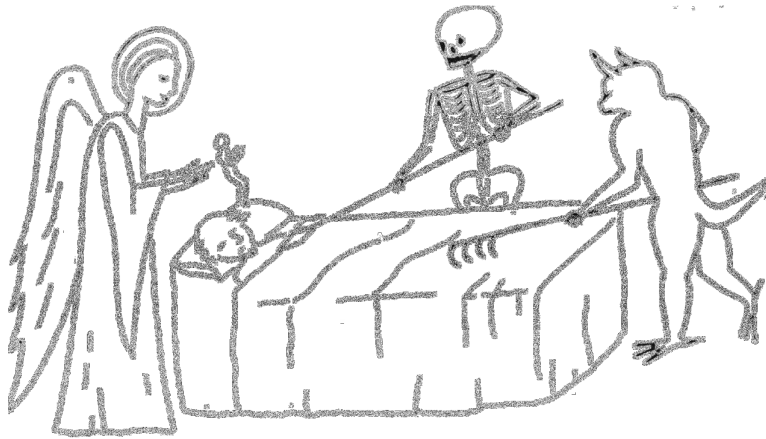


**NEGATIVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES:
ENCOUNTERS WITH EVIL**

DR MERETE DEMANT JAKOBSEN



This drawing of an angel and a devil vying for the soul of a dying man is based on images in 14th century manuscripts

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The accounts/letters have been quoted without any corrections to their original wording, spelling, grammar or punctuation.

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PREFACE

Try to express your belief in the approachable and utterly accessible spiritual being, you have come to know, and immediately you are aware that you are considered a crank by some, a servant of the non-existent devil by others, and a source of embarrassment to your family. So what does one do? In most cases the answer would appear to be, maintain strict silence about one's private revelations for fear of being considered a fool, or worse. I wonder just how many people alive today, are doing just that. [003244, F]

My own interest in spiritual experiences was inspired by my contact in the beginning of the 1980s with the belief system of the Greenlanders. As with all Inuit peoples living in the harsh reality of the Arctic, their concept of the spirit world reflected that condition. This was a world where nature could kill and the survival of individuals and the settlement as a whole depended on the skilful hunter knowing his environment, but also knowing how to protect himself and his family against the onslaught of misfortune and of evil or destructive spirits. The mythology of the Greenlanders reflected that concept. Often a violent encounter not only with other human beings but also with the *tupilak*, a manifestation of an evil intent by another person, was depicted. This was a world where evil was recognised in people as well as in the surrounding spirit world and therefore precautions had to be taken so that the individual did not feel a victim of randomness. It was possible to share the knowledge of evil with fellow human beings and not risk being seen as mentally disturbed. The mediator between the world of human beings and that of the spirits, the *angakkoq* or shaman, was of utmost importance in maintaining a balance. This gave an enormous power which was used and mis-used by the *angakku* as some became healers, others murderers, inducing fear into the settlement.

As I looked at the present spiritual climate and did field-work in neo-shamanic courses in England and Denmark it became clear to me that there was, if not a denial, then definitely an understatement of the evil or negative aspects of human spirituality. Although some of my informants had, indeed, experienced frightening and destructive spiritual encounters they mostly did not share them with their fellow participants as the atmosphere of the courses was that of benevolence emanating from the spirit-world. In the lower world the spirits seemed to be waiting readily for the course participants who were then generously supported by the spirits in their endeavours. A sort of ecologically correct lower world paradise was displayed. This was in such conflict with my understanding of the traditional shaman, that I decided to look at the archives at the Religious Experience Research Centre founded by Alister Hardy in 1969 and search for negative experiences to discover if there was evidence of modern Western people having had encounters that somehow were a manifestation of evil, destructive spirits, or the devil.

There are about 6,000 letters, of which I looked at over 4,000, as the archive is presently being updated and the records put on computer. These letters were sent to the Research Centre by people who responded to the call for descriptions of spiritual experiences by Sir Alister Hardy and others involved in the research from the 1960s onwards. Sir Alister Hardy, FRS, who was a biologist and later Professor of Zoology at Oxford, published appeals in journals, pamphlets and in newspapers inviting people who had experienced some power 'whether they call it the power of God or not, to write a simple and brief account of these feelings and their effects' (*The Observer*, 8 March 1970). Sometimes there are personal and social details attached to the description of the spiritual experiences described in the letters, which then give an indication of the background of the writer. There is, however, no fixed pattern in which these letters appear. Some are only a few lines long, giving hardly any idea

of the framework in which the experience occurred, while others have several pages dealing with the spiritual development of the writer. In this collection I found about 170 accounts or discussions of evil. I initially decided to use the word 'negative' instead of evil in my title for this collection, but as I worked through the material, I reverted to the term that most writers use themselves: evil. This is indeed a problematic word that conjures up particularly Judeo-Christian associations but, as I have said above, experiences with destructive spirits are not limited to our culture and although the word 'evil' is loaded with meaning for most of us, I had no other choice or I would have had to invent a new word. I will, therefore, use the word evil when dealing with the letters out of respect for the choice of the writers. It is, in this context, important to point out that the letters that I have come across all draw on a Christian understanding of spirituality.

The categories into which I have divided the experiences are typological, i.e. they are organised according to the character of the experience and not the state of mind or the interpretation of evil by the writer. It would be impossible to use either a sociological or psychological categorisation as the information surrounding the experiences varies considerably. I hope, however, that the variety of categories that this pilot study of evil provides might open up further research based on a more systematic collection of information which would lead to a greater understanding of negative spiritual experiences approached from different disciplines.

