

Goetia, Exorcism and Demonic Struggles in Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism

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I: POSSESSION

The climactic moment of theological meaning and questioning in the horror film classic *The Exorcist* arises during the discussion between the old and the young exorcists, Father Merrin and Father Karras, in which they reflect on the reason for the extreme suffering undergone by the possessed creature of God, the twelve-year-old Regan Teresa MacNeil. It is Scene 232, in the hall outside the girl's upstairs bedroom.

In the dimness, Merrin and Karras lean against a wall, their faces numb with shock as they stare at door to Regan's room. OS singing continues.

KARRAS: Father, what's going on in there? What is it? If that's the Devil, why this girl? It makes no sense.

MERRIN: I think the point is to make us despair, Damien – to see ourselves as animal, as ugly – to reject our own humanity – to reject the possibility that God could ever love us.¹

The two Catholic priests have just performed their first session of the Roman ritual, which ends in the demon singing church hymns in the sweetest possible manner – as mockery of the intended effectiveness of their exorcism. Father Merrin's face has already been hit by a yellowish glob of mucus spat out by the possessed: his hand, which earlier pressed a portion of his purple stole on the girl's neck, has already been drowned in the putrescent greenish vomit which flows like lava from her mouth. In those moments of vileness Father Merrin is reading out loud from the invocation section of *The Roman Ritual of Exorcism*, 'Snatch from ruination and from the clutches of the noonday devil this human being made in your image.'²

¹ Cited in Mark Kermode: *The Exorcist*, London, 2003, 79.

² William Peter Blatty: *The Exorcist*, London, 1971, 304. Blatty's creation is based on newspaper accounts of a boy's possession in America in 1949. For a book-length study of this case, based on the diary of the main exorcist, see Thomas Allen:

Though it cannot be exactly seen by mortal eyes, the image of divinity in the human form makes possible the esoteric notion of the eternal spirit in man and woman and of our primordial link to, and relationship with, the absolute in divinity which we call God. The Christian belief in the demonic is based on the understanding of the latter as spiritual forces that operate against the fulfilment of this primordially in the full glory of its beauty and harmony. In the Enochian version of the origin of humanity, demons are those fallen angels who conspire against the betterment of the human potential and existence after the darkening *kairos* of their illicit fornication with mortals brought about the collective ruination of their own spiritual chances.³ Damnation, or the origin of demonology, is the result of this pre-historical cross-species breeding, the breakdown of what the German philosopher Martin Heidegger calls the *Geschlecht* of the human *Dasein* in an accursed reconfiguration of the human *imago*, the wellspring of our being; both spiritual and physical.⁴ With a Gnostic appreciation of the meaning of this cosmic catastrophe, it can be said that human beings have a perennial problematic comportment towards divine transcendence, and this can be the basis of an esoteric interpretation of the expulsion of the primordial man and woman, Adam and Eve, from the Garden of Eden. To be precise, the fallenness of the mortal human condition, or the decay of our *Geschlecht* in life as well as in death, is the result of a spiritual warfare, possibly perpetual, between two kinds of angels: those who remain true to their *Geschlecht* and those who have contaminated it through their lust for the human form. Each act of demonic possession then, is a reappropriation in profane

Possessed: The True Story of The Most Famous Exorcism of Modern Time, London, 1993.

³ See the legend of the watchers in *Book of Enoch*, 6-11. These angels from heaven, being pure spirits, have no need for sexual reproduction. To reproduce themselves through the human womb is a violation of the basic principle of sex that God has created for humanity. As their punishment for this sexual abuse, the watchers will be deprived of inner peace for all eternity, despite intercession by Enoch, a prophet revered by the angels as the scribe of God. The offsprings of these damned unions, the giants or the *nephilims*, release evil spirits after their mass deaths in the Flood, and they will torment humanity until the end of time. *Nephilims*, therefore, form another source of demons apart from the fallen angels from the Enochian account, which is not mainstream Christian doctrine, and from the apocalyptic legend of Lucifer in the Christian canon.

⁴ For a phenomenological analysis of *Geschlecht* that is sensitive to the concept of 'daimon.' See David Farrell Krell: *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1992, 252-264.

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being-in-time of those condemned moments of angelic union with the mortal kind. What we have uncovered here is the principle of Goetic *kairos* as the undoing of the divine image in human beings that interrupts a reciprocal gaze of love between us and God. According to this perverse principle, the human body, which in Christian belief is honoured as temple of God, is desecrated through an unsolicited transformation of it into a home of the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, the fundamental, existential *not-feeling-at-home*,⁵ as the mode of being of demons and as the very art of possession themselves are.

In *The Exorcist*, Father Karras, who is trained in psychiatry, can only gradually begin to have an inkling of the raging battle over the spiritual control and ownership of the human body in demonic possession as he listens to the tape-recording he has made earlier of Regan's gibberish, which startlingly becomes speech, albeit thoroughly unsettling, when the tape is played in reverse.

Karras sits in front of the tape-recorder listening to an eerie, unearthly series of various whispered voices.

FIRST VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Let her die!

SECOND VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): No, no, sweet! It is sweet in the body! I feel!

THIRD VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Fear the priest.

