, the most hateful of the characteristics of the oppressor. Thus, religion is the composite result of a multiplicity of causes, which cannot always, it is true, be traced and pointed out. The Greeks really had no Satan, neither had the Romans; and it may appear strange that the latter, who deified a great number of abstract concepts, such as youth, concord, chastity, never imagined a true divinity and power of evil, even though they did imagine a goddess Robigo, a goddess Febris and others of like character.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there are not lacking in the religions of the Greeks and Romans antagonistic powers and figures that present a sort of double aspect; and if one delves a little more deeply into the character of the two peoples, and into their living conditions and their history, he sees that among them dualism could not have assumed a form very different from that which it actually did take. Let it be borne in mind, furthermore, that in Greece and in Rome there was no sacred book of morals, no theocratic code properly so called.

Dualism takes on form and special characteristics, first in Judaism, next in Christianity; and though in other religions, even in the primitive ones, there may be discerned a sort of phantom of Satan, a sort of form which – to borrow a term from chemistry – might be called allotropic, a form variously named, sometimes enlarged, the real Satan, with the qualities that are peculiarly his own and that go to make up his personality, belongs only to these two religions, and more particularly to the second one.

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<sup>5</sup> Robigo (Mildew) averted the blight. Febris, the goddess of fevers, had three temples in Rome.

Satan holds, as yet, only a humble position in the Mosaic system; I might say that there he merely reaches his childhood or adolescence, without being able to arrive at maturity. In Genesis, the serpent is merely the most subtle and cunning of the beasts,<sup>6</sup> and only by virtue of a late interpretation is he transformed into a demon. The whole Old Testament recognises Beelzebub only as a divinity of the idolaters;<sup>7</sup> in which connection it is worth noting that the Hebrews, before they came to deny the existence of the gods of the Gentiles – a decision that they were very late in reaching – , believed that these were indeed gods, but less powerful and less holy than Jehovah, their own national god. In fact, the first commandment of the Decalogue does not say, “I am thy God, and thou shalt not believe that there are any other gods beside me,” but rather, “I am thy God, and thou shalt not worship any other gods beside me”. Now it is well-known that many times the Hebrews did suffer themselves to be drawn away to worship other gods than their own. Azazel,<sup>8</sup> the unclean spirit to whom in the wilderness was turned over the scapegoat, laden with the sins of Israel, very probably belongs to a system of beliefs anterior to Moses; but his figure lacks clarity and outline, and perchance he is nothing more than a pale reflection of the Egyptian Set and a memory of the years of bondage endured in the land of the Pharaohs.

It is a commonly accepted opinion that only after the Babylonian captivity did the Hebrews have any clear and precise ideas regarding demons. Finding themselves, during that period, in continuous if not intimate contact with Mazdaism, the Hebrews had the opportunity to learn certain of its teachings and, in part, to adopt them; and among these doctrines, that concerning the origin of evil must have found easy access to their minds, prepared and predisposed as they were by their recent misfortunes and by forebodings of a gloomy future. Such an opinion leaves room for some doubt, and more than one objection can be raised against it; nevertheless, it is no less certain that, if the idea of maleficent spirits and a belief in their workings were not lacking among the Hebrews before the exile, Satan does not begin to take on the figure and characteristics that are peculiar to him save in writings that are posterior to the exile itself. In the Book of Job, Satan still appears among the angels in Heaven<sup>9</sup> and is not properly a contradicter of God and a hinderer of His works. He doubts the holiness and constancy of Job and provokes the test that is to plunge him from the height of happiness to the lowest depth of misery. Notwithstanding this, he is not a fomenter of sin and worker of woe; yet he does doubt holiness, and some of the ills that befall the innocent patriarch come from him.

Little by little, Satan grows and becomes complete. Zechariah represents him as an enemy and accuser of the chosen people, eager to defraud them of divine grace.<sup>10</sup> In the Book of Wisdom, Satan is a disturber and corrupter of the work of God; he it was who through envy impelled our first parents to sin.<sup>11</sup> He is the poison that wastes and defiles creation. But in the Book of Enoch, and particularly in the older part of it, the demons are merely enamoured of the daughters of men and thus entangled in the snares of matter and sense, as if one sought by a fiction of this sort to avoid acknowledging an order of beings originally diabolic; while in the later portion of the same book the demons are giants born of these unions.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis iii, 1.

<sup>7</sup> In the form Beelzebub, this name appears only in the first three Gospels of the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the form Baal Zebub occurs four times in the first chapter of the Second Book of Kings. Baal Zebub (or Baal Zebul), “Lord of Flies,” was a Canaanitish divinity, the chief seat of whose worship was at Ekron.

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus xvi, 7, 10–26. “And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord (Yahwe, Jehovah), and the other lot for the scapegoat (Azazel).”

<sup>9</sup> Job i, 6; ii, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Zechariah iii, 1–2.

<sup>11</sup> “For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. “Nevertheless, through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it.” Wisdom of Solomon ii, 23–24.

In the teachings of the Rabbis, Satan acquires new features and new characteristics; but in the Old Testament, his figure has as yet but little prominence and may even be called evanescent in comparison with that which he possessed later. There may be several reasons for this; the principal one, however, is doubtless to be sought in the very nature of Jewish monotheism, which is so constituted that only with great difficulty can it find room for any positive dualistic concept. Jehovah is an absolute god, a despotic lord, extremely jealous of his own power and authority. He cannot suffer that there rise up against him beings, less powerful indeed than he, but beings who venture to withstand him, who pose as his adversaries, who dare to thwart his work. His will is the one and only law, which governs the world and holds subject to itself all powers save, perhaps, those divinities of the Gentiles, whose existence is not denied, but who do not enter as living elements into the organism of the religion of Jehovah. Therefore, in the Book of Job, Satan appears, more than aught else, to be a servant of God, an instigator of divine trials and experiments. But there are other reasons. One needs only to examine somewhat the character of Jehovah to perceive at once that, where such a god exists, a demon no longer has much reason for existence. In Jehovah, the opposing powers, the mutually contrasted moral elements, which, when distinct and separate, give rise to dualism, are as yet intermingled after a fashion. Jehovah is jealous, savage, inexorable; the punishments that he inflicts are out of all proportion to the faults committed; his vengeance are frightful and brutal; they strike indiscriminately both the guilty and the innocent, both men and beasts. He torments his worshipers with absurd prescriptions which cause them to live in perpetual dread of sin; he bids them smite the populations of the captured cities with the edge of the sword. He says, through the mouth of Isaiah: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things".<sup>12</sup> In him, God and Satan are still united; the separation that slowly takes place between the two, and the definite antagonism resulting from this, are signs of the near approach to Christianity.

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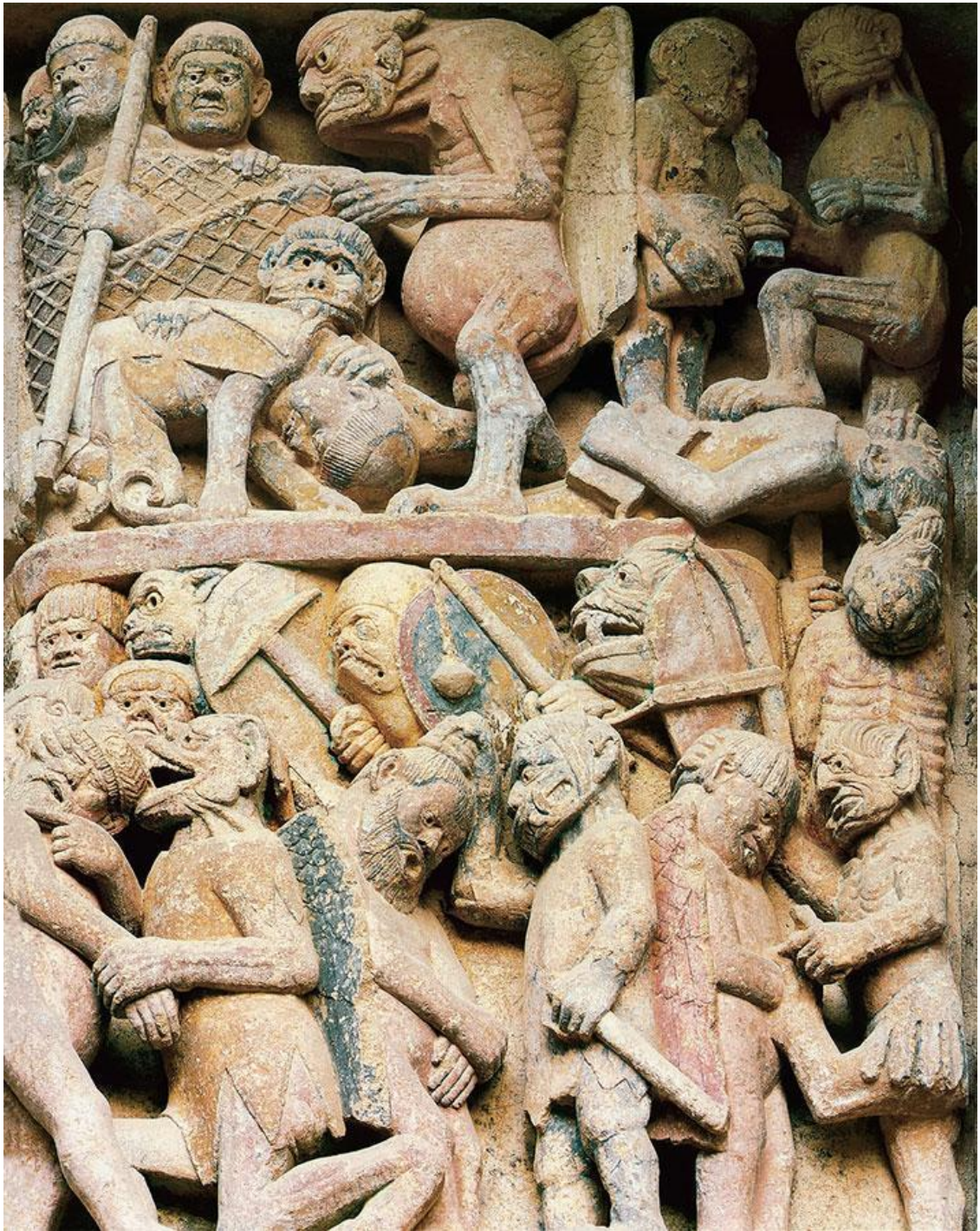
<sup>12</sup> Isaiah xiv, 7.





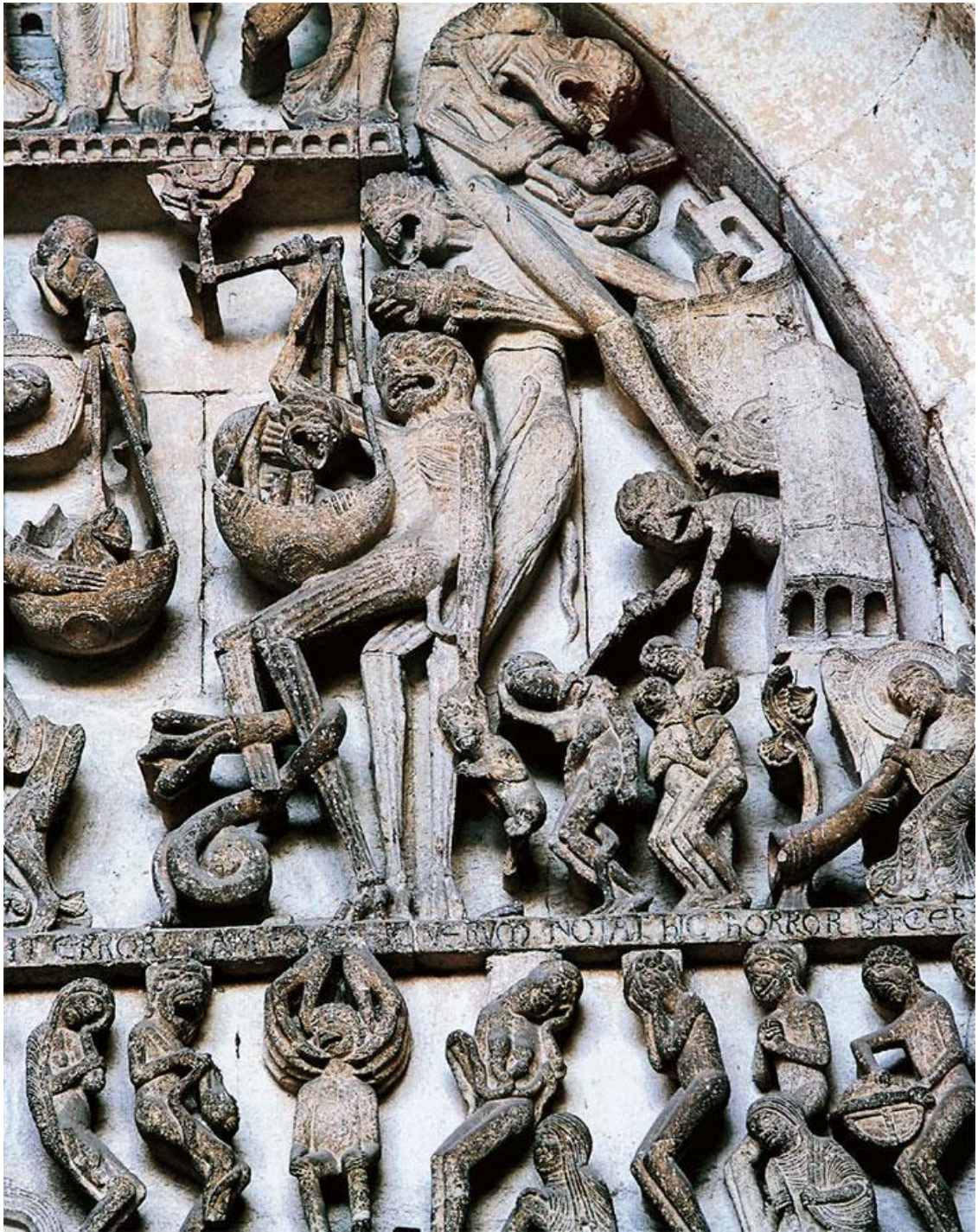
**Anonymous,** *Scenes from Hell*, west wall, south portal, 1125–1130. Église Saint-Pierre, Moissac, France.