I did not set out to make an analysis of the nature of evil. Several have done that before me who are more qualified. Evil has been discussed from a theological, anthropological, psychological and philosophical angle and I have not even attempted, within the confines of this booklet, to venture down any of those pathways but only in the introduction touch on some of them. My intentions have been to collect and roughly categorise from a thematic point of view the accounts that I have found. One of the possible uses of this material might be to make available human experience at its most terrifying for people who might also have had such an experience.

Some of my informants had kept these matters to themselves, feeling that they were odd or even that they, as persons, might be dangerous to other human beings. Visits to psychotherapists had not helped as the experiences had not been understood for what they were: negative spiritual experiences, not some regurgitated childhood recollection. As the writer above concludes, staying silent is the safest approach. Luckily, Professor Sir Alister Hardy and his assistants were able to encourage people to send letters sharing what might be seen for most as one of their most important life-experiences. This booklet has attempted to look at a part of that valuable material.

Merete Demant Jakobsen
Oxford 1998

NEGATIVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES: ENCOUNTERS WITH EVIL

INTRODUCTION

To use one single word, evil, to cover all the negative experiences that the writers mentioned in this booklet have narrated, is stretching the concept to its limits. The word generally conjures up associations such as morally depraved, bad, wicked, vicious, hurtful, mischievous and so on, but in essence it is, as described in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'The Antithesis of Good in all its principal senses'. The etymology is traced from Old English with the comment that 'this word is the most comprehensive adjectival expression of disapproval, dislike, or disparagement'.

When trying to categorise the various experiences of horror and fear that these writers have been brave enough to narrate, it is clear that one single definition will never be possible for the type of encounters that are being conveyed. Even the mere recollection is, for many of the writers, so disturbing that the process of reproducing it is in itself frightening. The original meaning of the word as 'disapproval' is another factor that is inherent in this process. Somehow the person being exposed to evil is not just a victim of evil spirits or the devil, the person is at the same time tainted by having been an object of an evil onslaught or even feels responsible for having attracted it. In most of the literature dealing with evil this attitude to the 'recipient' underlies the descriptions of evil. As this is an approach which is undesirable to encourage, it has limited the material available for this introduction. Let me just give one example of what might be typical of this attitude. Martin Buber has in *Images of Good and Evil* the following understanding of the role of a human being *vis-a-vis* evil:

Good and evil, the yes-position and the no-position of existence enter into his living cognizance, but in him they can never be temporally coexistent. He knows oppositeness only by his situation within it; and that means de facto (since the yes can present itself to the experience and perception of man in the no-position, but not the no in the yes-position): he knows it directly from within that 'evil' at times when he happens to be situated there; more exactly: he knows it when he recognises a condition in which he finds himself whenever he had transgressed the command of God, as the 'evil' and the one he had thereby lost and which, for the time being, is inaccessible to him, as the good. (1952: 21)

The 'no' position is here understood as an active denial of good. A human being has taken upon himself to transgress the commands of God and has thereby made good inaccessible. It is an existential choice. I hope, however, that the examples of experiences mentioned here will show that the recipient of these negative experiences can often not connect them to any conscious choice and feels the victim of random onslaught. Some, inspired by the Christian doctrine, naturally express the sense of personal responsibility mentioned above. For both kinds of interpretation of the experiences, however, a sense of being 'set apart' from other human beings is prevalent.

The concept of the devil sometimes serves to minimise the responsibility of the person. In *The Power of Evil* Richard Cavendish points to the role of the devil in modern society:

The Devil is intellectually out of fashion now but belief in him is far from extinct, because he was for so long a vital element of Christianity, because he is one answer to the problem of evil and undeserved suffering in a world ruled by a God who is good, and because some people's experience convinces them of the existence of a great power of evil at work in the world (1975: 194).

The fear of God and meeting with his angels is different in character from the fear induced by the negative experience. The latter type of fear has no catharsis but leaves the person anxious after the experience so that for many people it takes years before they are prepared to communicate the experience to anyone else. I believe that many more people have experiences similar to the ones presented here but keep these private. It is much more satisfying to share with others the encounters with a loving God or beautiful mystical experiences in nature than it is to narrate a gruesome, horrifying and deeply disturbing encounter with the devil. Nevertheless this is part of the human condition and should be treated as such. Evil is, however,

too large a reality to be grasped within a single frame of reference. Indeed it is so basic as to be inherently and inevitably mysterious. The understanding of basic reality is never something we achieve; it is only something that can be approached. And, in fact, the closer we approach it the more we realize we do not understand – the more we stand in awe of the mystery.
(Scott Peck, 1990: 42)

Alister Hardy himself seemed to be reluctant to venture into the area of the negative experience. He comments, 'The possible causes of these horrific conditions probably lie in part within the field of psychology, of which I am not qualified to write: maybe these distressing experiences may be overcome by turning the mind to religious ideas' (1979: 63). There is, however, no reason why these sorts of experiences should be treated any differently from the ones of a fulfilling and positive kind. Both are transforming, both are recognising the existence of a spiritual realm and both show the vulnerability of the human condition. Hardy admits that, 'It seems likely that the proportion of people who have such experiences may be much greater than our figures would suggest, for our appeal was for records of religious or spiritual experience rather than those of an evil nature' (1979: 78). But an encounter with evil is a spiritual experience. It is, however, also an experience which it is difficult to share. When I did field-work among course participants in neo-shamanism, it became clear to me that these kinds of experiences could be narrated only if there was someone prepared to listen who was not judgmental.