SECOND VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Give us time.

THIRD VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): He is ill.

FOURTH VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): No, not this one. The other. The one who will –

SECOND VOICE (*on tape-recorder; interrupting*): Ah, the blood! Feel the blood! How it sings!

⁵ See Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh, Albany, 1996, 176-177. *Angst*, according to Heidegger, is our fundamental attunement to existence, and understood and handled the right way, it opens up for us the possibilities of authentic knowledge and action. *Angst* is essentially our fear of nothingness, the *abyss* in our gaze upon, and attachment to, being.

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KARRAS' VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Who are you?

FIRST VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): I am no one.

KARRAS' VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Is that your name?

SECOND VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): I have no name.

FIRST VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): I am no one.

THIRD VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Many.

FOURTH VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Let us be. Let us warm in the body.

SECOND VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Leave us.

THIRD VOICE (*on tape-recorder*): Let us be, Karras.⁶

The paranormal phenomenon of reverse speech means that even the problematic *logos* of multiple personalities in schizophrenia cannot account for its occurrence, and the scientifically trained Father Karras, himself struggling with his private crisis in religious faith, is catapulted into a different kind of *knowing* which some Catholic exorcists in real life describe as a permanent altered awareness.⁷ Furthermore, the ontological problematic of the possible multiplicity of demons dwelling inside Regan fits in with the New Testament paradigm of Jesus casting out the 'legion' from the Gerasene demoniac. This forlorn man mutilated himself with stones, had the unnatural strength to break himself free from fetters and he cried day and night in torment. He approached Jesus for deliverance. The multiple demons who possessed him, with Jesus' permission,

⁶ William Peter Blatty: *The Exorcist*, op cit, and *Legion*, London, 1998, 116-117. *Legion* was released as *The Exorcist III* in 1990 and was directed by Blatty himself.

⁷ See the case of Father Michael Strong in Malachi Martin: *Hostage to the Devil: The Possession and Exorcism of Five Living Americans*, New York, 1976; especially important is 452. In a failed exorcism of a parishioner suspected of serial murders and cannibalism on the night of 11 December 1937 in Nanjing, China, Father Michael witnessed a kaleidoscope of maleficiently transfigured expressions on the possessed's face moments before he perished in flames. The priest suddenly had a realisation that the same demon that commanded Cain to murder Abel in biblical times would again become the lord of death on earth, and he suffered a heart attack. Two days later, Nanjing was invaded by the Japanese and 42,000 men, women and children were massacred.

immediately entered a great herd of pigs feeding nearby and caused them all to run in a state of frenzy and throw themselves into the Sea of Galilee. The pigs all drowned. The demoniac himself was cured, and followed Jesus' advice to bear witness, in the surrounding Decapolis region, to the marvel that had happened to him.⁸

The identification of a demon by name is essential to Catholic exorcism. In the fifteenth of the twenty-one instructions for the exorcist in *The Roman Ritual*, it is said that 'Questions he must ask the possessing Evil Spirit are, for example, the number and name of the possessing spirit; when they entered the possessed; why they entered him; and other questions of the same kind.'⁹ Such procedure is also paradigmatic of ancient Near Eastern magic, as the obtaining of an evil spirit's name was the first step towards an exorcist having power over it, which is essential to the success of the rite itself. But Christian monotheism, almost mimicking the Mazdaism of Persia, has reduced the multiplicity of demonic existence to the single agency of Satan, which began to take effect in Pauline evangelism and finally attained the status of ontological stability due to the theological ascendancy of Augustine's stark dualistic schemata, which demonises even pagan gods and goddesses and the beneficent *daimon*, or *agathodaimon*, of the Greeks. No longer adhered to is the ancient Jewish tradition of seventy-two demons as independent entities who were once subjugated by the greatest king of the Israelites, Solomon, mostly for reasons of their usefulness; *Goetia* thus has its origin in the mastery of spiritual stratagems. The following dialogue in *The Exorcist* reveals the unitary approach to demonology commonly shared by Christians, despite Pazuzu being the demon identified in the film, who was not among the legion of demons encountered by King Solomon and who therefore stands outside

⁸ Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39. See also Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, Tübingen, 1993, 72-87.

⁹ Martin, op cit, 462. In 1992 the Catholic Church ceased to use *The Roman Ritual* and replaced it with a 'modern' prayer of deliverance and healing. The *Ritual* as a text was developed gradually over a millennium, between the Third and the Seventeenth centuries, as described in Martin, op cit, 459. Father Gabriele Amorth, a well-known exorcist in Italy and a very conservative Catholic, is a campaigner against the Church's new approach to exorcism. He has published two books on demonic possession: *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, translated by Nicoletta V. MacKenzie, San Francisco, 1999 and *An Exorcist: More Stories*, translated by Nicoletta V. MacKenzie, San Francisco, 2002.

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Judaean-Christian cultures.¹⁰ But first let us revisit that most powerful and suspenseful scene in *The Exorcist*, which offers us the famous iconic image of a contemporary priest about to face an ancient enemy of humanity.