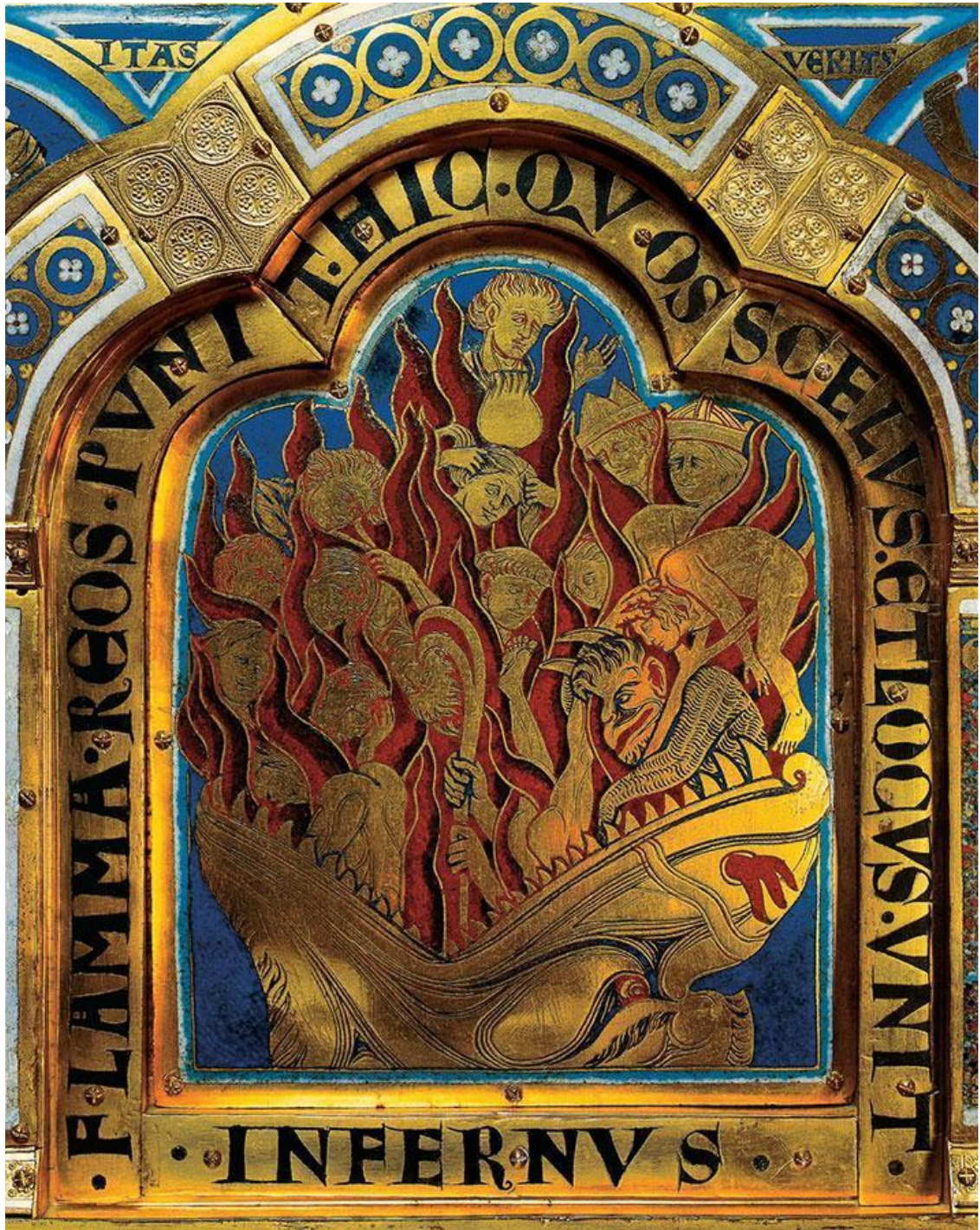
**Anonymous,** *Last Judgment* (detail), tympanum, west portal, 1105–1110. Église Sainte-Foy, Conques, France.





**Gislebertus**, *Last Judgment* (detail), tympanum, west portal. Cathédrale Saint-Lazare, Autun, France.





Nicolas de Verdun, *Chapel Ambon* (detail), 1180. Klosterneuburg Abbey, Klosterneuburg, Austria.

Satan is already partly formed, but he attains the fullness of his being only in Christianity, the religion that claims to seek the fulfillment of that Judaism from which it sprang, yet in so large a measure denies it. Here we find ourselves confronted by a maze and tangle of moral causes and historic causes, all of which have the effect of ever exalting, colouring and enhancing the sinister figure of Satan. On the other hand, Jehovah is transformed into a God incomparably milder and kinder, into a God of love, who necessarily rejects, as non-assimilable, every Satanic element; and when Christ also shall have been raised to the godhead – the gentle, radiant figure of the deity who for love of men himself became man, who for their sake shed his blood and suffered ignominious



death – , by this very contrast he will bring out in altogether new relief the grim and gloomy figure of the Adversary. The human tragedy, fused with the divine tragedy, will reveal the inner causes of his miraculous progress, awakening in the minds of men new moral concepts, new images of things, a new picture of heaven and of earth. It is true, then, that Satan led our first parents to sin and, by virtue of the offence provoked by him, robbed God of the human family and of the world in which it lives. How great must be his power, how firm his usurped dominion, if in order to ransom the lost it is necessary that the very Son of God shall sacrifice himself, shall give himself up to that death that entered the world precisely through the agency of the Enemy! Before God set his hand to the work of redemption, Satan could rest secure in his possession; but now that this redemption is completed, even before it is completed, will he not be bound to exert his power to the utmost in order to contest with the victor the fruits of victory and to regain, at least in part, what he has lost? Yes, he even dares to tempt the Redeemer himself, and the apostle pictures him as a roaring lion in quest of prey that he may devour.<sup>13</sup>

But if the conditions of the ransom, if the rank of Him who was to bring it about, gave Satan a degree of greatness and importance that he could not have had otherwise, the redemption itself did not rob him of all the prey that he had taken or that he was yet to take, and the victory of Christ did not so completely overthrow his power as the desire of the ransomed would fain have hoped. Saint John said that the world must be judged and the prince of this world be cast out;<sup>14</sup> Saint Paul declares that the victory of Christ had been full and complete and that with his death he had destroyed the king of death;<sup>15</sup> yet the prince of this world was not really deposed, yet the king of death was not slain; but rather he continued, as before, to scatter death broadcast – eternal death no less than temporal. Christ breaks through the gates of Hell, he bursts into the kingdom of darkness, he depopulates the abyss; but behind him the gates close again, the darkness gathers anew, the abyss is repopled. Strange to tell, never was Satan so much talked of among men, never was Satan so much feared, as after the victory of Christ, after the completion of the work of redemption!

Nor did this come about through any simple error of judgment, through any logical contradiction. Evil has been printed in the book of our life in such characters that no mere religious doctrine, no dream of faith and love, is able to erase it. The discouraging spectacle of a world in dissolution presented itself on every side to the eyes of the new believers; the delicate, fragrant flower of Christ's teachings unfolded in the midst of Satan's midden. Was not the work of the eternal prevaricator to be seen in that multicoloured polytheism that had so charmed and seduced men's spirits? Were not Jove and Minerva, Venus and Mars, and all the gods that peopled Olympus, incarnations of him, or servants of his will, executors of his designs? That lusty, joyous civilisation of paganism, those flourishing arts, that bold philosophy, those riches and honours, those scenes of love and idleness, those boundless debaucheries – were not all these his inventions, his tricks, forms and instruments of his tyranny? Was not Rome's empire the empire of Satan? Yes, in fact: Satan was worshiped in the temples, lauded at the public festivals; Satan sat on the throne with Caesar; Satan ascended the Capitoline with the *Triumphatores*. Who knows how often the devout faithful, gathered in the Catacombs, hearing the roar and turmoil of that life passing over their heads, trembled lest the diabolic tempest should engulf the bark of Christ, and in the very arms of the Cross felt themselves threatened and overwhelmed.

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<sup>13</sup> I Peter v, 8.

<sup>14</sup> John xii, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews ii, 14.



**Anonymous**, *Missal Used at the Saint-Nicaise Church in Reims (Missale Remense)*, between 1285 and 1297. Parchment, miniature, 23.3 × 16.2 cm (text: 14.7 × 10.5 cm). Russian National Library, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Thus Satan attained gigantic proportions from all the greatness of the pagan world centring in himself. In every aspect of that life which cramped him in on every side, the Christian perceived a likeness to the “strong man armed”<sup>16</sup> whom Christ had come to conquer, and who, conquered, had become bolder and more aggressive than before. And his soul was filled with consternation and terror; how was he to guard himself against the wiles, how defend himself from the attacks, of an enemy more venomous than the Hydra, more multiform than Proteus? Tertullian will warn him, others too will warn him, not to seek the company of pagans, not to take part in their festivals and games, to engage in no calling that can, directly or indirectly, serve the worship of idols; but how is he to observe such a prohibition and live? Or how, if he does observe it, is he to make certain of keeping his heart pure, when the very ground he treads, the air he breathes, are formed of impurity and sin?

Nor is Satan content with mere enticements and wiles; with yet other weapons does he endeavour to regain what he has lost. He storms from every side the scarcely yet founded Church, and like a bronze-headed battering ram, day and night he buffets and shatters its walls. He stirs up frightful persecutions and strives to drown the new faith in terror and in blood. He fosters the great heresies and snatches countless lambs from the flock of Christ. Sad times! Life full of danger and of woe! No, Christ’s kingdom is not yet come; but those saddened spirits to whom Faith lends her wings believe that they can catch a distant glimpse, in apocalyptic visions, of its radiant glory, and they proclaim the second coming of the Redeemer and the final overthrow of the “old serpent”.<sup>17</sup>

Vain dreams! Deluded hopes! The Redeemer comes not, and the old serpent, grown more venomous than ever, multiplies his coils, and ever closer and closer enfolds the world. Proof after proof of this may be had from the teachings of certain sects that plagued the Church, more particularly during the first three centuries, all striving to introduce into Christianity a dualism differing but little from that of the Persians. These teachings, taken collectively, constitute what is called Gnosticism, and the more extreme among them have the common tendency of attributing to Satan an even higher degree of importance than he formerly possessed, of considering Satan as the creator of our bodily nature, of making evil an original and independent principle, not sprung from defection and decadence, but co-eternal with good and at war with good. In this way Satan’s power increased, the work of redemption became more difficult, salvation more uncertain. Clement of Alexandria and Origen had maintained that all creatures would return to God, their common beginning; but Saint Augustine thought that God would save only a few elect and that the greater part of the human race would become the prey of the Devil.

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<sup>16</sup> Luke xi, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Revelation xii, 9; xx, 2.





**Pol de Limburg**, *The Fall and Judgment of Lucifer*, from *The Luxurious Hours of the Duke of Berry* (*Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*), beginning of 15th century. Illuminated manuscript. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.