In *Seeing The Invisible. Modern Religious and other Transcendent Experiences*, Meg Maxwell and Verena Tschudin write:

In the archives of the AHRC [Alister Hardy Research Centre, forerunner of the RERC] are only a small number of experiences of evil. It may be that this represents an idiosyncrasy in that requests and questionnaires did not ask for this type of experience. It may be that not many people do experience evil. There are no particular reasons given why these experiences should occur. It seems remarkable, however, that some of them happen either to religious people [000248; 004711] or in religious places [003191].

The characteristic of all these experiences is the utter sense of fear, terror and horror that they induce [000248; 004325].

It may be simply coincidence, but it is worth noting, that while many of the 'ordinary' may last for a very short time, some of the experiments describe these experiences as lasting for a long time [003191] or even a whole night [004325]. (1990: 27-8).

It is not remarkable that these experiences happen to religious people. The Bible has many references to evil in the form of the devil or evil spirits. In *Angels and Demons in Human Life* by the Rev Gilbert Shaw these are taken deeply seriously. He points to the difference in quality between meeting the devil and 'demonic personalities':

I must draw an important distinction between, on the one hand, the devil and the demonic sphere as a testing force which is answered and negated by recollection, and which must last till the consummation of the end, and, on the other hand, the entry into space-time of

individual demonic personalities, who may secure a locus or an attachment to a place or human personality and who as intruders can be cast out by prayer and the authority of exorcism. (1954: 74)

There may also be an infestation of places, either through some human wickedness done there whereby the demon has entered, or through an idolatrous worship, particularly when connected with lust or violence; or again the demon may have been planted by deliberate purpose of man. (Ibid.: 81)

Remember that the power of evil is only allowed. God is always in command of the situation if we have faith and give our prayers to him to fulfil His will. We are not to be frightened or distressed by horrible forms, noises, or other commotion the demonic may manifest, nor must we be deluded if they ape the good. (Ibid.: 83)

It is as foolish to deny the devil and his angels as to allow him too much power, and it is perhaps even more foolish to treat him and his votaries as a joke and a stimulus to a jaded human appetite for thrills. (Ibid.: 84)

The Christian understanding of the devil and demons on the one hand and individual demonic personalities on the other might not be so clear for people experiencing the horror of the encounter. The concept of evil as personified in the devil is described in the letters, as is the sense of an amorphous evil. As will be seen from the quotations above, the choice is placed with the individual as to which approach to take to the encounter with evil. In the letters the religious person and the agnostic alike seem to use the symbols of the Christian God as protection, the cross, the Bible and prayer when faced with evil.

This small selection from the New Testament, from the New Revised Standard Version, shows how seriously demons and spirits are considered. Some of these examples deal with people with deviant behaviour or who are possibly mentally ill.

Matt 8:16 'That evening they brought to him many who were possessed by demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick.'

Matt 12:24 'But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons."' (Luke 11:15. Matt 9:34. Mark 3:22).

Matt 12:28 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you.'

Luke 4:33 A man in a synagogue has the spirit of an unclean demon. Jesus communicates with the demon. The demon recognises him as 'The Holy One of God.' (Mark 1:23-27).

Luke 4:41 'Demons also came out of many shouting, "You are the Son of God!"'

Luke 8:27 A man who has demons. Jesus communicates directly with the unclean spirit.

Luke 10:17 'Lord in your name even the demons submit to us!'

Luke 11:14 'Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed.'

Luke 13:11 'And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years.'

Luke 24:37 'They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.'

John 8:44 'You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' Jesus is here talking to the Jews.

1 John 3:8 'Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.'

Eph 6:12 'For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.'

Finally from the Old Testament: 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.' (Gen 6: 5). This condition of human existence, the sense of original sin, the constant battle against evil, is what is described in many of the letters. The writers acknowledge this as a side of their lives and try to combat it. This kind of battle is shared by humans all over the world. Knud Rasmussen writes about the Inuit culture:

An evil man was the worst enemy of man and life. But nature too was full of horror and dangerous problems. There were the mountain spirits, sea spirits, underground spirits, giants and goblins, who were only too willing to come and help when evil called and gave them a chance. All these spirits were stronger and mightier than man himself and he would perish inevitably if his forefathers had not arranged life so well by means of amulets and magic words, and if certain people had not been given the power to rule the hopelessness of darkness. (Rasmussen 1938: 69)

What is worrying for me in our culture is that many people do not always feel that they have the means of dealing with such an experience, let alone share it, and therefore feel isolated. The isolation can be almost as debilitating as the actual experience. A negative spiritual experience sets the person apart. The fear and horror involved in facing evil becomes a fear of facing others with the experience. Rarely are there any other persons present when the experience takes place and, if there is, that person is often a partner asleep. The 'dark night of the soul' is a lonely experience.

The huge interest in ghost stories shows, however, that people are somehow also fascinated by horror. Reading through the letters it became clear that although there were few examples of ghosts, the fear involved in the encounter with evil was of a similar nature to that of facing malignant ghosts in ghost stories. In *The Tool* (1928) by W.F. Harvey, in *Twelve Tales of the Supernatural*, the narrator gives the following description of fear:

Every man has experienced at some period of his life that strange intuition of danger which compels us, if only it be strong enough, to alter some course of action, substituting for a reasonable motive the blind force of fear. I was walking straight towards the mound, when I came to a standstill. Something seemed to repel me from the spot, while at the same time I became conscious of my intense isolation, alone on the moor miles away from any fellow-creature. I stopped for half a minute, half in doubt as to whether to proceed. Then I told myself that fear is always strongest when in pursuit and, smiling at my folly, I went on. (1997: 106-7)

The notion of evil being somehow attached to a place is dealt with in one of the chapters in the booklet. Unprepared people suddenly experience a malignant force prevalent in a specific house or in a place in nature. There is no previous indication of knowledge of the place, i.e. it is not a haunted castle where the person is tuned to experiencing something frightening. Often other people independently have the same kind of experience.