A cab pulls up to the house in long shot. Out of the cab steps a tall, old priest (Merrin), carrying a battered valise. A hat obscures his face. As the cab pulls away, Merrin stands rooted, staring up at the second floor of the MacNeil house like a melancholy traveller frozen in time.¹¹

During Father Merrin's first and last visit to the house on Prospect Street – for he shall die there – two short dialogues take place between he and Father Karras which reveal the old priest's dogmatic understanding of the situation.

KARRAS: Hello, Father. Such an honour to meet you.

Merrin takes Karras' hand in both of his, searching Karras' face with a look of gravity and concern while upstairs the demonic laughter segues into vicious obscenities directed at Merrin.

MERRIN: Are you tired?

KARRAS: No, Father.

MERRIN: I should like you to go quickly across to the residence and gather up a cassock for myself, two surplices, a purple stole, some holy water, and your copy of *The Roman Ritual*. The large one. I believe we should begin.

KARRAS: Don't you want to hear the background of the case, first?

MERRIN: Why?¹²

¹⁰ Pazuzu is the Babylonian demon of the south-western winds and is associated with airborne diseases; but he can also be petitioned to prevent them. However, Pazuzu is also known to have beneficent qualities, in that he can stop Lilit-like demons (Lamastu) from snatching away babies at night, and amulets of his head were worn by some women. See Jeremy Black and Anthony Green: *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, Austin, 2003, 147-148.

¹¹ Blatty, *Legion*, op cit, 121.

¹² Ibid, 123.

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(The following dialogue takes place between the two priests while they dress themselves in vestments.)

MERRIN: Especially important is the warning to avoid conversations with the demon. We may ask what is relevant, but anything beyond that is dangerous. Extremely. Especially, do not listen to anything he says. The demon is a liar. He will lie to confuse us, but he will also mix lies with the truth to attack us. The attack is psychological, Damien. And powerful. Do not listen. Remember that. Do not listen.

(as Karras hands him his surplice)

Is there anything at all you would like to ask now?

KARRAS: No. But I think that it might be helpful if I gave you some background on the different personalities that Regan has manifested. So far, I'd say there seem to be three.

MERRIN: There is only one.¹³

The mental concentration on a church dogma, rather than the dispersion of intellectual speculation and curiosity, is perhaps a necessary requirement in an extreme situation like exorcism, for it is never less than a spiritual combat in which the salvation or loss of a human soul or the psychological integrity of both the possessed and the exorcist in this world of the visible are at stake. But the irony in *The Exorcist*, and this is despite Blatty's own sympathy for Catholicism and its view on demons, is that Merrin *fails*. The demon possessing Regan, instead of being cast out by Merrin as Jesus would have done, has cast the old priest's soul out of his body in the form of death by heart failure, induced in a manner that is not disclosed to the audience as it takes place off-screen. And death is final; Merrin cannot return.

As viewers of *The Exorcist*, we are moved by the heroic sacrifice made by Father Karras after the death of his mentor of one night, when he taunts the demon to transfer from Regan to himself. There is more at stake for a demon to destroy the life of a Catholic priest, for every one of them has the power to exorcise, something that in actual fact is implicitly used in every baptism that he gives.

¹³ Ibid, 124.

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... Karras begins gently and tenderly to place Merrin's hands on his chest in the form of a cross. An enormous, mucoid glob of yellowish spittle hits the dead man's eye.

On Regan/Demon.

REGAN/DEMON(mocking): The last rites!

Then it puts back its head and laughs long, and wildly, through:

KARRAS: You son-of-a-bitch! You murdering bastard!

A projectile stream of vomit from off-screen strikes his face, but he is oblivious.

Yes, you're very good with children! Well, come on! Let's see you try something bigger!

Karras has his hands out like great fleshy hooks, beckoning, challenging.

Come on! Try me! Take me! Come into me!

On Regan/Demon. In the demonic features now, a trembling, wild-eyed rage; a fearsome struggle over some irresistibly tempting decision that the Demon is fighting against.

On Karras as he breaks off, his body jerking as if seized suddenly by some inner force alien to him. Yet his features do not change as his hands go to his throat and he struggles to his feet. His actions are those of a man who either has been possessed by or thinks he has been possessed by the Demon, but who also is fighting for control of his own organism. And now here, suddenly, in a move toward the bed and Regan (who, if she is in shot, is unconscious, her face in shadow), Karras' features briefly contort into those of the Demon Pazuzu, but then return to normal again on a backward jerk by Karras as:

No!

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*The Demon – in Karras' body – had moved to kill Regan; but Karras has won control now long enough to reach the window, rip the shutters off their hinges and leap out.*¹⁴

In their comments on the conclusion of the film, Blatty and its non-religious director, William Friedkin, are both confident in their view that the triumph of good over evil is unambiguously depicted through Karras' powerful act of self-sacrifice. The Christian message of the film's ending is that in Regan's deliverance from the evil spirit, Father Karras, who has been weak in his faith (we cannot forget those chilling moments of the demon's psychological assault on him when it assumes the form of his recently deceased mother and accuses him of abandoning her) finds redemption in his sacrificial death. Dying for others is one of the highest virtues extolled by Jesus; the universal message of Christianity itself is that Jesus was nailed to the cross for all humanity and that all sins were washed away in his bloody sacrifice.