**Master of the Rebel Angels**, *St. Martin Sharing his Coat* and *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, c. 1340–1345. Oil on wood mounted on canvas, 64 × 29 cm (recto). Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

It is by no means easy, amid the clash of opposing doctrines and the contrariety of influences, through the speculations of philosophy, especially the Neoplatonic and Cabalistic, the brilliant fantasies of the Gnosis, and the already wavering orthodox dogma – it is not easy to form for one's self a clear and exact concept of the changes and accretions that Satan underwent in the first centuries of the Church. Whoever knows to what a strange and monstrous syncretism the religion of Rome had arrived, can easily imagine that from this indistinguishable hodgepodge of absurd beliefs and crazy practices Satan would naturally derive more than one of the elements of his renewed personality. Truly, the Christian Satan is the result of the meeting and mutual interpenetration of varying civilisations, of opposing philosophies, of hostile religions; and when the Church triumphs, when the dogma is established, he extends over the world a fearful dominion.

The incurable corruption of paganism gives new emphasis to the idea of evil and raises to gigantic proportions the personifier of this idea. The Christians believed that the pagan world was the work of Satan; instead, it is the pagan world that, to a great degree, gives Satan his form in the imagination of the Christians. Without the Roman Empire, Satan would have become far different from what he is or was. All the foulness, all the devilishness, scattered throughout pagan civilisation, is gathered together and condensed in him; on him, naturally, is cast the blame for everything that to the pious and stubborn Christian conscience appears as sin – and that includes an infinite variety of thoughts, customs and deeds. The divinities that had formerly had their own altars and temples, do not die nor disappear, but are transformed into demons, some of them losing their former seductive beauty, but all retaining and increasing their ancient wickedness. Jove, Juno, Diana, Apollo, Mercury, Neptune, Vulcan, Cerberus and fauns and satyrs outlive the worship that was rendered them, reappear amid the darkness of the Christian Hell, crowd the minds of men with strange terrors, give rise to fearful fantasies and legends. Diana, changed to a noonday demon, will assail those imprudent ones who are too heedless of their health; and by night, across the silent tracts of the starry heavens, she will lead the flying squadrons of the witches, her pupils. Venus, ever burning with passion, no less fair as a demon than as a goddess, will still ply her ancient arts on men, will inspire them with unquenchable longings, will usurp the couches of wedded wives, will bear away in her arms, to her subterranean abode, the knight Tannhäuser, drunken with desire, caring no longer for Christ, greedy for damnation. One of the popes, John XII (made pope in 955, deposed in 963 by the Emperor Otto I), guilty, according to his accusers, of having drunk to the health of the Devil, when casting dice will invoke the aid of Jove, of Venus and of the other demons. Satan will oftentimes be represented in the figure of a faun, a satyr or a siren.





**Master of the Rebel Angels**, *St. Martin Sharing his Coat* and *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, c. 1340–1345. Oil on wood mounted on canvas, 64 × 29 cm (verso). Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

When the Church finally triumphs, the history of Satan appears to be known in every detail and his figure to be complete. Men know – or think they know – his origins, the earlier and later vicissitudes of his career, his processes and his works. The Fathers have portrayed and described him. Satan was created good, and made himself wicked; he fell through his own sin, drawing after him in his ruin an innumerable multitude of followers. Later on, it will be told that a tenth part of the heavenly host was cast down and plunged headlong into the abyss; and there will be pictured an array of neutral angels, neither rebels against God nor opposed to Satan, mere spectators of the battle waged between the two; angels whom Saint Brandan<sup>18</sup> will meet in the course of his adventurous wanderings; whom Parsifal will hear recalled in the farthest East, where the holy relic of the Grail is guarded;<sup>19</sup> whom Dante will place in the vestibule of Hell together with those wretched dastards “who never were alive”.<sup>20</sup>

But Satan has not yet ceased to grow, his personality is not yet complete; long, indeed, is his history, and when one era of it has closed another is beginning. The ascetics, who had thought to escape him by escaping the world and in the desert had found him again, more malignant and powerful than ever, and who had experienced his countless wiles and suffered his savage insults, did not yet know him under all his aspects.

To the ancient calamities succeeded new ones; on an age of deepest corruption there followed an age of violent dissolution, which seemed to be wrenching the world from its hinges. Already out of the dim North the barbarians are bursting in like a sea that has broken down the opposing dikes, and under the shock the Empire of Rome crumbles in crashing ruin. The wicked and accursed pagan civilisation is quenched, but only to give place to the hopeless darkness of barbarism, wherein it is impossible to descry any gleam of salvation. It seemed as if the human kingdom were about to end, or that a brute kingdom were about to begin on earth. This horrible disaster, described with fiery eloquence by Salvianus (born in the fifth century), made men doubt Providence, and offering a spectacle of evils hitherto unknown, numberless, measureless, set forth in new relief, as was but natural, the figure of him who is the source and the promoter of all evils. Satan grew through the deeds of the barbarians; but at the same time he grew through many of their beliefs, attracting to himself everything in their religion (and that was not a little) that he found consistent and homogeneous with his own character. In contact with Greek and Roman life, he became in a certain measure Hellenised and Romanised; in contact with the northern barbarians, he became Germanised. Numerous figures out of the Germanic mythology, Loki, the wolf Fenris, elves, sylphs and gnomes, are transfused into Satan and confer on him new aspects, new characteristics and new activities. Thus Satan is being built and shaped, with accretions that are sometimes swift, sometimes gradual; by means of successive stratifications and continuous infiltrations, changing unceasingly, passing through all the steps of a long and wearisome evolution. Originally a simple elemental power, he gradually acquires the moral character that belongs to him; and when we behold him in his maturity, when we examine his inner nature, we are astounded at his greatness, perceiving the multiplicity and diversity of the elements of which he is compounded. Not only the forces of nature,

<sup>18</sup> Saint Brandan of Clonfert, born in 484, died in 577 is reported to have made a voyage (the “Navigation of Saint Brandan”) in search of the terrestrial paradise and to have landed with his companions on a miraculous island in the Atlantic.

<sup>19</sup> In the ninth book of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* (lines 1155–1164), the hermit says to the knight: “They who stood neutral while Lucifer and the Trinity were fighting, even all those angels, noble and of high estate, were made to come down to earth, to guard this very stone [the Holy Grail]; yet the stone remained pure. Nor do I know whether God at last granted them pardon or doomed them to more grievous punishment.”

<sup>20</sup> *Inferno*, iii, 39–64.



not only the gods of different mythologies have become Satan, but so also have human beings. In poems and legends of the Middle Ages, Pilate, Nero and Mohammed are converted into devils.



**Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1562. Wood, 117 × 162 cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium.**





**Luca Giordano**, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, c. 1655. Oil on canvas, 83 × 60 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Satan reaches the highest degree of his development and of his power in the Middle Ages, in that troubled and unhappy period wherein Christianity shows itself most vigorous. He reaches maturity at the same time as the various institutions and peculiar types of that life, and when Gothic

art flourishes in lofty-spired temples, the myth of Satan flourishes also, gloomy and stupendous, in the consciousness of the Christian peoples. After the close of the thirteenth century he begins to decline and languish, as do the papacy, scholasticism, the feudal spirit and the spirit of asceticism. Satan is the child of sadness. In a religion like that of the Greeks, all radiant with life and colour, he could not have held any prominent role; in order that he may grow and thrive, there is need of shadows, of the mysteries of sin and of sorrow, which like a funeral shroud enfold the religion of Golgotha. Satan is the child of fear; and terror dominates the Middle Ages. Seized with an unconquerable dread, the souls of men fear nature, pregnant with portents and monsters; they fear the physical world, opposed to the world of the spirit, and its irreconcilable foe; they fear life, the perpetual incentive and tinderbox of sin; they fear death, behind which yawn the uncertainties of eternity. Dreams and visions torment men's minds. The ecstatic hermit, kneeling long hours in prayer before the doorway of his cell, sees flying through the air aweinspiring armies and riotous hordes of apocalyptic monsters; his nights are lighted up by flaming portents; the stars are distorted and bathed in blood, sad omens of impending evil. In seasons of pestilence that mow men down like ripened stalks of grain are seen darts, hurled by invisible hands, cleaving the air and disappearing with hissing sounds; and ever and anon, across the face of terror-stricken Christendom runs, like a tremor presaging the world's end, the sinister word that Antichrist is already born and is about to open the fearful drama foretold in the Apocalypse.

Satan grows in the melancholy shadows of vast cathedrals, behind the massive pillars, in the recesses of the choir; he grows in the silence of the cloisters, invaded by the stupor of death; he grows in the embattled castle, where a secret remorse is gnawing the heart of the grim baron; in the hidden cell, where the alchemist tests his metals; in the solitary wood, where the sorcerer weaves his nightly spells; in the furrow, wherein the starving serf casts, with a curse, the seed that is destined to nourish his lord. Satan is everywhere; countless are they who have seen him, countless they who have conversed with him.

This belief had taken firm root, nor did the Church fail to favour and strengthen it. The Church made good use of Satan, employed him as a most effective political tool, and gave him all possible credit; since what men would not do through love of God or in a spirit of obedience, they would do through fear of the Devil. Satan was presented under all guises, painted or carved, to the dismayed contemplation of the devout; Satan rounded out each period of the preacher, each admonition of the confessor; Satan became the hero of a legend unending, that offered counterparts and examples for all the vicissitudes of life, for every action, every thought. Not a few of the Visions of the Middle Ages show what sort of application could be made of the Devil to politics in general; certainly, to ecclesiastical politics the Devil rendered far better service than did the Inquisition and the fagot, though both of these rendered service enough. As early as the year 811, Charlemagne, in one of his capitularies, accused the clergy of abusing the Devil and Hell for the sake of filching money and seizing estates.

But great as was the fear that men had of Satan, the hatred that they cherished against him was no less.

Such hatred was not, indeed, unjustified, since in hating him one hated the author of all evil, and the more one loved Christ the more one ought to hate His enemy. But in this case also, fear and hatred produced their customary results, extravagance in opinions and exaggeration in beliefs. The figure of Satan had to suffer the consequences of this; and this excess, being noted by some one of more moderate spirit, gave rise to the proverb, "The Devil is not so black as he is painted".



## I. The Devil



**Hans Memling**, *Triptych of Terrestrial Vanity and Celestial Redemption* (detail), c. 1490. Wood. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg, France.



## The Person of the Devil



**Enguerrand Quarton**, *The Coronation of Mary* (detail), 1454. Oil on panel, 183 × 220 cm. Musée Pierre de Luxembourg, Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, France.

Only with the utmost difficulty, if at all, do men succeed in forming a concept of an incorporeal substance, essentially different from that which meets their senses. For them, the incorporeal is usually an attenuation, a rarefaction, of the corporeal, a state of minimum density, comparable though inferior to that of air or flame. To all uncivilised men, and to the great majority of those who call themselves civilised, the soul is a breath, or a light vapour, and it can be seen under the appearance of a shadow. The gods of all the mythologies are, to a lesser or a greater degree, corporeal; those of Greek mythology feed on ambrosia and nectar, and in case they meddle (as they are sometimes wont to do) in the brawls of mortals, they run the risk of catching a sound

drubbing. It ought not to seem strange, then, that the pneumatological doctrines of both Jews and Christians generally assign bodies to angels and to demons.

Doctors and Fathers of the Church are almost unanimous in holding that demons are provided with bodies, already possessed by them when they lived in the condition of angels but become denser and heavier after their fall. The density of these bodies of theirs, always far lighter than the bodies of men, has not been similarly estimated by all investigators; in the second century Tatianus declared that it was like that of air or fire, and a body formed of air was attributed to the demons by Isidorus of Seville (560–636) at the beginning of the seventh century. Others, like Saint Basil the Great (330–379), were inclined to assign to them an even more rarefied body. But it is easy to understand how, in a matter of this sort, there could not possibly be one single opinion that must be universally accepted; and how Dante, without offending the conscience of any one, could give his Lucifer, down amid the frost and ice of Cocytus, a solid, compact body, to which he and Virgil cling, as to a rock.<sup>21</sup>

Having bodies, the demons must also have certain natural needs, as have all living, corporeal beings; foremost among all these being that of repairing their organism, whose structure is being constantly worn away by the exercise of life. The devils must require to be fed; and in fact, Origen (185–253), Tertullian (150–230), Athenagoras (about 176), Minucius Felix (second century), Firmicus Maternus (about 347), Saint John Chrysostom (347–407) and many others, say that the devils greedily absorb the vapour and smoke of the victims sacrificed by the pagans – a somewhat unsubstantial food, to be sure, but one not unsuited to their constitution. Some Jewish Rabbis, in a little more generous spirit, endeavouring to introduce a somewhat greater variety into the diabolic diet, said that the devils subsist on the odour of fire and the vapour of water, but that they are also very fond of blood when they can get it; and a German proverb adds that when the Devil is famished he eats flies.