What I find is the most interesting aspect of this research is the randomness with which people are suddenly faced by evil. Of course, there are examples of people being on the verge of mental illness or in severe depression, but they are few. Mostly it is people who suddenly, waking up from sleep or walking in a wood, visiting a house and so on, are faced with a sense of evil that they cannot connect to a previous state of mind. It would be possible to roll the whole battery of psychological explanations into the forefront but for the person involved it has only one name: evil.

I hope this booklet is going to achieve an open-mindedness about this phenomenon. My intent has not been to write an exhaustive account of evil but, through examples in rough categories, to try to point to aspects of its manifestations as seen from the perspective of the writers. As these are letters depicting a certain time and event in a person's life there might not always be a pre- or post-history, as important as this may seem. Let me end with the words of Susan Howatch who in her latest novel, *A Question of Integrity*, let one of her characters state: 'Evil exists. Those who forget that fact or ignore it or reject it are at best taking a big risk and at worst conniving at their own destruction. All creation has its dark side.' (1997: 458)

EXPERIENCES OF EVIL

1. Experience of evil present in a state of sleep or awakening

Several of the descriptions of encounters with negative forces or, as most people describe it, the presence of evil spirits or the devil, are experienced while in a state of awakening or just before sleeping. The person might be in a hypnogogic state, in the twilight zone between consciousness and sleep where one is still aware of ordinary reality but at the same time intertwining this awareness with that of the dream state so that what belongs in the category of dream is interpreted as existing in reality. Several writers, however, claim that they were fully awake when they experienced the negative presence and that they, therefore, have encountered a force which is not connected with their dreams.

One of the first letters sent to Sir Alister Hardy expresses such a state of mind:

Another time I awoke from a sound sleep and had an overwhelming feeling of a presence in the room. The atmosphere felt very oppressive. I felt a strong sense of fear and forced myself to get up and put on the lights. I went from room to room and there was no living person there but this feeling persisted strongly. Again I resorted to prayer and gradually fell off to sleep with a rosary in my hand. [000038, F]

This experience can easily be interpreted as a dream that has influenced the dreamer so that she woke up and carried the sense of fear from the dream state to reality. Most people during their lives probably have this kind of experience. Such experience can, however, take on a more menacing character as with the following writer:

It must have been about 20 years ago when I was 34. I was in bed with my wife asleep in our rented flat in Leicester. Suddenly I became aware of a sense of the uttermost evil – so much so that I became awake. I could feel this sense of evil enveloping me. I had the terrifying impression that this evil force or presence was bent upon taking possession of me. – How does one describe evil? I only knew that I was enveloped by this revolting force – so vile and rotting – I could almost taste the evil. I was in terror – so much so I could not call out or move. A part of my mind told me I must at all cost act or I would be lost.

I recall, upon this realisation, by a great effort that I managed to stretch out my right hand and, with my index finger traced the shape of the Cross in the air. The movement was only small but it was in the shape of the cross. Immediately upon my doing this the evil enveloping me fell away completely at once, and I felt a wonderful sense of peace and safety. Following this I fell into a relaxed and peaceful sleep.

I did not recount this experience to my wife and I have not since at any time had any similar experience – nor would I wish to have. It made a profound impression upon me, and I have pondered over it many times since with a sense of gratitude. [000667, M, 54; event: age 34]

This writer was sleeping and it was in this state that he became aware of evil; he actually claims that this was what had woken him. There are two possible interpretations: either the experience of evil was part of a dream or he was woken by its presence in reality. The writer obviously interprets the situation as an independent evil in the room enveloping him and wanting to take possession of him. He uses the senses of smell and taste to try to describe the non-material experience, as does another writer: 'The atmosphere of evil was like a taste and a smell and a noise, even now the thought of it makes me sick.' [002600, F, 50] The sense of paralysis in connection with terror is a common experience, as is the release achieved by the sign of the cross. The next experience is also an expression of a sense of a personal attack:

A year and a half ago I was asleep in the night, and woke very suddenly and felt quite alert. I felt surrounded and threatened by the most terrifying and powerful presence of Evil. It seemed to be localised within the room. It seemed almost physical and in a curious way it 'crackled', though not audibly. It was also extremely 'black' and I felt overwhelmed with terror. I stayed rigid in my bed for several minutes, wondering how to combat this blackness. I felt it was a manifestation directed very personally at me, by a Power of Darkness. I was overwhelmed by despair and a desire to go out and kill myself by jumping in the Thames nearby, but I knew that I must withstand this.

[He gets a crucifix and commands it to go away. He is shaking with fear and calls a friend and leaves the building.]

I hasten to say that although I am a sensitive and sometimes emotional person I am usually sceptical about abstract phenomena! I have not told many people of these experiences because of their 'melodramatic' sides. I have been as objective as I can in describing them. [003191, M, 28; event: age 26]

The attempt to describe evil by relating it to generally recognisable sensations such as 'black' and 'crackle', when this is not actually what is sensed, is a way of solving the problem of explaining a sensation that is 'beyond' the physical senses, almost like a 'sixth sense'. The writer's attempt to describe his own personality and his 'normal' approach to such phenomena is common as he is aware of the fact that the experience can be interpreted as mental instability.

The connection between the experience and the experienced is clearly expressed in the next account. In this the writer is feeling under emotional strain and reads the Bible. When she reaches the crucifixion she sees 'the Lord, clearly and unmistakably, hanging on the cross'. She is trembling but then goes to bed.