II: EXPULSION

In an interview given to the BBC on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *The Exorcist*, Friedkin stated that the extraordinary power of the film was not only its emotional impact on the audience, but the effect it had on people's spiritual choices after viewing it. As reported in the media, multitudes of lapsed Catholics returned to the Church. The Catholic Church, ever prudent, lent only cautious support to the message in *The Exorcist*. The following comment made in *Diabolical Possession and Exorcism* by Father John Nicola, who was actually hired as technical adviser to the film and instructed the actors playing Father Merrin and Father Karras, Max von Sydow and Jason Miller respectively, in the rite of exorcism, is instructive in its qualified endorsement:

For teenagers, and impressionable adults it will be psychologically dangerous; it should absolutely not be seen by them. However, for those who can handle it, the truth is there. It presents facts which support the credibility of the teaching of the Church; and it is an exposé of the devil so forceful and so

¹⁴ Ibid, 141-142.

widely propagated as not to be rivalled by anything in the past, or probably in the foreseeable future.¹⁵

No study of *The Exorcist* has uncovered the fact that despite its Christian designs and intentions, it can be interpreted as an affirmation of *Goetia*, or ceremonial magic that engages demons in its workings. It needs to be emphasised that the technique used by Father Karras to absorb the demon into himself, despite its obvious heroism, is virtually unheard of in Christianity. Based on Jesus' ministry, Christian exorcism operates on the principle of casting out the possessing spirit and never its internalisation, no matter how temporary that may be. The demon's monstrous otherness is always kept at a distance in order to support the central dichotomy of purity and pollution in Christian practice, which tolerates no *Goetia*; in medieval times priests could be executed for even praying to an angel.

Christianity, in essence, is the continuous disciplining of self and other, namely the intercourse between the two, in order to maintain a regimen of spiritual hygiene that guarantees the intended outcome of salvation. It is no accident, therefore, that in the *New Testament* possessing spirits are referred to as 'unclean'. This description cannot be solely based on the copious amounts of physical filth produced by the body of a possessed, for in the case of the *perfectly* possessed, where there is a seamless alignment between a human soul and a demon in the life of one body; the demoniac's appearance and behaviour purported to be quite normal, at least on the surface. The deeper dimension to the Christian understanding of spiritual uncleanliness, therefore, involves what is mentioned in the beginning of this paper as the hermeneutic notion of *Geschlecht* in the make-up of humanity, that is, its destabilisation in the possible 'nephilimisation' of humanity which Christian consciousness fears will bring about another global, civilisation-threatening disaster, such as the flood.

In violating the spiritual law of *Geschlecht*, Father Karras attains something like the insight of *Goetia* in his selfless act of demonic absorption, even if it cannot be contained within the factuality of his Christian embodiment. Suddenly finding himself outside the parameters of *The Roman Ritual*, Karras' only way out is death, one that inflicts definite violence on his body as he tumbles down a long

¹⁵ John J Nicola: *Diabolical Possession and Exorcism*, Rockford, 1974, 164.

flight of cold, hard and grey stone steps, which number nearly a hundred. As he hits the footpath below his skull is cracked open and he lies crumpled and twisted in a pool of blood. The young priest dies the same way as the pigs that jumped over the cliffs of Gerasene, demonically possessed. Can we ever be certain that when Father Karras briefly squeezes Father Dyer's hand as he administers the last rite, does it really mean his wordless confession of his sins in the few precious seconds before his death, or is it the demon faking it? Or even the latter affirming its desire to continue its polluting connection through the Catholic clergy? Beneath Karras' body opens the hermeneutics of abyss, even if his soul, as all Christian viewers of *The Exorcist* will no doubt believe, ascends to heaven.

The leading occultist of modern times, Aleister Crowley, explains in *Liber 418* that the virtue of a magus consists in the integration of daring with will, knowledge and keeping of silence.¹⁶ He observes that the operation of daring alone, which is commonly found among young practitioners of magic, is a result of the lack of balanced growth in their psychology and in *The Exorcist* it is indeed Karras' psyche, which is heavily coloured by his melancholy and his guilt over his mother's lonely death, that the demon in Regan most viciously attacks, and which clearly shakes him from deep within. Karras' heroic act in the end is therefore an act of desperation that arises from a state of hopelessness which he fears, upon realising Father Merrin's defeat in the exorcism, in the shattering of all meaning, that is, all that is good and wholesome in a world where God is supposed to be present and sustains all being. Karras' success in removing the demon from Regan vindicates *not* the rite of exorcism of the Church, but an individual daring on his part, which partially qualifies him as a *sorcerer*. If this had happened in real life, Karras may not pass the dogmatic test of canonisation at all. But this is not what really destabilises the intended hermeneutic structure of *The Exorcist*.

Far from being a Christian rite, the absorption of a demon into oneself as a plunge into the abyss of no-self (in Karras' case, the annihilation of *Dasein* in death), is in fact the paradigm of the ceremonial magic system devised by the archfiend of Christianity: none other than Aleister Crowley, the self-titled 'Beast 666' and founder of Thelema, a

¹⁶ Aleister Crowley (with Victor B. Neuburg and Mary Desti): *The Vision and The Voice, with Commentary and Other Papers*, York Beach, 1998, 10.

new religion based on Egyptian gods who want to do away with the universal Christ consciousness that has dominated, shaped and sustained Western civilisation for two millennia. 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law' is the Thelemites' mantra to this day, thus completing the nihilistic cycle of modernism in the full individuation of *logos* through will.