The common people frequently speak of old devils and young devils; and many are the proverbs which, in various languages, give evidence of this popular belief. We know that the Devil, grown old, became a hermit;<sup>22</sup> and it would seem reasonable that he too should grow old, since all organic beings do likewise; but Isidorus of Seville, who has already been quoted, declares that the demons do not grow old, nor can we well make any different assertion until diabolic anatomy and physiology have been more thoroughly studied. If they do not grow old, neither ought they to die; and those Rabbis are guilty of a great falsehood who declare that they too die, like men – not all of them, it is true, but yet the great majority. It seems that they could fall ill, however; at any rate the witches, during the days of the Inquisition, sometimes went so far as to say in their depositions – after having suffered two or three turns of the cord – that the Devil did fall ill from time to time, and that it was then their task to nurse and cure him.

Some Fathers and Doctors, like Saint Gregory the Great (Pope 590–604), – not to mention others – would have it that the devils were altogether incorporeal; but this belief was, as I have shown, far from being the generally accredited one. However, one was at liberty to accept one belief or the other, and Saint Thomas (1225–1274), after citing the conflicting opinions on the subject, concludes by saying that it matters but little to faith whether the demons have bodies or not. But if it matters little to faith, it matters much to fancy, and people were not slow in giving the devils as solid a body as possible.

And how was this body formed? Let it suffice here to treat only of the bodies that the devils possess naturally, not of those which they can assume at their pleasure and of which I shall speak later.

<sup>21</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv, 70–81.

<sup>22</sup> *Of* the Italian and French proverbs: “Il diavolo, quand’ è vecchio, si fa romito”; “Quand le diable devient vieux il se fait ermite.”





**Fra Angelico, *The Last Judgment* (detail), 1432–1435.** Tempera and gold on wood. Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy.

In general, and as a rule, the bodies of the demons had a human form. This ought not to excite our wonder, since man, who has made the gods in his own image, has also made in his own image both angels and devils. However, when we speak of a human form, we must not conceive of a form in all respects like our own. In consequence of his sin and of his fall, Satan (“The creature who fair semblance once possessed,” as Dante Alighieri calls him<sup>23</sup>) and with Satan the other rebels, not only beheld their bodies grow denser and coarser, but they also saw changed into ignominious deformity the sovereign beauty wherewith God had first clothed them. The form of the devils is, then, a human form, but disfigured and monstrous, wherein the beastly mingles with the human and not seldom exceeds it; and if, on the basis of this form, we were to assign to the demons (with the consent of the naturalists) a place in the zoological classification, we must needs class the greater portion of them in an appropriate family of anthropoids.

An excessive ugliness, sometimes fearful and awe-inspiring, sometimes ignoble and ridiculous, was, then, the most prominent and apparent among what I may call the physical characteristics of the Devil; nor was this without reason, for even if it be not true that the beautiful is, as Plato was held to teach, the splendour of the good, it is, on the other hand, very true that men are drawn by some kind of instinct, whose origins we will not seek to discover, to associate beauty with goodness and wickedness with ugliness. To give to Satan an excessive degree of ugliness was considered a work of merit, which in itself benefited the soul and in which was found a legitimate outlet for hatred of an enemy never sufficiently feared. Authors of legends, painters, sculptors, expended the best of their inventive talent in depicting Satan; and so well, or to speak more correctly, so ill did they depict him that Satan himself must have resented their efforts – though it is not likely that he sets any great store by his own beauty. There is a well-known story, told by many writers of the Middle Ages, about a painter who, having painted a certain devil uglier than fairness demanded, was by that same demon hurled down headlong from the scaffolding where

<sup>23</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv, 18. In the *Inferno*, it is the Giants, not the Titans, who appear as warders of the Ninth Circle of Hell (*Inf.* xxxi).

he was working. Luckily for the painter, a Madonna, whom he had represented as very beautiful, thrust forth her arm from the picture and caught and upheld him in mid-air.

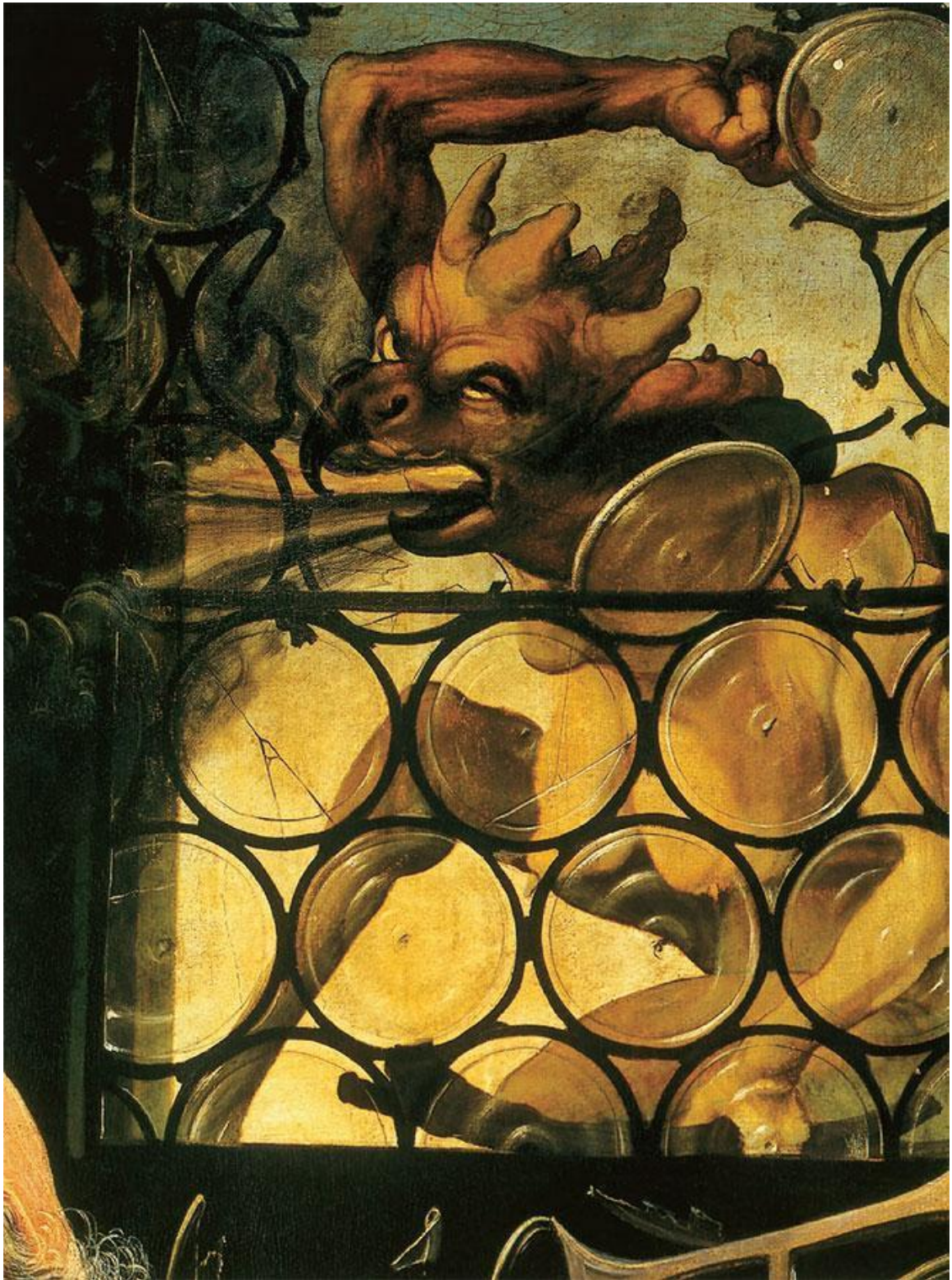
However, it was not necessary to invent anything in this connection. Many persons had seen the Devil with their own eyes and were able to say how he was formed; in the vertiginous fantasies of the visionaries, at every slightest shock he would take shape from the shreds and fragments of images, just as from particles of multicoloured glass are formed the capricious figures of the kaleidoscope.

The Manichaeans, a famous heretical sect that arose about the middle of the third century, attributed to the prince of demons a form which was not only human but gigantic, and they said that men were made in his image. Saint Anthony (251–356), who was destined to behold him under so many other aspects, once saw him in the form of an enormous giant, entirely black, and with his head touching the clouds; but on another occasion, as a little child, likewise black, and naked. Black appears as the native colour of the demons from the very earliest centuries of Christianity, and the reasons for assigning it to them are self-explanatory, so obvious are they, and natural. More than one anchorite of the Thebaid beheld the demon in the form of an Ethiopian – which once more goes to show how the demon conforms himself to the times and places amid which he moves, or has been made to move; but countless other saints of later times continued to see him in this guise, not the least of whom was Saint Thomas Aquinas. Neither is this gigantic stature without a reason, since in all mythologies the giants are usually wicked. In that of Greece, the Titans are the enemies of Zeus, and for this reason Dante places them in Hell. Dante likewise makes his Lucifer of gigantic size;<sup>24</sup> and in the French epopees of the Middle Ages the giants are quite often devils, or sons of devils. In the Vision of Tundal, composed about the middle of the twelfth century, the prince of the demons, who is roasting eternally on a gridiron, is not only of gigantic dimensions but, like Briareus, he has a hundred arms; and like Briareus, with a hundred hands and a hundred feet, he was seen in the fourteenth century by Saint Birgitta (1303–1373). On the other hand, the Devil is occasionally represented as a dwarf, probably through the influence of Germanic myths that need not be discussed in this place.

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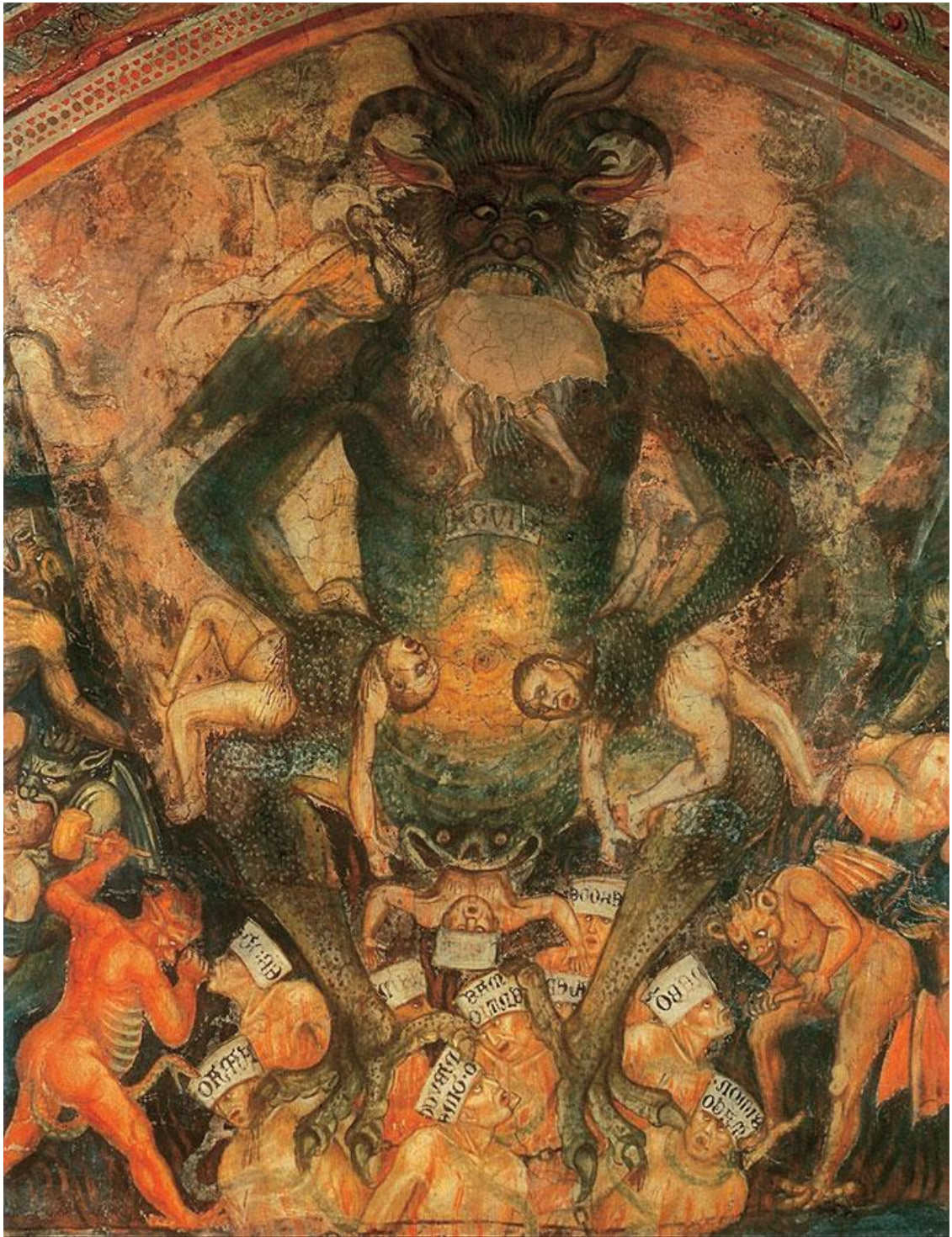
<sup>24</sup> From the data given by Dante in Canto xxxiv of the *Inferno*, Lucifer's height has been estimated at about 2,500 feet.