I was just dropping off to sleep when suddenly I felt the presence of such evil (as I have never experienced before or since) that I shot bolt upright in bed with icy cold shivers running up and down my spine and the scalp of my head tingling. My heart was thumping as I peered into the darkness, listening intently to try and find what had wakened me; but I could neither see nor hear anything, only feel the presence of such evil. My body ached with holding myself rigid, but I daren't relax, then it was as if I became aware of a fierce struggle going on, and as if I were both spectator and at the same time one of those involved in the struggle. And still it wasn't that I could see anything, only sense it. Looking back and knowing what I do now about the Devil being a person and not a myth as I thought in those days, I can well believe that it was a struggle on his part to regain my soul. [001676, F, 55; event: as a young woman]

The presence of evil is, as in the above accounts, expressed as a non-material entity which has woken the sleeper. It is interesting that she is both a spectator to a struggle and involved in the struggle. This could be seen as describing two states of mind present at the same time: that of consciousness and sub-consciousness. In the conscious state she is detached

from what is happening on the sub-conscious level, i.e. the struggle for her soul. The next writer explains how she, in a dream, wandered into a coven of devils and witches: 'Everyone was in terror of the hate they had given such power to. It came to me to stretch my arms wide to make myself into the form of a cross and call on God and Jesus Christ in a loud voice. This made the evil power concentrate on me and a timeless struggle between us ended in the evil fading away.' [002396, F, 40]

A similar struggle is described in the next account:

It was full summer and the windows were open. I 'woke' to find the room full of malignant creatures. I did not see them, but I got the message quite clearly that I was to be destroyed. They were swinging my bed with the object of pitching me out of the window. I sweated with terror. What must I do? On instinct I said The Lord's Prayer ... 'Our Father ... which ... art ...' My mouth was dry, my lips felt paralysed and the words only came with difficulty, but it worked. The creatures receded and as I finished I woke fully in my physical body. This was the first of several attempts to frighten me. It would seem that the dark forces are not going to give up a likely candidate without struggle. [002475, F]

The malignant creatures are not visible in this description, but their action can be physically felt, i.e. the swinging of the bed. Sometimes the presence can also be heard. Sharing a bed with her mother, one correspondent became aware of a tapping sound.

My mother got out of bed because of my restlessness then I found that I could not move, nor could I articulate when trying to speak to my mother to explain. I heard whispering close to my ear, in one, then the other. I refused to listen and felt most strongly that there was something evil about. As best I could, I moved my head from side to side and tried to say the Lord's Prayer. I could not remember the words beyond 'Our Father ...' Even though I had remembered the words, I could not articulate them. Only meaningless sounds were uttered.

My mother stood beside the bed wringing her hands and saying 'What is it? What is it? I couldn't spend another night like this.' I lay helpless, unable to explain. About 1 a.m. the bed, one of the old, brass-railed kind with interwoven metal laths under the hair mattress, levitated, swung about in mid-air, then crashed loudly to the floor. As daylight dawned, I regained the ability to move and speak but felt weak, and fell into a sound sleep. [003363, F]

As with the preceding description, the writer felt that the bed was moving and that the evil force manifested its power through interfering with material matters almost as in a spiritual séance. At the same time, she herself was unable to move and could only utter meaningless sounds. Several accounts, however, describe visions of evil.

I awoke in the night with a terrible feeling of oppression in the room and my heart seemed to stop beating when I saw hovering near the ceiling in a far corner a luminous, grinning, grimacing gargoyle-like face, not static but pulsating. I was instantly wide awake and filled with terrible fear and anger that this thing should come and manifest itself to me. I remember picking up anything within reach and flinging it at the grinning evil face and like a flash it darted to within inches of my face. I was petrified and felt as if I was suffocating in a blanket of evil. I remember praying and saying aloud, 'God help me' and with this spoken word it vanished and a fresh ice cold air filled the room and it seemed sweet and pure. [002739, F, 58; event: in her early 30s]

The evil is here manifested in an 'evil face', and has taken a recognisable form. The writer can, therefore, describe the image of evil. As she, by calling on the help of God, expelled the evil face there was, as in other descriptions, a strong sense of catharsis. She describes a state of sleep that is then transformed to a conscious state without the image vanishing but instead coming closer to her. She is in no doubt about the reality of the face as she attacked it. It is, however, the summoning of God that comes to her aid. Another writer had a similar experience of evil faces:

I find there is a force of good (or God) which controls the evil and there are evil presences around.

Sometimes when I close my eyes at night I see the most awful faces, leering and disgusting, and if I say to myself 'Go away, Lord deliver us from evil' they gradually disappear (This still happens).

Once, about 15 years ago, I woke to strange lights and the feeling of a body lying beside me – horror and fear – I could only pray and gradually all became normal and I was able to switch on my light. There is evil but God is stronger.

I am not a great church goer but I have proved to myself that there is evil around us and that prayer to God will send it away. [002490, F, 81; event: since 15]

Another writer was visited by a group of 12 men in the night, whom he described as follows: 'They wore very dark blue-plum-coloured coats which reached down to their knees. Their faces were almost the same colour and looked as bad and wicked as a face could look.' [002782, M, 64] The next writer also saw an image of evil. While in bed she experienced seeing a man's face, ugly and menacing.