According to ceremonial magic in Western esotericism, the highest spiritual attainment is the total expression of the will of the Holy Guardian Angel through the mind and the action of the magus, as described in the tradition established by Abraham of Würzburg in the fifteenth century, which was based on the transmission he received from a master called Abramelin when he travelled to Egypt.¹⁷ For Crowley this was a realisation of the true will of paganism over the free will of Christianity; he assessed the Abramelin text as the central *grimoire* of Western esotericism. For the evolution of his own system, Crowley combined Abramelin with the Enochian (angelic) magic of possibly the greatest magus of Europe, John Dee from Elizabethan England, all the while maintaining the *Kabbalah* as the common language in his magical hermeneutics and calculations. By achieving this Crowley placed the direct experience of inner knowledge and of the other world in the centre of Western esotericism, and this defines the important contribution he made to the development of the 'occult' stream within modern Western esotericism, irrespective of whatever 'religious' and 'moral' conclusions he might draw from this.¹⁸

¹⁷ Abraham of Würzburg: *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage, As Delivered by Abraham The Jew unto His Son Lamech, A.D. 1458*, translated by S. L. MacGregor Mathers, New York, 1975. This translation was first published in London in 1900. MacGregor Mathers was one of the founders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (began in 1887) and gave Crowley a Second Order initiation in Paris in January 1900, a little over a year after he joined the Golden Dawn through George Cecil Jones in November 1898 and was taught ceremonial magic by him. Crowley actually began his spiritual quest as a Buddhist. In a few years' time, Crowley and MacGregor Mathers became bitter enemies over the control of the Golden Dawn, and Crowley used black magic against him, intended to be fatal. The text of the ritual he conducted could be found in *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King or Lemegeton: Clavicula Salomonis Regis*, translated by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, edited, annotated, introduced and enlarged by Aleister Crowley, edited also by Hymenaenus Beta, York Beach, 1995, 2.

¹⁸ In this aspect Crowley can be compared to the pinnacle of Tibetan Buddhist esotericism in the form of Dzogchen or Great Perfection, which in its 'Thelemite' expressions and examples continues to draw ire from Buddhist orthodoxy.

Crowley became absolutely certain of his standing as the leading magus of Western esotericism ('*logos* of the *Æon*')¹⁹ when he believed that he had succeeded in conquering the abyss in a major Enochian operation he conducted with his occult partner Victor Neuburg, over a period of one month, in the Saharan deserts of Algeria in 1909. This involved invoking the angels corresponding to each of the thirty *æthyrs* or dominions identified by Edward Kelly, the scribe and the medium for Dee, who appeared to have the more powerful 'second sight' of the two. 'We walked steadily to Bou-Saada, invoking the *Æthyrs* one by one, at convenient times and places, or when the Spirit moved me. As a rule, we did one *Æthyr* every day,' writes Crowley in his Introduction to *Liber 418*.²⁰ It was between 2 and 4.15 pm on 6 December, while the sun was in its southern declination in 'a hollow among the dunes' far out from the city of Bou-Saada (the two reached there on 30 November), that Crowley and Neuburg conducted the Goetic rite of drawing a magic triangle and a magic circle in Solomonian proportions of 1:3; the latter for Neuburg, who acted as the scribe to record the vision and the voice. At each point of the triangle a pigeon was killed and its blood spilt on the sand, as a substance that could give form to the dweller in the abyss.²¹

Crowley was invoking the tenth *æthyr* called *Zax*, awakening Choronzon, the most powerful demon in the human experience of the abyss.²² The great demon was invoked within the triangle of Anaphaxeton, Anaphaneton and Primeumaton by Crowley. He then retired to a hidden station, covered in a black robe with a hood, to observe the entire workings, always ready with a magic dagger to threaten the demon and to protect the scribe from harm:

'Zazas, Zazas, Nasatanada Zazas,' cried out Choronzon as he opened the gate of the abyss, and continued thus:

I am the Master of Form, and from me all forms proceed.

¹⁹ Crowley *et al*, *Vision and Voice*, op cit, 12.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

²¹ *Ibid*, 24. See also 161 for a diagram of the triangle and the circle. For their arrangement, consult *Lemegeton*.

²² Chorozon is not from the Judaeo-Christian or Islamic tradition. Its name was revealed to Kelly in his angelic communications, hence purely Enochian.