**Matthias Grünewald, *St. Antony, Isenheim Altarpiece* (detail), c. 1512–1515. Oil on wood. Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France.**





**Taddeo di Bartolo**, *Hell* (detail), between 1393 and 1413. Fresco. Collegiata di Santa Maria Assunta, San Gimignano, Italy.





**Giotto di Bondone**, *The Last Judgment* (detail), 1302–1305. Fresco. Capella degli Scrovegni (Arena Chapel), Padua, Italy.

Dante's Lucifer has three faces, but Dante was not the first to give him these. The Trinity was sometimes represented in the Middle Ages in the guise of a man with three countenances; and since the divine trinity suggested by way of contrast the idea of a diabolic trinity, and since, furthermore, in the spirit of evil there are supposed to be three faculties or attributes opposite and contradictory to those allotted to the three divine persons, it was but natural that in representing the prince of the demons artists would turn to the image of the Triune God in order to form a well fitted counterpart. This Lucifer with the three faces, a sort of antithesis or reverse of the Trinity, appears in works of sculpture, in paintings on glass, in manuscript miniatures, his head now girt with a crown, now surrounded by horns, holding in his hands sometimes a sceptre, sometimes a sword, or even a pair of swords. How ancient this image is, it is hard to tell; but certainly it is anterior to Dante, who brought it into his poem, and to Giotto (1276–1337), who, before Dante, introduced it into his famous fresco; it is found already in the eleventh century; and allusion to a three-headed Beelzebub is made in the Gospel of Nicodemus, which, in the form it now presents, is not later than the sixth century.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The Gospel of Nicodemus is one of the so-called “apocryphal writings”.



**Giovanni da Modena**, *The Punishments of the Damned in Hell*, 1410. Fresco. Basilica di San Petronio, Capella Bolognini, Bologna, Italy.





**Anonymous,** *Madonna del Soccorso* (detail), c. 1470. Chiesa dei Sancto Spirito, Florence, Italy.

The more the fear of Satan increases in men's minds and spreads through the world, the more horrible and fantastic becomes his ugliness; but it is easy to understand how differences in occasion, belief and temperament would tend to give him one shape rather than another. The simplest form in which he has been clothed is that of a tall, lank man, of sooty or livid complexion, extraordinarily emaciated, with fiery and protuberant eyes, breathing ghostly horror from all his gloomy person. Thus is he described more than once, in the thirteenth century, by Caesarius von Heisterbach, a Cistercian monk, whose name will reappear frequently in these pages; and thus is he introduced by Theodor Hoffmann (1776–1822) in his weird tale entitled "The Devil's Elixir". Another form, represented time and again in art, is that of a blackened and disfigured angel, with great bat-like wings, an emaciated and hairy body, two or more horns on his head, hook-nosed, with long pointed ears, swine's tusks, and hands and feet armed with claws. Such is the appearance of the demon who, in the Dantean Hell, flings into the viscid pitch-bath of the barrators one of the Ancients of Santa Zita:

Ah! what fierce cruelty his look bespake!  
In act how bitter did he seem, with wings  
Buoyant outstretch'd and feet of nimblest tread.  
His shoulder, proudly eminent and sharp,  
Was with a sinner charged; by either haunch  
He held him, the foot's sinew griping fast.<sup>26</sup>

This form does not preclude a certain elegance; but because of this very fact it must needs find many willing distorters. The horns often became ox-horns; the ears, asses' ears; the tip of the tail was embellished with serpents' jaws; hideous visages, like the carved heads of fountain-spouts, covered the joints and grinned from the breast, the belly and the buttocks; the virile member coiled and twisted in weird fashion, recalling certain bizarre creations of ancient art; the legs were changed into goats' legs, reminiscent of the pagan satyr, or one of them was changed to the leg of a horse; the feet were sometimes the talons of a bird of prey or the webbed claws of the goose.

But with all this, the last word in monstrosity had not yet been reached. One strange belief maintained that the bodies of devils had only a front and were hollow within, like those old tree-trunks that by slow decay have been emptied of all ligneous substance. Saint Fursey (died about 650) once saw a pack of devils with long necks and heads like brazen cauldrons. Certain other devils, seen by Saint Guthlac (673–714), had huge heads, long necks, thin swarthy countenances, squalid beards, bushy ears, lowering brows, savage eyes, teeth like horses', singed locks, wide mouths, bulging breasts, scraggy arms, knock-knees, bow legs, unwieldy heels and splayed feet. Furthermore, they had loud, hoarse voices, and from their mouths they vomited flames – though this act of vomiting flame from the mouth is not an especially striking feature, since, as a rule, they used to spout living flames from every orifice of the body. To Saint Birgitta there once appeared a devil having a head like a pair of bellows furnished with a long pipe, his arms like serpents, his feet like grappling irons.

But who could ever describe this new Chimaera under all its aspects? The belief that each individual demon must have a peculiar form of his own, befitting his peculiar character, his rank and the nature of his infernal office, tended to multiply these strange fancies and increase their confusion. We have seen brute members joined in the bodies of demons with members of human shape; not seldom the brute predominates over the human, and in such a case we find, for instance, a beast with the head of a man, like Dante's Geryon;<sup>27</sup> sometimes the brute excludes the human

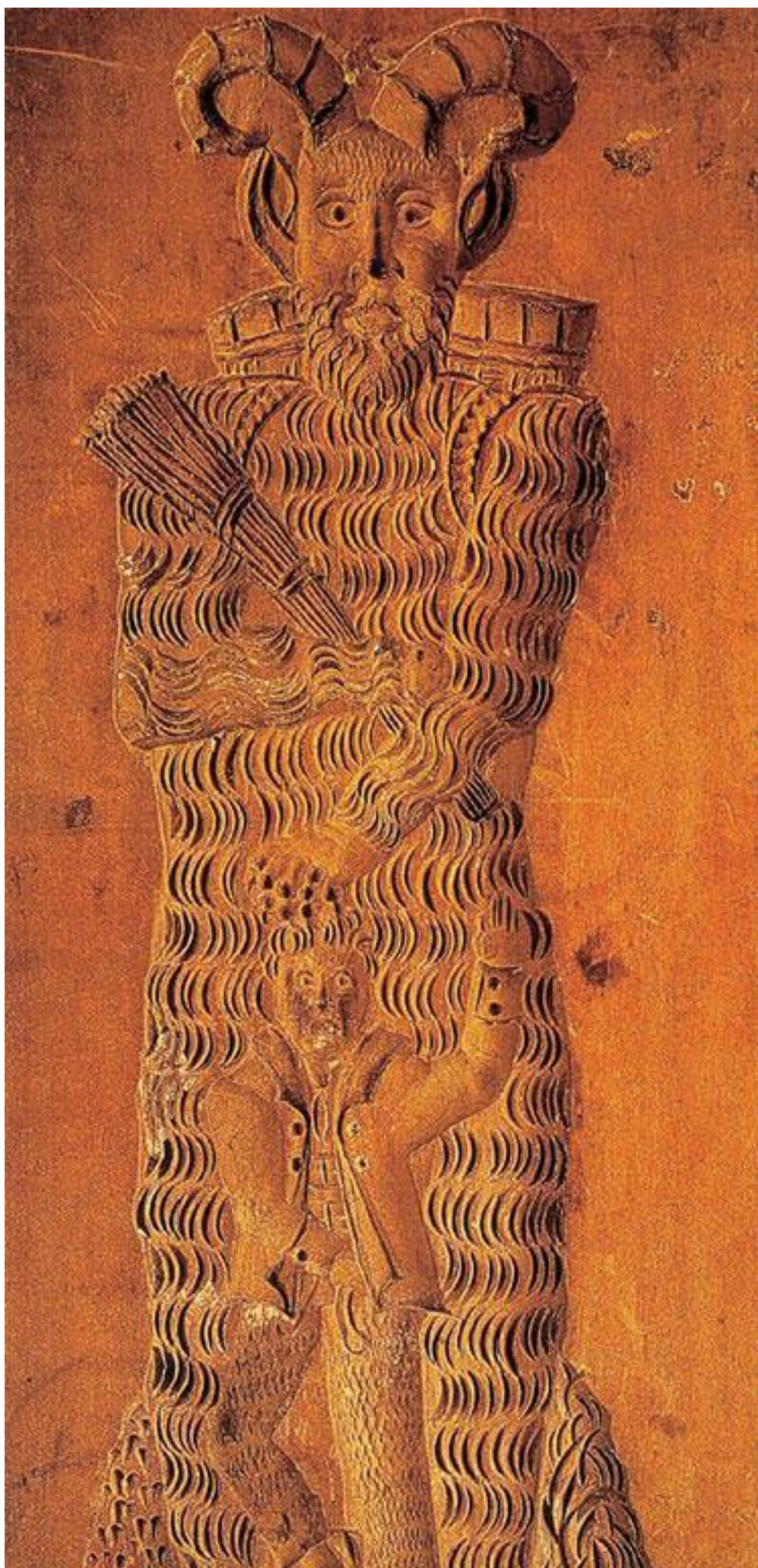
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<sup>26</sup> *Inferno*, xxi, 31–36.

<sup>27</sup> *Inferno*, xvii, 1–27.



altogether, and then we meet a diabolic beast, which also may be composite, made up of portions taken from this creature and from that, a monster that does violence to nature, a living symbol of falsehood and confusion.





**Anonymous,** *The Krampus, Demon Companion of St. Nicholas*, 19th century. Imprint on a cake pan. Private collection.

All through the Middle Ages, the Devil, as we have seen, is represented as being exceedingly ugly; and to this rule – a moral rather than an aesthetic one – it is very hard to discover exceptions. Nevertheless, some rare exceptions can be found. A Latin Bible of the ninth or tenth century, preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, contains among other pictures a miniature representing Satan and Job. Satan is here depicted in a fashion that cannot be called ugly. Of the former angel, there are still preserved the wings and – stranger still – the nimbus that encircles his head, but the feet are armed with claws, and in his left hand he holds a vessel filled with fire, wherewith he seems to intend to symbolise his own nature. A devil, whom the poet calls handsome, but who nevertheless has a large mouth and a hooked nose, is described in a French epopee of the twelfth century, *La Bataille Aliscans*. Federigo Frezzi, bishop of Foligno and author of the *Quadriregio* (died in 1416), finds in Hell, contrary to his expectation, a Satan of great beauty:

I thought to see a monster foul, uncouth;  
I thought to see a realm all waste and sad:  
And him I saw triumphant, glorious.  
Stately he was, and fair, and so benign  
His aspect, and with majesty so filled,  
That of all reverence he appeared most worthy.  
And three fair crowns he wore upon his head:  
Joyous his countenance and blithe his brow,  
And in his hand the sceptre of great power.  
And though his height might well exceed three miles,  
His features and his form such balance showed,  
Such harmony, I marvelled much thereat.  
Behind his shoulders, too, six wings he had,  
Of plumage so adorned, so radiant,  
Nor Cupid nor Cyllenius have the like.

But this is merely a deceptive appearance, and the poet, looking through the diamond shield of his guide, Minerva, beholds the prince of the demons as he really is – of most savage aspect, entirely black, with fiery eyes, his head surrounded, not with a crown but with dragons, all the hairs on his head and trunk changed into serpents, his arms furnished with claws, the rest of his body and his tail like those of a monstrous scorpion. Satan begins to reacquire something of his beauty with the arrival, or rather with the unfolding, of the Renaissance; and it is easy to understand how an age enamoured of beauty, an age that devoted to the cult of beauty all the best of its own elements, could not suffer, even in Satan, too base and horrible a deformity. In the “Last Judgment” of Michelangelo, the figures of the demons do not differ greatly from those of the damned, and they are impressive rather through their awfulness than their horribleness. Milton’s demons keep in their fall no small portion of their former beauty and their former majesty; but those of Tasso have strange and horrible forms and even reproduce all the monsters of antiquity. The figure of the cavalier, in velvet doublet and silken mantle, his cap adorned with a long cock’s feather and with sword at his side, is a product of modern imagination.