Then a little figure manifested itself. It was like a sitting dog with a curly tail, large ears up pointed, a man's face and had horns curling forward. It spoke to me in a high pitched unpleasant voice saying 'You are afraid of us but you cannot get rid of us. We are going to stay with you and we can come nearer.' It did and I felt a great fear, I felt that Evil spirits had come close and made themselves visible to me. I immediately started reciting the Lord's Prayer and the 'thing' disappeared at once. [003143, F, 64]

She had the same experience five years later. To make sure that she is not seen as odd she adds: 'I am not a crank Spiritualist, merely an ordinary person with great Faith'. Both the above images of evil conform to the many representations we know in our society: the connection between facial features and evil, the correlation with the animal world, especially the horns. Colour is another way of describing the presence of evil:

The next night when I didn't give the matter a thought I was suddenly awakened in the small hours. My gaze was immediately drawn to the inner corner of the room. I saw there a rectangular object with a green element in it rather like the element in an electric light bulb. (It may have been green with an orange element.) Immediately I looked at it I experienced a violent and painful shock and sense of terrible evil. Immediately I exclaimed 'Christ help me' – as a prayer (I was an agnostic at the time and not given to prayer) and not just an exclamation. I put my head under the bedclothes and all fear went. I went to sleep. [003862, M, 45; event: early part of 1951]

The writer refers to an abbey and having heard of a monk 'seeing the Devil in colour.' He refers to an erring monk being burned there. He then proceeds to describe his religious experiences happening during a manic depressive 'high': offering all his savings to a vicar to retain a daughter church, sending a religious telegram to a friend, ringing random people up at night to ask whether they are Christians. He felt embarrassed by these actions in his normal state of mind.

The connection between mental disease and experiences of a religious nature is known from many cultures. It is, however, remarkable that so few seem to connect the negative experiences with mental instability even though there are similarities to that of insanity. One writer had received ECT in hospital. She felt that she was in a state of great desolation.

In the October of the autumn '51 I went through the most terrible darkness. Of all the darkness and desolation I had suffered this was the ultimate. There are many, many dark nights of the soul in mystical experience, but this was the blackest of them all. I thought I was in the hands of great evil and, being by nature innately religious, I went to my bedroom to pray. There was no God to pray to, so I said 'If I am in the hands of great evil, please take me out of this'. [002977, F, 50; event: at the age of about 30]

She had an experience of the Devil at her bedside but explains: 'there is no evil by the way, it is merely a symbol of the dark side.' The earlier accounts have described the presence of evil as 'real', but for this writer evil is internal. This interpretation of the manifestation in evil images of the person's own dark side is shared by the following writer:

That evening I did not sleep one wink. I had persecuting voices attacking me all night (I have since realised that for the past five years I had thought voices during the night but had passed them off as dreams).

[She had a swollen tongue and her hands and feet were covered in thick sweat the next day. She decided to meditate.]

I was exhausted by evening and seemed to be given a God given sleep for about 15 minutes then my body was so rocked by an overpowering force and the voices chanted 'have you forgotten', 'have you forgotten' – this seemed to imply that I had failed to fill out a form or such like and as a result hundreds of people would suffer. Suddenly, I realised that I had the forces of evil within me and that I was being tormented by the devil as Christ had been and was in the desert. I realised that I had to fight these forces with all my might. I started to weep for all the demands I had made on my husband all our married life – always had I thought to make him my soul mate – I could not allow him to be himself (he is an architect). [001786, F]

The sense of evil here has moved within the person and takes on the character of a form of guilt feeling towards others and especially towards her husband. In an earlier part of the letter she admitted that she had been critical of other people. Another example of a difficult relationship with one's family leading to a negative experience is this description:

One night it was very dark, with no moon or stars gleaming through the window. The bedroom light was duly turned off. As I lay, wide-awake on my bed, the physical dark without was less profound than the darkness within.

'You can't succeed. You only fail. Give up, give up, give up! urged the whisper.' 'All right' I answered within myself, 'I'll give up.'

Then, though lying still and quiet on my bed, I seemed to be sinking down and down, with a sensation that was physical, into a deep, dark pit. I seemed to lie prone on my face at the bottom. Then, though lying quiet and still on my bed, I seemed to myself to lift up my head and cry out, 'Oh, I cannot give up. But what shall I do?'

Across the foot of my bed there flashed a light and in the light the words written: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.'

The darkness and despair left me. [003646, F, 71; event: 15]

The internalisation of a guilt feeling towards the family as part of the transition period of the teenage years is an obvious example of the encounter with dark forces within. Some correspondents who had practised meditation found themselves in contact with dark forces within themselves and wrote about this. The connection between meditation and the manifestation of the experience of negative forces is expressed in the next letter:

I had been practising meditation for a quarter of an hour morning and afternoon. I woke up one night and found myself besieged by evil, horrifying and overwhelming. I switched on the bedside lamp and looked at the clock to make sure I was awake and not dreaming. I even feel nervous about writing about it now in bed at night. The evil was so terrifying I wondered whatever I could do to stop it and then remembered that in ancient rites one made the sign of the cross and called Jesus ... I did so more out of terror than belief, but I was desperate. Gradually the evil seemed to subside perhaps taking twenty minutes or half an hour to do so. I was grateful that there were powers that could control it and was very thankful. I have still been a little frightened of it happening again and wonder if it is the dark powers of the mind through which we have evolved and repressed, coming to the surface, but at least I know there

is a Power of love and courage that can be called upon to protect one from the terror by night. I wonder if this [is] the sort of experience that those initiated had to undergo in the Pyramids or in the Mysteries of Delphi? [003800, F, 69; event: 50]

An experience of evil during the night can be a result of an incident in ordinary reality although for most of the correspondents the cause of the experience of evil, if any, could be found in the state of mind of the individual. The following writer describes an unexpected encounter with an evil place that leads to an encounter with evil during the night, as if the negative force has attached itself to the person. The writer was visiting a house with a friend and an estate agent. In the house the agent pointed at a door and said that if what it led to had a window it could be made into another room.