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I am I. I have shut myself up from the spendthrifts, my gold is safe in my treasure-chamber, and I have made every living thing my concubine, and none shall touch them, save only I. And yet I am scorched, even while I shiver in the wind. He hateth me and tormenteth me. He would have stolen me from myself, but I shut myself up and mock him, even while he plagueth me. From me come leprosy and pox and plague and cancer and cholera and the falling sickness. Ah! I will reach up to the knees of the Most High, and tear his phallus with my teeth, and I will bray his testicles in a mortar, and make poison thereof, to slay the sons of men.²³

In Western esotericism demons are recognised as chaos, dispersion and formlessness, and Crowley understood Choronzon as the same. However, precisely because of his emptiness is Choronzon the 'master of form,' for in his instability in appearance is his dangerous power to change form at will. 'Thus taketh he the form of a beautiful woman, or of a wise and holy man, or of a serpent that writheth upon the earth ready to sting.'²⁴ Neuburg's senses and feelings were assailed, and he became the weakest when Choronzon took on the form of a woman he had loved in Paris, and 'woed him with soft words and glances.'²⁵

Neuburg was mentally strong enough to withstand the demon's seductions and verbal assaults. But Choronzon also tried to engage Neuburg in philosophical discussions after each spiritual onslaught failed. There were also blasphemous rantings. As it was his duty as a scribe to write down everything he saw and heard, Neuburg did not realise that Choronzon would use this to undermine him: the demon threw sand on to the magic circle that protected him while Neuburg was writing in his notebook, and before long he was able to break it and, 'in the form of a naked savage,' rapidly moved toward the scribe and 'tried to tear out his throat with his froth-covered fangs.'²⁶ Neuburg invoked the names of God and fought back quickly with his magical dagger. It worked and Choronzon retreated into the triangle. Then the demon took on the form of Neuburg's former lover again. The scribe remained unshaken and eventually with the power of the

²³ Crowley et al, *Vision and Voice*, op cit, 163-164.

²⁴ Ibid, 165.

²⁵ Ibid, 164.

²⁶ Ibid, 25.

pigeons' blood exhausted, Choronzon could no longer manifest on earth and vanished.²⁷

Crowley had not come to Neuburg's rescue and exorcised the demon. Instead, in order to pass the magical test of 'crossing the abyss,' Crowley did the following:

During all this time I had astrally identified myself with Choronzon, so that I experienced each anguish, each rage, each despair, each insane outburst. My ordeal ended as the last form faded; so, knowing that all was over, I wrote the Holy Name of BABALON²⁸ in the sand with my Magical Ring, and arose from my trance. We lit a great fire to purify the place, and destroyed the Circle and Triangle. The work had lasted over two hours, and we were both utterly exhausted, physically and in every other way. I hardly know how we ever got back to Bou-Saada.²⁹

The abyss is experienced as a moment of enlightenment in ceremonial magic as the conventional notion of self dissolves into nothingness and primordial awareness of being is attained. In Crowley's case, the dissolution probably went too far and identification with the demon of dissolution itself took place instead. The underlying basis of all of Crowley's magical workings became *Goetia* afterwards. It was also possible that by invoking the goddess Babalon in this state of possession, Crowley introduced Choronzon into Malkuth, indicated in the Tree of Life in the *Kabbalah* as the dominion of the living. The tenth *æthyr* *Zax*, most feared in the Enochian system, thus became alive among men and women. The great trials of Crowley's esoteric career bore testimony to this meeting between the abyss and the holy.

In his later works, such as 'Liber Samekh,' Crowley declared his Holy Guardian Angel to be the essence of Satan, which was to be fully grasped in its primordial meaning, not its personification. While troubling to Western consciousness, Crowley experienced

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Babalon is the name for the Goddess in Thelema, as revealed in Crowley's text of revelation, *Liber Legis* or *The Book of the Law*, London, 1938.

²⁹ Ibid.

the liberation of understanding in his identification of the holy with the demonic, for it led him to the integration of the meaning of nothingness into his magical practice:

Now this Word *SABAF*, being by number Threescore and Ten, is a Name of ayin, the Eye, and 'The Devil' our Lord, and the Goat of Mendes. He is the Lord of the Sabbath of the Adepts, and is Satan, therefore also the Sun, whose number of Magick is 666, the seal of His servant *THE BEAST*.³⁰

III: LIBERATION

If in the Christian tradition demonic possessions are viewed as attempts by devils and evil spirits to degrade the primordial divine image or *imago dei* of man and woman, then in Tibetan Buddhism demonic spirits who assail their innocent victims and the recent dead are encouraged to partake in the feeding of this image, so that the imperfect being of their targets are set free either in this life or in the postmortem journey of the *bardo* of becoming.³¹ The notion of the arch demon, be it Satan, Choronzon, Asmodeus, or Samael, is absent in the Tibetan mind; there is no eschatological conspiracy against humanity that prevents one from attaining spiritual perfection.

Buddhism differs from other major religions in that it is permeated with a fundamental naturalism; its involves a practical knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages in the spiritual cosmos, as encountered by hunters and gatherers in the wilderness, or university counsellors in the complex world of youth psychology and

³⁰ Aleister Crowley, 'Liber Samekh,' in Aleister Crowley, Mary Desti and Leilia Waddell: *Magick: Liber Aba: Book Four, Parts I-IV*, York Beach, 1994, Appendix IV. Second Revised Edition edited by Hymenaeus Beta from Ordo Templi Orientis. In what is reminiscent of *Book of Enoch*, in the same ritual Crowley mentions the seeking of the pleasures of earth by the magus and his Holy Guardian Angel.