**Paolo Uccello**, *St. George and the Dragon*, c. 1470. Oil on canvas, 55.6 × 74.2 cm. The National Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

The demons, though they had their own proper forms, could also at their pleasure assume other forms; but so great is the variety, so extensive the development, of both one kind and the other, that it is not always possible to distinguish between them. In general, it may be said that there is no shape which the Devil may not assume on occasion, a faculty which renders him most worthy of the name sometimes bestowed on him of the “Infernal Proteus”. Milton was well aware of this faculty. Speaking of the fallen angels, he says:

“Spirits when they please  
Can either sex assume, or both; so soft  
And uncompounded is their essence pure;  
Nor tied nor manacled with joint or limb,  
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,  
Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose,  
Dilated or condens’d, bright or obscure,  
Can execute their aery purposes,  
And works of love or enmity fulfill.”<sup>28</sup>

Let us try, for a moment, to recover our bearings in the midst of this infernal masquerade. The devils, ugly by nature, could by artifice acquire an appearance that was beautiful and seductive; they could also acquire a deformity that was different from their own. According to their plans and needs, they assumed sometimes one aspect, sometimes the other.

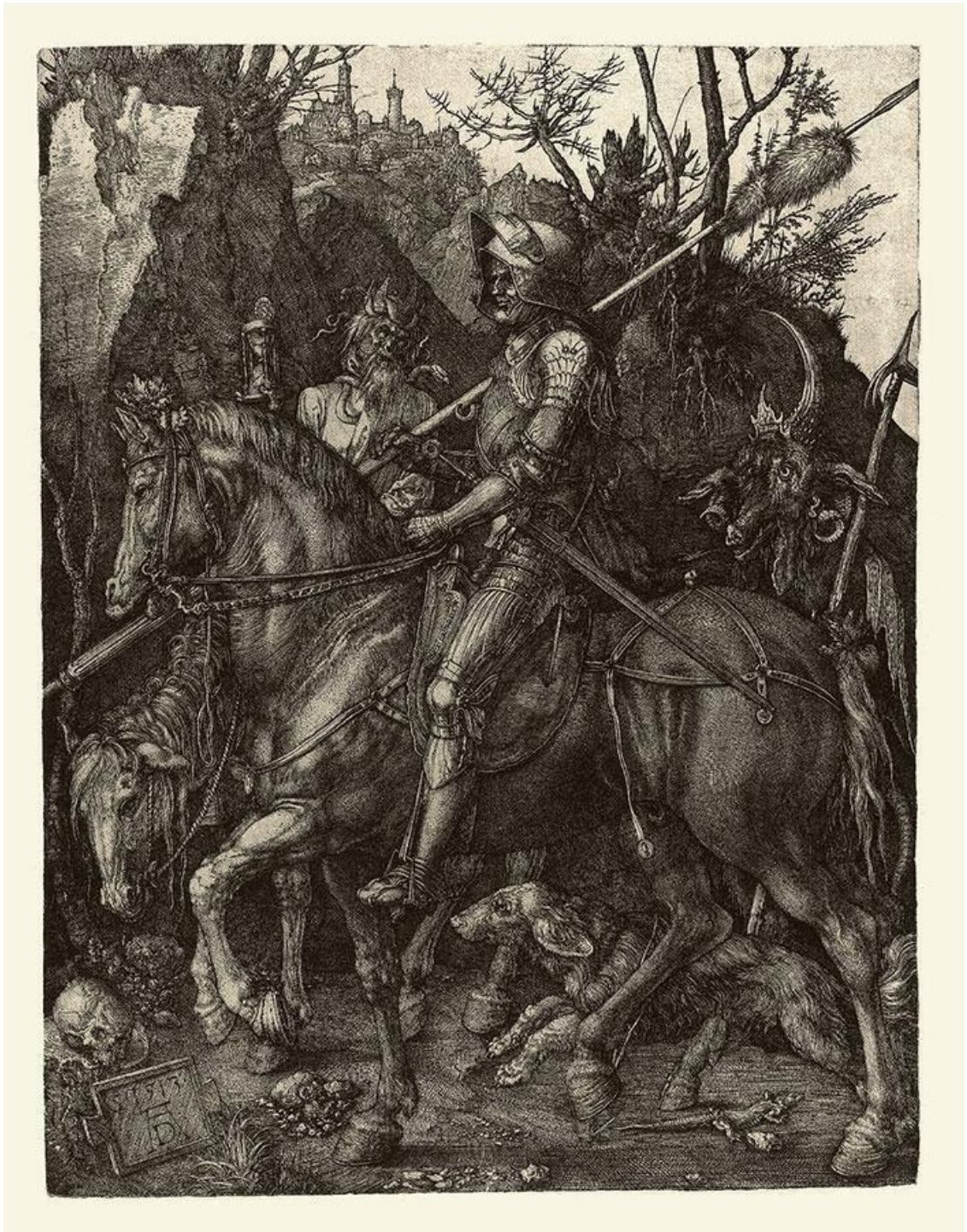
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<sup>28</sup> *Paradise Lost*, i, 423–431.



That the devils, especially in ancient times, should appear to Christians under the guise of one or another of the pagan divinities, will seem strange to no one. Saint Martin, the famous bishop of Tours, was made to see them disguised as Jupiter, Mercury, Venus and Minerva. But Saint Martin lived in the fourth century, at a time when paganism, if not flourishing, was yet alive; and for that reason his visions are easily accounted for. Not so easily, however, do we account for the fact that devils in the form of Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Bacchus and Hebe, were still seen by Saint Rainaldo, bishop of Nocera, in the thirteenth century. In this second case, we are forced to recognise the effects of certain readings of classic authors, and the symptoms of the near approach of the Renaissance. The same reasons that led the demons to masquerade as pagan divinities could also lead them to clothe themselves in the likeness of illustrious men of old. In the tenth century, there appeared one night to a grammarian of Ravenna, Vilgardo by name, certain devils in the guise of Virgil, Horace and Juvenal; and thanking him for the diligence with which he was devoting himself to their writings, they promised to make him after his death a sharer in their own glory.

Very often the devils, who generally possessed one human form, would assume another – also human, but better adapted to their need. Countless histories of saintly men tell us of demons appearing in the form of attractive women, while numberless histories of female saints tell us of demons hiding themselves under the semblance of handsome and saucy youths. I shall return to the subject of these perilous apparitions when I come to speak of the Devil as tempter. Not seldom did the devils conceive the idea of presenting themselves before the man or woman they wished to annoy, under the guise of friends, kindred, or persons otherwise well-known and familiar; whence there might result, and oftentimes there did result, great damage and scandal. The venerable Mary of Maille discovered the Devil beneath the garb of a hermit, reputed by all a holy man. To the blessed Gherardesca of Pisa, and to other holy women, the Devil appeared in the guise of their husbands; in the form of a gallant he issued one day from the bedchamber of Saint Kunegund (1002–1024). On another occasion, he was guilty of even grosser conduct. He assumed the appearance of Saint Silvanus, bishop of Nazareth, discovered his passion to a young girl, and suffered himself to be found beneath her bed. Standing one day at a window, Thomas Cantipratensis, a Dominican of the thirteenth century, beheld the Devil in the form of a priest, who was exhibiting himself in a most indecent attitude. The monk shouted, and in a trice the demon vanished. This same Thomas tells how, in the year 1258, there was seen near Cologne a great mob of devils in the guise of White Friars, running and dancing across the meadows.



**Albrecht Dürer**, *Knight, Death and the Devil*, c. 1513. Engraving, 24.4 × 18.7 cm. Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, Germany.





**Vittore Carpaccio**, *St. George and the Dragon*, 1516. Oil on canvas, 180 × 226 cm. San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, Italy.

Quite often, the devils let themselves be seen in the forms of various animals. As for the dragon, I am uncertain whether that was the natural form of some devils or one assumed incidentally. As a dragon, it is true, Satan appears in the Apocalypse; and many are the saints to whom diabolic dragons showed themselves. In the eighth century, John of Damascus (700–754) described the demons as dragons flying through the air. Sometimes the dragon seems to be a creature intermediate between demon and beast. But countless were the other animal forms that the demons were wont to don in order to torment, to frighten, or to annoy the righteous souls of the faithful. Saint Anthony, afar in the desert, was made to see them in the forms of roaring, howling beasts of prey, of serpents and scorpions; and more than a thousand years later, Saint Colette still saw them transformed into foxes, serpents, toads, snails, flies and ants. In the thirteenth century, Saint Giles recognised the demon under the shell of an enormous tortoise. In the form of a lion, the demon killed a child, who was restored to life by Saint Eleutherius (456–532), bishop of Tournai; to many persons he showed himself in the form of a raven. In the legend of Saint Vedast (sixth century) it is related that the demons were once seen obscuring the sunlight under the form of a cloud of bats. As a dog, the Devil became the companion of Pope Silvester II (Pope 999–1003), suspected of practicing magic arts; as a dog he appeared to Faust, and as a dog he was seen guarding treasures hidden underground; as a huge he-goat, he showed himself at the revels of the witches; as a cat, he rubbed his back in their kitchens; as a fly, he buzzed persistently about the heads of honest

folk. In short, there is no savage creature, no hideous or disgusting one, under whose semblance the demons have not some time hidden themselves.

All this diabolic zoology should occasion us no surprise. Not only was it natural that the demons, in order to gain their particular ends, should take on whatever animal forms best suited them; but between the animals themselves – some of them, at least – and the demons, there was a certain affinity, there was sometimes an actual identity of nature. Aside from the fact that in Christian symbolism some creatures, such as the serpent, the lion or the ape, represent the Devil; aside from the fact that the demons themselves are very often called beasts; it is also true that certain animals are rightly transformed into demons, or confused with the demons. In an ancient formula for exorcism, God is asked to preserve the fruits of the earth from caterpillars, mice, moles, serpents and other unclean spirits. On the other hand, I remember having seen in an ancient “Bestiary”, or zoological treatise of the Middle Ages, the Devil catalogued along with the other beasts. I have already called attention to the fact that the dragon formed a sort of connecting link between demon and beast; the same can also be said of the basilisk. The toad, which very often appears in company with the witches, turns out, in certain tales, to be far more demon than beast. To prove this, I need only to cite the following frightful story, related by Caesarius von Heisterbach. A child finds a toad in the field and kills it. The dead toad pursues its slayer, giving him no rest either day or night; when it has been killed again and again, it still continues to pursue him, and does not desist even after it has been burned and reduced to ashes. The poor persecuted child, finding no other means of freeing himself, lets himself be bitten by his enemy, and then escapes death by quickly cutting away with a knife the flesh which the venomous jaws have penetrated. Its vengeful fury appeased, the terrible toad was seen no more.

Saint Patrick (396–469), Saint Geffroy (died in 1115), Saint Bernard (1091–1153) and several other saints, excommunicated flies and other noxious insects, or even reptiles, and rid houses, cities and provinces of their presence. The trials of animals, conducted in the Middle Ages and even in the height of the Renaissance, are famous in the annals of superstition; the beasts were arraigned, as were the devils. In 1474 the magistrates of Basel tried and condemned to the flames a diabolic cock which had ventured to lay an egg. If animals transform themselves into demons, it was but just that the demons should transform themselves into animals.

Nor were they satisfied with transforming themselves into animals only; nay, they even turned themselves into inanimate objects. Saint Gregory the Great relates the pitiful case of a nun who, thinking that she was eating a leaf of lettuce, ate the Devil and retained him in her body for a season. A disciple of Saint Hilary, abbot of Galeata, once beheld the Devil in the shape of a tempting cluster of grapes. To others, according to circumstances and conditions, the Devil caused himself to appear in the semblance of a goblet of wine, a gold-piece, a purse full of money, a tree-trunk, a rolling cask and even a cow’s tail. It is not without reason, therefore, that the Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch, and several others among the most famous painters of devils, often animated with diabolic life trees, stones, fabrics, pieces of furniture and kitchen utensils.

But not even here do these diabolic masqueradings reach their limit; and if those that I have related give proof of no small degree of natural versatility and no slight power of imagination, there are yet others which reveal the greatest audacity and a truly diabolical impudence. More than once did Satan venture to assume the venerable features of some famous saint, still living, or already dead, and raised to the honours of the altar. Ofttimes, too, he would reveal himself in the semblance of an angel, resplendent with light and glory. Capping the climax of his audacity, he appeared to some in the likeness of the Virgin Mary, of Christ, crucified, or risen from the dead, of God the Father himself; and, in company with his satellites, he sometimes succeeded in staging the entire Court of Heaven.