I opened the door and as I did so my friend who did not believe in the supernatural and the agent fled out of the bungalow but I seemed rooted by the evil power that came from that room. That night when in bed I felt an evil form of a man standing by my bed. I shook from head to foot. When I was young my mother told me once that people used to fetch her mother to lay ghosts and she told me the verse out of the Bible that she used to say. So that night as I tried to repeat it I could not get God out, I could only say G-G-G-, but the next night it came again but I managed the whole verse and it never worried me again, but try ever so hard I have never since been able to remember the words or from which part of the Bible it was. [002810, F, 70]

Impersonal evil connected to a place will be mentioned later, but one more example of this kind of experience will be given. A person turning up at an unknown place and then experiencing that this place is infested with a negative force has much in common with the typical ghost story. This account is in the form of an interview.

My husband and I took a break for the week-end for a rest, and we went to an Inn – public house, inn, hotel – in Wales. It was in North Wales but I'm afraid I can't remember the exact details though those I could find out. It was a 14th or 13th century public house – or part of the building was certainly old. We had a room and on the first night after dinner we went to bed and we were sharing a double bed and I woke up bolt upright, bolt upright not in my body but in my clarity. I mean, I didn't sort of roll over and sort of begin to wake up, I woke up very, very suddenly. I could feel hands on my belly, on my pregnant belly, pulling, kind of pulling my stomach, pulling at my belly, from the side of the bed. I was on the left hand side of the bed at the time. I was petrified both in a literal sense that I couldn't move, literally couldn't move, and petrified because I was terrified. I knew that there was nobody there in the physical sense and I knew that somebody was trying to get at my baby. I suppose ... This was just an absolute knowing. [005216, F, 51; event: 1973, 27]

The narrator continues to explain that the experience as far as she was aware lasted a few minutes. She tried to wake her husband but could not move. As soon as he woke the feeling of the hands subsided. 'He did realise that I was obviously extremely distressed, and I think that he understood perfectly well that it was not a dream that I was having.' They stayed on at the inn as the narrator felt fine the next day. In the night she changed bedside with her husband, only to experience precisely the same thing again. The following day they asked the owner of the hotel whether anything had happened in that room. He denied it but the narrator had no doubt 'that room was definitely, however one wishes to describe it, haunted.' She states that she 'knew internally that some woman had lost her baby, perhaps in childbirth, in that room. I can't tell you why, I knew.'

The same narrator also had a vision of the devil in her own house, which was a 1960s-built semi-detached house in Witney. In the middle of the night, when her new-born son woke for his feed, she had to cross the landing to get to his room:

Anyway I can remember coming out of my bedroom door, switching on the landing light so I was not in the dark, and to my right in just ... at the edge of my vision, over near the top of the stairs which were some few feet away from me, perhaps, about six feet away from me (my son's room was on the left and this was on the right) I could see the Devil. Now, I don't really know how to say this, because I knew perfectly well that there was a figure there, and he literally had cloven hooves, shaggy hides, and horns – I mean he was literally this romantic Victorian image, as it were, of how the Devil was drawn, or even earlier, even 16th or 17th century. And I was very, very, very afraid. And I would nightly have this apparition. I'd know he was there.

This experience only stopped when she did not have to get up in the middle of the night anymore. With the birth of her second child, living in another house, she again experienced a negative presence in the room 'and often in the night, to my great distress, I would have to wake my husband just to be awake while I was feeding the baby.'

The connection between pregnancy and fear of losing the child or fear of anything hurting the baby as a sort of post-natal reaction springs to mind as a psychological explanation. For the narrator, herself a psychotherapist, this was, however, a very real experience of evil and the Devil.

A special category is two descriptions of childhood experiences that deal with the Crucifixion and the evil surrounding this deed.

At four years old, I was lying in bed one night wide awake and rather bored. It was winter, so no light came from the window but the door had been left open so that the landing light shone a strip of light onto the wall above my head. I was suddenly aware of a whole moving scene on the hitherto blank wall. It was the Crucifixion. Around and below the central figure on the cross moved a crowd, and their faces were horrifically clear to me as they gazed upwards. Some of the faces were distorted with hatred and menace, some were blank and foolish, but all were utterly terrifying; I could never forget those faces, they are perfectly clear to me to this day. [001418, F; event: 4]

The next writer had, as an orphan, spent her childhood in a forlorn state. She had the following nightmare in the sick bay quarters:

... in this nightmare I witnessed the crucifixion of Our Lord, it was more like a memory than a dream, a passing back in time to another existence. I saw every detail in 'panoramic technicolour' as one might say, but more than this. I was in the thick of it, jostled and pushed in a milling crowd of savages, and aloft, the cross, looking higher than a church steeple swaying from side to side in the hands of his murderers. There was red storm thunder screams and an all pervading horror of a terrible calamity of this deed. But I couldn't see the face only the rib cage sticking out in dark silhouette against a raging sky. Yet I knew it was Jesus, don't ask me how I knew, I couldn't to this day explain how I knew. [003496, F; event: childhood]

The last category is that of being frightened by a visitation from an apparition which is not necessarily of evil intent. One night the following writer saw a brown person in her room and felt the presence of others. She was terrified as she believed them to be burglars. The next morning she slipped out of bed to find everything in order. Nothing had been taken. About a week later:

I woke in the night and turned over and saw the man in brown again, smiling at me. I have never in my life approached the terror I experienced then, and then I knew it was ghosts I had seen. I went under the bedclothes again, and crawled out a long time later. Before I submerged I just had time to see him remove the smile from his face and turn to his left sinking his chin on his breast with a look of utter dejection as he saw me going to hide myself again. I thought then I was going to be haunted for ever but I knew that I could never be so frightened again as I had suffered the acme of fright on the last occasion and had also found myself untouched and unharmed. [002672, F, 73]

She had more visitors but finally felt she had had enough and eventually told them that they were not wanted. All the incidents took place in February 1972. She had not seen anything since.