³¹ The philosophy of *bardo*, which literally means 'interval' or 'intermediate state,' is central to Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice. It originates with its unique existential and visionary hermeneutics in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thödröl)* a genre of very similar texts on 'soul guidance' which most likely have their spiritual origins in the shamanism of Bön, Tibet's native, diffuse and syncretistic religion. It is important to note that this life, too, is a *bardo*. The 'best' *bardo* is that of primordial luminosity, which advanced practitioners aim to attain in a seven-week long retreat in utter darkness, as described in Chögyam Trungpa's commentary on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, translated by Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa, Boston & London, 2003, 18. For an excellent study on this ancient text, see Bryan J Cuevas, *The Hidden History of 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead'*, Oxford, 2003.

sexuality. Spirituality is an evolutionary affair in Buddhism: even on the swift, 'diamond' path of tantric Buddhism, which Tibet is renowned for, the practitioner's fate is determined by his or her latent and manifest *karma*. In this context, hermeneutic constructions of Tibetan Buddhism place demons as spirits who only act as temporary obstacles and whose obstructions can be removed by skilful religious means; a very powerful demon, for example, simply requires the intervention of a lama of high realisation who also has an excellent command of ritual efficacy. In the non-dual cosmogony of Buddhism, demons are states of mind or understanding, which means that they are manifestations of certain hermeneutic disruptions at work rather than testimonies to an absolute ontology about *Geschlecht*, the violation of which in the Christian worldview is the main source of their *Angst* about the spiritual destiny of humankind.

As in Christianity, demonic possession can also be deadly in Tibetan Buddhism. Even if demons are examples of hermeneutic eclipses of the primordial mind of enlightenment, existence being directed by understanding, a fatal shutdown of the body is always a possibility when the body itself is so intimately involved with the mind in the holism of the Buddhist way of life.³² Failed exorcism, therefore, at least on the philosophical level, can only be attributed to the ripening of a dominant karmic latency in the victim. If death turns out to be the outcome, then the more urgent task at hand is the intensive guidance of the deceased's disembodied consciousness (*namshe*), in the often horrific confusions of the intermediate state between death and rebirth where ghoulish visions abound, toward the ultimate peace and luminosity of the original ground of enlightenment, which is uncreated and unceasing at the same time.³³

Tibetan exorcists believe in the fundamental superiority of human intelligence over demonic intelligence; after all, it was correct

³² Part of the allure of the Tibetan Buddhism for the spiritually daring is the reports of sudden deaths of followers who are suspected of abusing the advanced techniques of Vajrayana. Madness, however, is more likely the outcome, but that, too, is a severe disruption to one's bodily existence. Tibetans are ingrained in the belief that their teachings are protected by demons bound by oath; the periphery of Tibetan Buddhism is therefore outright demonology, or *Goetia*. This principle is certainly active in Western ceremonial magic.

³³ The majority of ordinary Tibetans will be content with abiding in the visions of beautiful people in blissful realms, which are usually signs of good rebirths.

understanding that enabled the Buddha to defeat the god of the realm of desire, Mara, with his bipolar warfare of fear and attachment, moments before the sage's attainment of enlightenment under a *bodhi* tree.³⁴ Enlightenment is hermeneutics in perfection, and the imperfections of ontology, the dominion of beings, is overcome. Since demons are not enlightened beings, their knowledge is not perfect and they can be deceived. The non-violence of Tibetan Buddhism turns exorcism into a mind game: it is about tricking the harassing demons, for example in the case of possessions, into believing that their unenlightened desires can be satiated by moving their attention to objects more desirable than the possessed. It can be said that bound by this logic of desire, the demons themselves are possessed by the *maya* of object-formation and attachment in the phenomenal world. In this aspect, they are rather like the watchers in the *Book of Enoch*, who became trapped in the world of form and produced imperfect, if not monstrous, reproductions of their spiritual essence through intercourse with women.

The object inviting a demon's displaced attention is a ritual effigy, called *ngar mi* in Tibetan³⁵, which magically duplicates the possessed person's image and which at the same time contains the strategic untruth that it is a better version of that person. In reality it is a simple sculpture made of dough³⁶ which bears no exact resemblance to the person it is supposed to represent and therefore it is a question of magical intent rather than realism. It is also a question of the power of this intent, in this case that of the officiating lama, which is necessary in compelling the offending demon to leave the victim's body and mind and move into the *ngar mi*. In no instance is the *ngar mi* animated by the demon, which will duplicate the possessed in some

³⁴ Mara is not the equivalent of Satan in Buddhism. It does not denote an enduring individual, demonic or otherwise, but is instead a role performed by different spiritually powerful beings in their journeys of karmic purification and cosmic edification. See Robert Decaroli: *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and The Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford, 2004, 116.

³⁵ The term literally means 'human as I am.' See Donald Lopez: *Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sutra* Princeton, 1996, 220.