The demons were able, by condensing the air about them, or by fashioning at need some other element, to form for themselves the kind of body that best suited them; but they could also



introduce themselves into a body already formed, and employ it exactly as if it were their own. I do not intend to speak here of diabolic possession – of which I will treat in its proper place – , a power which the demons exercised by entering bodies that were still alive; but I am speaking of their invasion of dead bodies, which through their agency gave the appearance of life. Dante makes Friar Alberigo de' Manfredi<sup>29</sup> say that the betrayers of their fatherland, undergoing punishment in Ptolemaea, suffer such a fate that, while their souls are languishing in the lowest depths of Hell, their bodies, directed by demons, remain for a certain season in the world, still, in appearance, alive. This has been regarded as an ingenious invention of Dante himself, but such is not the case. Caesarius relates the melancholy history of a dead clerk whose body was animated and sustained by a devil. This counterfeit clerk used to sing with so sweet a voice that all who heard him were entranced; but one fine day a certain holy man, after listening a while to his singing, said without hesitation: "This is not the voice of a man; 'tis the voice of a doubly damned devil!" And having performed his efficacious exorcisms, he compelled the devil to come out; and when the devil was out, the corpse dropped to the ground. Thomas Cantipratensis tells how the demon entered the body of a dead man that had been deposited inside a church and endeavoured with his chicaneries to terrify a holy virgin who was praying there; but the holy virgin, perceiving the trick, gave the dead man a sound rap on the head and made him lie quiet. The story of a devil who, in order to tempt a poor recluse, appropriated the body of a dead woman, is told by Giacomo da Voragine (died in 1298) in his *Legenda Aurea*. But this idea is quite ancient. Concerning a devil who, entering the corpse of a felon, used to carry travellers across a river in the hope of drowning them, we read in *The Life of Saint Gildwin*; concerning another, who kept alive the body of a wicked man, we read in *The Life of Saint Odran*. The theologians admitted the truth of what was related in these legends; only, in their wisdom, they affirmed that devils could not invade the corpses of persons of good repute and approved by the Church. The belief, with or without this restriction, is not as harmless as it might appear at first. Closely connected with it are various others concerning the evil that can be wrought by dead bodies; also various horrible practices intended to prevent these bodies from doing harm. If a person believed to be dead made the slightest movement, this was at once thought to be an illusion of the Devil, and burial was given in all haste to the dead who wished to be alive. This belief persisted well into the Renaissance, and even in the eighteenth century it had not entirely disappeared.

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<sup>29</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiii, 118–147.



**Raffaello Sanzio**, also known as **Raphael**, *St. Margaret*, 1518. Oil on poplar wood, 192 × 122 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.





**Carlo Crivelli**, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1480. Tempera and gold on wood, 37.8 × 25.4 cm (painted surface: 36.5 × 23.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA.

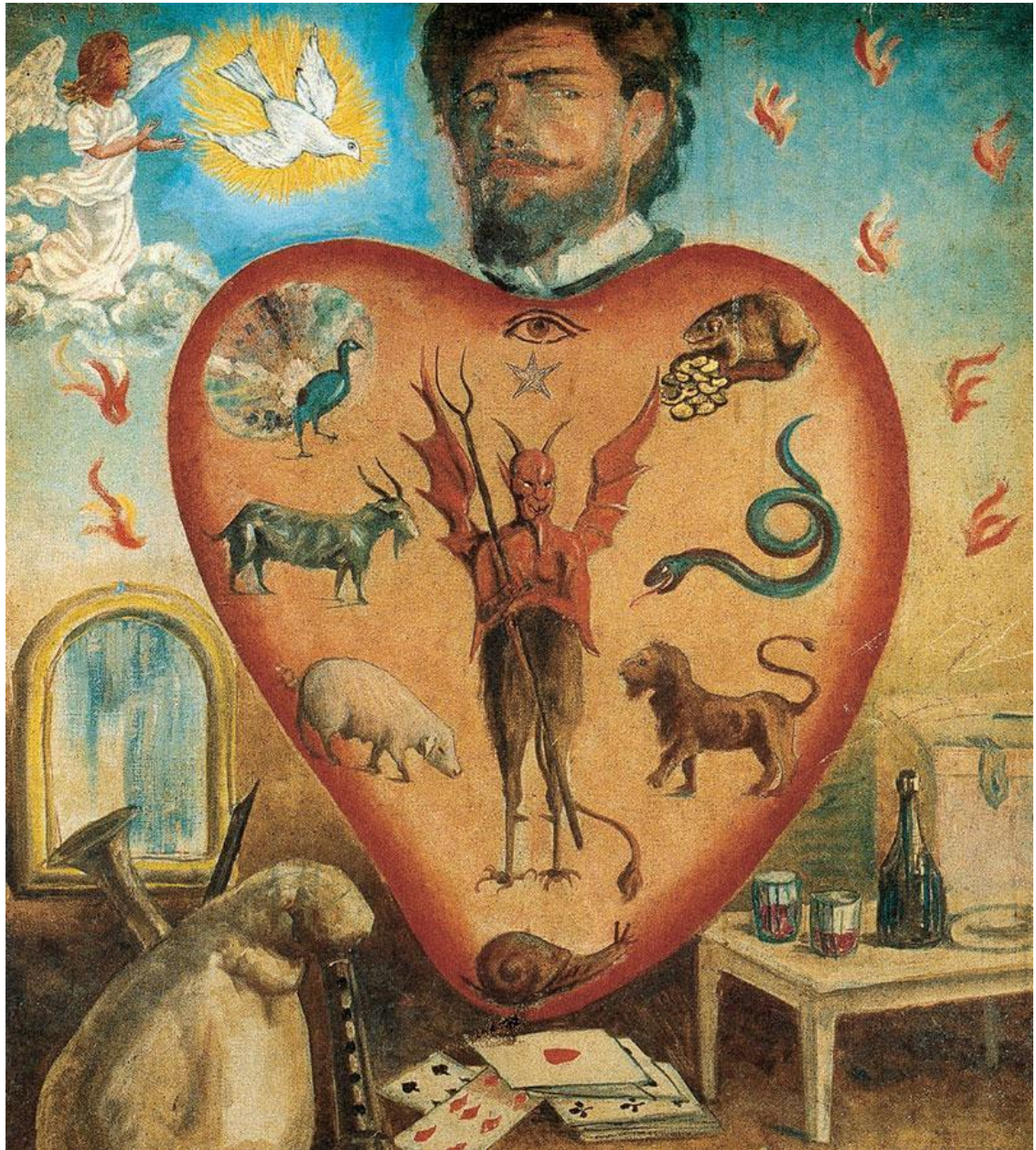
The Devil could, at will, assume honourable and pleasing forms, but none the less he did not cease to be a devil; though rendered invisible, his devilishness did not cease to emanate from his whole person, as an evil influence. Even when he concealed himself under the shape of a beautiful girl, or that of an angel, of the Virgin Mary, or of Christ himself, by his approach he perturbed and dismayed human nature, inspired unaccountable aversions, or left behind him profound apprehensions and terrors. This pernicious influence could be greatly strengthened if he also let himself be seen under his own, or any other, monstrous aspect.

The good Caesarius cites various instances to show how great danger is involved in a sight of the Devil. Two youths fell ill after seeing the Devil in the form of a woman; several, after seeing him, died. Thomas Cantipratensis says that the sight of the Devil will strike one with dumbness. Dante, in the presence of Lucifer, became “frozen and faint”; he does not die, and he is not alive. Nor should this surprise us, when we remember that to the White Lady and other spectres was often given the power of slaying with a look or a mere glance.

Numberless were the shapes under which the Devil could hide himself, and numberless the tricks which, by using these shapes, he could play on others; but there were some who, like Saint Martin, knew how to rout him out, even when hidden under the most unusual and most deceptive forms. When discovered, the disguised demon would either incontinently vanish or reassume his ordinary aspect.

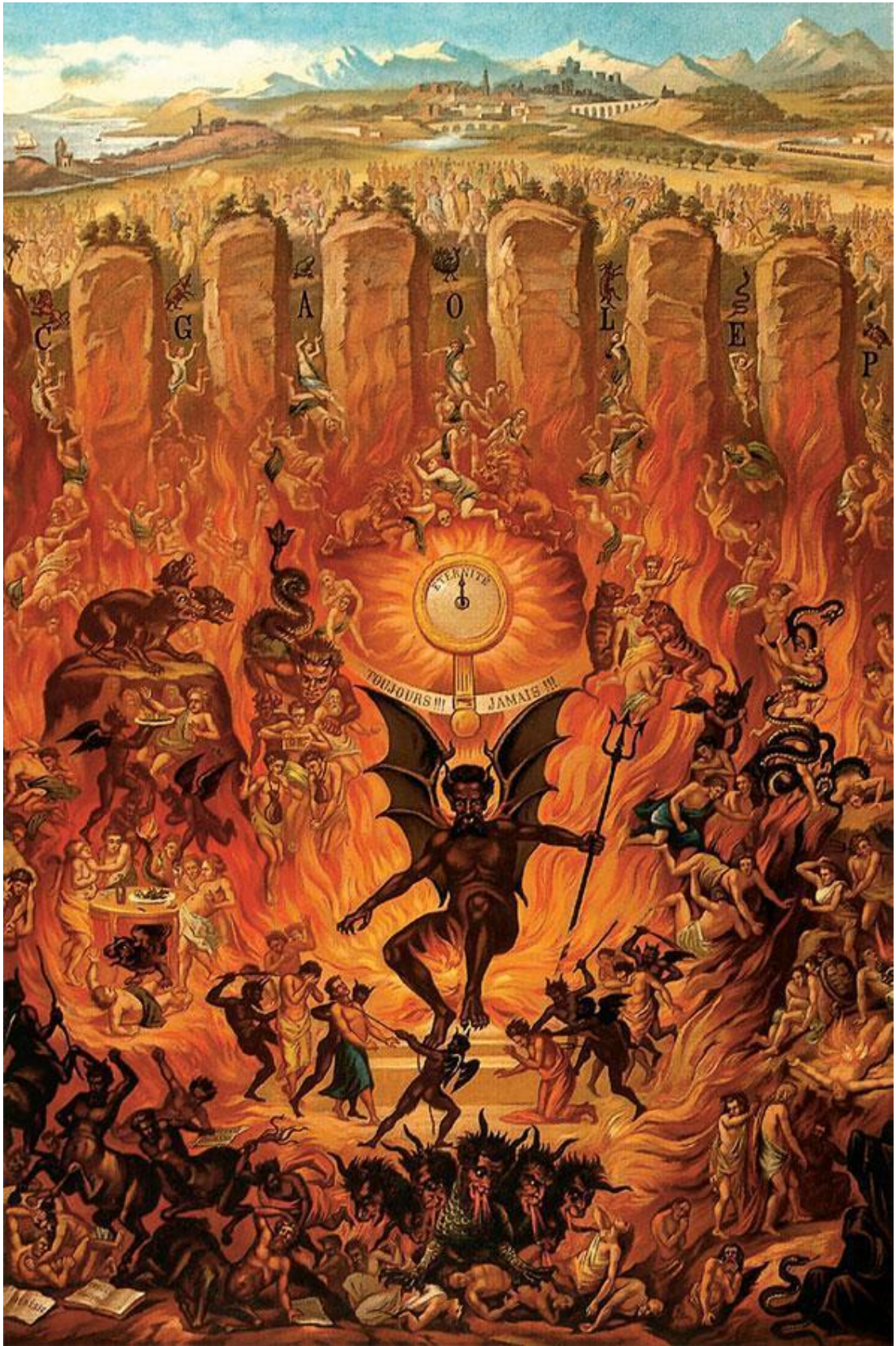
Such was the physical nature of the Devil; of his moral nature I will not speak now, for we shall see that nature expounded in the following chapters. I will only say, in passing, that – contrary to the opinion of Thomas Aquinas, who charged him with no other sin than pride and envy – , popular belief attributed to the Devil all of the seven deadly sins.





**Anonymous**, *Mission Table*, also known as a “taolennou”: *The State of Sin*, 19th century. Oil on canvas, 76 × 63 cm. Évêché, Quimper, France.





**Anonymous,** *Hell and the Seven Deadly Sins*, published by *La Bonne Presse*, end of 19th century. Private collection, Paris, France.



## **The Number, Abodes, Qualities, Orders, Hierarchy, Knowledge and Power of Devils**

TO speak of the Devil, as if there were but one devil, is inaccurate; the devils were many, and when we use the word “devil” in the singular we refer to the prince of devils, or else to the whole diabolic race taken collectively and represented by the individual.

Not only were the devils many, they were innumerable. It was generally admitted by theologians that a tenth part of the angels rebelled against God; but there were some who were not satisfied with so vague an estimate, and who subjected the infernal population to a regular census. One theologian, more diligent than the rest, after making a thorough examination of the subject, found that the devils must number not less than ten thousand billions.

For so great a multitude, room was needed; and the abodes of the devils were accordingly two: the sphere of the air and Hell; the former, that they might have an opportunity to tempt and to torment the living; the latter, for their own proper punishment and that they might inflict merited chastisement upon the dead. The aerial abode was granted to them only until the Judgment Day; when the final doom is pronounced, they must all be thrust into Hell, to come forth no more.

The devils were not all of one class or of one condition. There were aquatic demons, who were called Neptuni; there were some that dwelt in caves and woods, and they were called Dusii; there were also the Incubi, the Succubi and so forth. Furthermore, not all had the same aptitudes; one was more successful in one thing, another in another. Hence, the division of labour and the necessity for a certain social organisation. It has seemed to some that among the demons, who are the very personification of disorder and confusion, an organisation of this sort should not and could not exist; but such is not the opinion of Saint Thomas and the most accredited theologians, who insist that there is a hierarchy among the devils, just as there is a hierarchy among the angels that remained loyal. Indeed, the hierarchy of the devils would seem to be more firmly established and more complete than that of the angels; since the former have one chief who stands above all and commands all, while the latter have none, or have one only in God, who is a universal monarch and not theirs alone. The prince and monarch of the devils is Beelzebub, according to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke<sup>30</sup> and the general belief of theologians, but it must be said that considerable uncertainty prevails in this regard. Sometimes their chief appears to be Satan; at other times, Lucifer; and Dante – perhaps to escape this difficulty – makes of Satan, Lucifer and Beelzebub, one single and identical devil, contrary to the opinion of others, who make of them three distinct devils not possessing equal powers.

Orders of devils are spoken of in the so-called Book of Enoch, which antedates Christianity; and they are spoken of, later, in the New Testament. Saint Thomas makes express mention of higher and of lower devils, and of systematically established ranks among them; without, however, entering into details on the subject. But such reserve, though it might well become theologians in general, did not at all suit those who were especially classed as demonographers or those who gave attention to the study and practice of magic. For all these, it was of the utmost importance to become thoroughly acquainted with the diabolic hierarchy and, at the same time, with the condition and the activities of each rank included therein – nay, as far as might be possible, with those of each individual demon. Furthermore, the principles of their organisation were not understood in the same way by all; and while some of the Fathers thought that their rank was determined according to the various kinds of sins that the demons fostered, others believed that this was done according to their degree of power and method of action.

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew xii, 24; Luke xi, 15. Also, Mark iii, 22.

Dante calls Lucifer the “Emperor of the Doleful Realm”;<sup>31</sup> for him, the universe is symmetrically divided into three great monarchies: the celestial, above; the infernal, below; and the human, midway between the two. But this conception of a Satanic kingdom is not peculiar to Dante, or even to the Middle Ages, though in the Middle Ages it attains its greatest degree of fullness and precision. This idea is already found in the Gospels and in the writings of certain Fathers; hence, the custom of attributing to Lucifer, as symbols of his power, the sceptre, the crown and the sword. In more than one ascetic legend, Satan appears seated on a throne, surrounded with royal pomp and accompanied by a great throng of ministers and satellites. And some even went so far in this fantasy as to imagine a Satanic court, similar in all respects to the courts of the great princes of the earth. In the magic book of Johannes Faustus, that Faust whose fearful history furnished the theme for Goethe’s masterpiece, we read that the king of Hell is Lucifer, that Belial is viceroy, that Satan, Beelzebub, Ashtoreth and Pluto are governors, that Mephistopheles and six others are princes, and that in Lucifer’s court are found five ministers, a secretary and twelve familiar spirits. In other books on magic and demonology, note is made of infernal dukes, marquises and counts; and in connection with each one, we are told very definitely how many legions of devils he has under his orders.

Legions and chiefs constitute an army. The demons were, by their very nature, militant spirits; and their military organisation is opposed to the military organisation of Heaven. What wonder, then, that such an organisation should be imagined as in every respect like to the military organisations of earth? In the legend of the blessed Mary of Antioch, we see, at dead of night, the king of the demons pass by in his chariot, surrounded and followed by a countless host of horsemen. Peter the Venerable (died in 1156) tells of an immense throng of diabolic warriors, armed at all points, that passed one night through a certain forest. And how many times have the armed legions been seen flying, like storm clouds, across the sky?

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<sup>31</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv, 28.





**William Blake**, Plate 5, from *Europe: A Prophecy*, 1793. Relief etching, colour wash. The British Museum, London, United Kingdom.





**Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel**, *Flying Demon*, c. 1899. Oil on canvas, 158.5 × 430.5 cm. Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.



**Anonymous**, *Man with Seven Devils*, extract from the *Book of the Seven Deadly Sins*, 15th century. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.



If Hell was a kingdom and if Satan, as king, had his court, it will not appear strange that in such a court councils should be held, measures discussed, and judgments and sentences pronounced; or that, from time to time, Satan, desirous of relaxation, should depart with a portion of his followers for some mad chase through the forests of the earth, uprooting in his course the age-old trees, and scattering about him terror and death. With less fury, but not always with less damage, was the chase followed in those days by princes of flesh and blood. As king, Satan claimed the homage of all who acknowledged him.

Concerning the knowledge of the demons, the theologians are not always in agreement; however, it is admitted by all that after the fall their intellects were darkened, so that, even though they greatly surpass the human intellect, they are far inferior to those of the angels. The demons know things past and present, even the most hidden ones; but present things God can always conceal from them, if he so desires. Some of the Fathers declared that Satan was ignorant of many things concerning Christ and the mystery of his incarnation; or, in a word, that he did not recognise in Christ the God become man. Such ignorance cost him dear; for, by furthering the unjust death of Christ, he opened the way for the work of redemption, and thus brought about his own ruin. In fact, in the Gospel of Matthew, Satan says to Christ: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread"<sup>32</sup> – words which show that he has no clear understanding of him whom he is tempting.

The demons are acquainted with all the secrets of nature; but are they equally well acquainted with those of the human mind? Can they penetrate the inmost recesses of our consciousness and spy upon our thoughts and our affections? On this point, also, opinions are divided. It has seemed to some that if such a faculty had been granted to the demons, man would be altogether at their mercy, and without any possible defence against suggestions and temptations. And in truth, granted that I have full and sure knowledge of a man's mind, then, if my wit aid me a little, I can govern him at my pleasure. Many, therefore, affirmed that the demons cannot see the human mind, but conjecture, from outward signs, what is going on within it; thus doing, though with greater accuracy, what a mere human being can do. Others, in their turn, thought that the demons could read in our minds as in an open book; and of this opinion is that prince of theologians, Saint Thomas Aquinas. Still others adopted a middle course.

Thus, Honorius Augustodunensis (died after 1130) declares that the demons know men's evil thoughts but not their good ones. It is a fact that more than one unfortunate exorcist, while putting forth every effort to drive the devil out of the body of a possessed person, suffered the mortification of hearing the fiend recite *coram populo* the entire list of his own most secret sins, including those of thought.

Do the devils know the future? Another puzzling question! The majority of theologians denied this, and rightly; for if they know the future, as they know the present and the past, in what way does their knowledge differ at all from that of God? And how can God suffer the devils to know beforehand all that He is to do throughout the ages of eternity? Such knowledge as this they could not have possessed, even before their banishment from Heaven; for had they possessed it, knowing what was bound to be the outcome of their rebellion, they would never have rebelled. Indeed, it is said that not even the good angels have direct knowledge of the future, but know it only in so far as they read it in the mind of God, and in so far as God permits them to read it. However, even on this point, there is a way to conciliate conflicting opinions. Origen would have it that the demons conjectured the future from the aspects and movements of the heavenly bodies; an opinion, to my mind, not altogether consistent with that of Lactantius (about 300), who made astrology itself an invention of the demons. Saint Augustine believed that the devils did not know the future through direct vision, but that by virtue of a faculty that they possess of moving from

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew iv, 3.

place to place with lightning speed, and because of the acuteness of their senses and their intellect, they were able to surmise it, imagine it or divine it. Saint Bonaventure (1221–1274) affirmed that they did not know those future things that are contingent, but that they did know those that follow fixed laws; for the demons had a very complete knowledge of the course of nature.

The devils, then, knew by heart all the sciences: and it is probably for this reason that, whenever a man of science has revealed some great truth to his fellows, the Church has never failed to cry: “To the Devil with him!” and to burn him alive if it could. Dante denies that the devils can philosophise; “for love, in them, is altogether extinguished; and to philosophise, love is necessary”.<sup>33</sup> This does not prevent Dante, however, from representing as arguing in perfectly good form the devil who is carrying off the soul of Guido da Montefeltro, who had received undeserved absolution from Pope Boniface VIII; or from permitting the demon to style himself a “logician”, just as if he were a Doctor of the Sorbonne.<sup>34</sup> It is said (and the famous Jean Bodin<sup>35</sup> so writes in his *Daemonomania*) that the renowned Ermolao Barbaro, patriarch of Aquileja (died in 1493), once called up a devil in order to find out from him what Aristotle had meant by his “entelechy”. At any rate, though ignorant of sound philosophy, the demon must have been well versed in sophistry, even master of it; and in this connection I recall the fearful tale of that scholar of Paris, who (having died and gone to perdition) appeared to his terrified teacher, arrayed in a gown that was completely embroidered with sophisms; a tale that the good Passavanti (1297–1357) relates, for the admonition and confusion of all those who do not make good use of the syllogism.

But if the devils were not supposed to have any knowledge of philosophy, it will appear strange to some that they could have a knowledge of theology, could know the Scriptures by heart, and could argue concerning the mysteries with that same precision and clarity of ideas that we so admire in professional theologians. Yet such was the case. On countless occasions, through the mouths of possessed persons of whose bodies they had made themselves masters, the demons would quote passages from both the Old and the New Testaments; they would cite the opinions and judgments of Fathers and Doctors of the Church; they would propound embarrassing questions; to the no slight humiliation of those who, listening to them or striving to exorcise them, found that they themselves knew far less of these matters than did the demons. In one of the Visions of Saint Fursey, the demons argue very learnedly with the angels concerning sins and penances, quote the Scriptures, and show themselves no less able dialecticians than are the greatest theologians. Nor is there any lack of other cases of like nature. We know how the Devil used to engage in very bitter theological disputes with Luther.

However, we need not believe that all the devils possessed the same knowledge, or that they were all of the same mental capacity. There were among them, indeed, some who were more, some less, learned than the rest; just as some were more, some less, intelligent. In due season, we shall meet the stupid and ignorant devil, a conception that is not so unreasonable as it might seem at first glance. If a certain branch of knowledge appealed to any devil, he could, it seems, devote himself to that particular branch. Caesarius tells of a devil lawyer, Oliver by name, who proved himself an able pleader. Other devils took greater delight in material pursuits; and these helped in the brewing of philtres, the transmuting of metals and in performing other tasks of that nature.

Knowledge implies power; therefore it is no wonder that the devils were able to perform great things. True, their power also had its limits, but what were these limits? It is hard to say with any accuracy. Matthew calls Satan a powerful spirit,<sup>36</sup> and, indeed, not without reason. His power

<sup>33</sup> *Convito* (Convivio) iii, 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Inferno*, xxvii, 123.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Bodin was one of the writers who sought to revive the prosecution of witches in the latter half of the sixteenth century. His *Daemonomania* was published in 1579.

<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the reference is to Matthew x, 28, or to xii, 24–26.



is not comparable with the omnipotence of God; yet he is great and formidable. He rebels and is conquered, and victory will never smile on him again; but, though conquered, he rises again and avenges himself. He enters the happy abode of our first parents and brings in sin; he disturbs the harmony of God's work and brings in death. He poisons the world and makes it apostatise from God; he becomes the lord and arbiter of this perverted world, *princeps hujus saeculi*.<sup>37</sup> It is said, forsooth, that he can do only so much as God permits him to do; but we must admit that God permits much to him, and that, whatever he performs, he performs by virtue of a force that resides within himself and is connatural to him. Whatever there is of evil in the world comes, in the beginning, from him; and the preponderance of evil renders gigantic our own conception of his power. And this power of his, which was to have been weakened by the work of redemption, has not been weakened. We are told how the Devil once appeared to Saint Anthony and told him that the curses men were incessantly hurling at him were undeserved, since, now that Christ reigned, he himself could no longer do anything. But the devil who said this lied. Along with paganism, perhaps his unlimited sway over the earth also ceased; but his power did not cease. Christ has conquered him, but he has not disarmed him; and straightway he begins the strife anew and ranges the earth at will, disputing with his victorious adversary this wretched human race, soul by soul. He peoples his kingdom with slaves; and when century after century has passed since the Redeemer's death, who, looking on this poor troubled world of ours, would say that he found himself in a world redeemed?

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<sup>37</sup> *Of.* John xii, 31; xiv, 20; xvi, 11.

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