³⁶ The making of dough in Tibetan sacrificial objects (*gtor ma*) can be quite complex. Depending on the deity or the spirit it is offered to, the dough can be mixed with 'wine, beer, medicines, blood, pieces of meat, resin, poisons, etc,' as described in René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz: *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, Kathmandu, 1993, 347. In the current popularisation of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, *gtor ma* made of butter and flour has become the standard.

perverse semblance of life and expand the horror of the spectacle of possession even further; instead it is a vehicle for the demon's disposal, away from the affairs of the living. For this to effectively happen, the *ngar mi* is offered as a ransom (*glud*) to the demon, and this moment of psychic exchange is the most important in Tibetan exorcism. Any reluctance on the demon's part to take this offering is to be overcome by the activation of its memory of the supreme principle of the Tibetan *logos*, that of the subjugation of all demons to Buddhism ever since its official introduction into the Land of Snows during the eighth century by the great tantric yogi from Oddiyana, Padmasambhava.

Thus it is recited: 'Remember your promise to follow [the Buddha's] instructions; do not harm those assembled here. Go, demons, to your own abodes.'³⁷ The *ngar mi* is then removed in an elaborate ritual of exit to the outskirts of the village or the town concerned, often placed beside a creek or a river.

Padmasambhava placed all demons of Tibet under oath to either protect or not to interfere with the propagation of Buddhism.³⁸ The former were turned into the fearsome *dharmapalas* who safeguard doctrinal purity and punish the transgressors. The best of the demons, therefore, are given a place of honour in the revised, unified cosmogony of Tibet. Like all beings they abide by the nature of emptiness and its luminescence, and their harmful nature can even be changed, like the tantric encounters the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa (twelfth century) had with demonesses in his meditation cave, which resulted in their renunciation of disease-bringing among the mortals.³⁹ The *logos* of the Buddha, unlike that of Christ, is not about the eternal separation of heaven and hell and the eschatological destining of the human soul to one or the other at the end of time, but the ultimate evolutionary betterment of the spiritual

³⁷ From an exorcism rite analysed in Lopez, op cit, 225.

³⁸ For an authoritative account of Padmasambhava, see Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, translated and edited by Gyurme Dorje, Book One, Boston, 1991, 512-521. Padmasambhava is revered as the Second Buddha, and affectionately called 'Father Orgyan' (Orgyan being another name for Oddiyana), by followers of the first Buddhist school in Tibet, the Nyingmapas, who in their teachings as well as in their practice have absorbed the native Bön.

³⁹ Judith Simmer-Brown: *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*, Boston & London: 2002, 61-63; 231-232.

condition of all sentient beings, including ghosts, spirits, demons and local deities, which as a salvific action principle forms the basis of the *bodhisattva* ideal in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism is never a mere metaphysical idealism, but is essentially hermeneutic in its recognition of the 'view' (*Ita ba*) hence understanding, as the formation of how one experiences this world and others, which in essence is in agreement with Western phenomenologists' definition of human existence as *Dasein*, a being which essentially understands, and which therefore responds to the question of being (*Seinsfrage*) and is interested in the meaning of mortality, finitude and transcendence.⁴⁰ Tibetan Buddhists come closer than Buddhists from other traditions and cultures to the recognition that in the conditioning of being by nothingness, being enjoys the full potential of freedom and emancipation. Taking an existential approach which embraces both the visible world of humans and the invisible world of spirits and demons, it can be said that demonology, or *Goetia* 'conditions' the path to enlightenment which all Buddhists hold dear. This is controversial in the religious sense but in the phenomenological sense, which includes extraordinary phenomena such as possession and exorcism, such understanding opens the door to a way of liberation which integrates the magical, hence experiential, absorption of the greatest power of the abyss of the human spirit. We find some reflections of this, on the level of popular consciousness, in the selfless act of Father Karras in *The Exorcist*, for which he dies and in the history of modern occultism, in the integration by Aleister Crowley, into his higher self; of the absolute demonisation of the abyss, Choronzon, for which he eventually became the ecstatic plaything of gods like Aiwass, Abuldiz and Babalon⁴¹ and suffered disintegration of his spirit in the obscure last years of his life.

In Crowley's self-acknowledged culmination of his magical workings as *congressus cum daemone*, which was an audacious attempt at a union of the traditional opposites of *theurgia* and *Goetia*,⁴² there was

⁴⁰ Heidegger, op cit, 39-42. *Dasein* is the ontological priority in the question of being.

⁴¹ For an affirmative overview of Crowley's encounters with his gods, see Editor's Introduction to Crowley. In Cairo, April 1904, Aiwass dictated, through Crowley's first consort, 'Scarlet Woman,' the main text of the new religion of Thelema: *Liber Legis* or *The Book of Law*, first published by the Ordo Templi Orientis, London, 1938. The trance medium concerned was Rose Edith Crowley, née Kelly.

⁴² See Crowley: *Liber Samekh*, op cit, Appendix IV.

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a forgetting of the *logos* of enlightenment enshrined in the primordial wisdom of Buddhism: while form is indeed emptiness (god is demon), emptiness is also form. *Goetia* won once again in the open and secret history of magic, revealed and transmitted, according to the *Book of Enoch*, by the fallen angels to mortals never identified by name. Its victory as always is its recurrence, perhaps eternal, as the conquest of the soul by the abyss. *Goetia*, in its advanced state in Tibetan Buddhism both in terms of knowledge and rituals, remains to be critically assessed in the spreading of the Vajrayana in the West, which, as recent scholarship shows, is not without some mind-baffling and spiritually unsettling controversies.