The last writer to be mentioned in this chapter is a person who was visited by a dead relative:

When my father died in 1935 I was very grieved. About a year afterwards I was lying in bed when I experienced a feeling of evil and found myself floating in a cloud above my bed attached to my body which I could see lying there. I felt a cold hand and a voice said 'Christine, come out of this' and a cold hand touched me. I said 'It's dad but you are dead'. He said 'Yes, are you frightened?' I said 'No, I didn't fear you in life, why should I now?' He clasped my hand, there was a tremendous wind and I came to my senses. [002767, F; event: after father's death in 1935]

It is not clear whether the evil feeling stemmed from the visit of the father (i.e. from the presence of a dead soul), or whether the father actually helped her out of an evil state. Robert Hertz's essay on 'Death' carefully explores the attitude of different cultures to the corpse of a relative. Generally speaking the corpse is viewed, if not as evil, then carrying potential for retaliation on the living if the performance of the proper ritual behaviour, monitored by the dead, is not adhered to. Somehow, the dead body represents demonic aspects even though the person may have been kind when alive.

The next chapter will examine the demonic character of a place.

2. Experience of evil present in a place

Several accounts describe experiences by people turning up at a place, be it a house, a wood, a church or a battlefield, and then suddenly feeling a strong sense of evil permeating that specific area. In the *Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories* Michael Cox and R.A. Gilbert mention in the introduction two types of people writing ghost stories. 'Perhaps most writers of ghost stories simply belong to the class described by Edith Wharton as "ghost-feelers", as opposed to "ghost-seers" – people, that is, who are "sensible of invisible currents of being in certain places and at certain hours".' (1989: xi-xii)

There are several similarities between the traditional ghost story and that of writers describing frightening experiences in an unknown house. In the previous chapter two people described such an experience: the evil presence in the house shown to the writer by an estate agent [002810] and the hands clawing at the narrator's pregnant stomach in the old inn [005216]. The following writer was visiting an old house, wondering whether it was a 'church house'. During a look round the house, she described a long corridor, from which her own room led. Standing at the window of her room, she

... tried to feel myself into 'an Elizabethan' – I like history. On facing the window I became aware that I was not alone, and turned expecting to see my husband. In the corner one part of the wall marked with crosses was a presence crouched in the corner. I could see nothing; it 'grew' and I was terrified and dared not move as it seemed to 'grow' across the door. How long I stood there I do not know. I was unaware of other people or time, just terrible terrible fear of something so evil. My husband stood at the door and immediately seeing my face, he came around the bed. I whispered because of the boys near at hand. My husband got himself between me and 'it' and got me through the door. [003854, F]

The husband later claimed that there was no bed in the room although the writer had described it as a four poster. She explains that it happened in a well-known place. She ends the letter: 'Yes I have felt a presence. I hope I never feel another. I hope it wasn't religious or a premonition of after life! If it is – I'm not going!'

The sense of somehow being threatened by a presence is what the next writer also experienced. She describes the presence as a spirit:

I had gone to a house I had never been before, and was alone in a small oratory, when I felt an oppressed and malignant spirit which suddenly assaulted me and seemed to be trying to choke me. The feeling was indescribable and terrifying. My instincts were to run away but I felt it would leave the Spirit victorious. [She prayed to God and the spirit went away. She talked to another woman who has had a similar experience in the house.] She described it in exactly the same way, something indescribably evil which enveloped and tried to throttle her. The house had originally belonged to a Spiritualist. [003535, F, 55; event: July 1948]

The reason for the negative presence is interpreted as connected with the former owner of the house, as is the next description of evil presence in a house:

My single sister, like myself, now in her sixties and the most down-to-earth person, would bear me out as she too experienced what I can only describe as the most terrifying presence of evil. This was in a bedroom in an old part of a farmhouse in Wales. I had been unable to return home with my young son whom I had gone to fetch due to a long and violent thunderstorm. (My sister, while staying with me, had spent the night there a year previously.) She had said nothing to anyone, until I told her that thunderstorms nor anything would get me to stay there again. We had both slept in the double bed with the old lady of the farm. She slept but I woke her up as I couldn't stop shaking, after having prayed with all my might and crossed myself, I thought to protect me. I was brought up Church of England, I'm not Roman Catholic; I felt it was my only protection. This evil presence was masculine and seemed to come from the wall facing me, nearer and nearer as though straining to get me. I saw nothing but the blackness of the room, as my sister had, but although it is twenty years or more ago I'll never disbelieve that there are powers of evil. A very violent family had lived there. [003865, F, in her 60s]

A few times the experience, as above, is shared by more than one person. The next writer had his wife with him in a cottage in 1974, when the following experience took place:

I woke up one night to see a dark figure rushing towards me. When I was fully awake I checked curtains, moonlight, etc. (we had no roads near us, being in an isolated cottage screened by trees). Nothing to explain it, no moon and curtains tight. Three nights later my wife screamed; she had seen the same figure. I hadn't told her previously in case I frightened her so no direct suggestion. No one would sleep alone in the house after this. [003880, M; event: 1974]

A more direct attack is described by the next writer. She was running a small boarding house, in an old house which she inherited from an aunt.

Now that old house had one of Satan's demons in it. I was the one who was attacked. The time something would try and cause me to fall backwards as I was going up the stone stairs. And try to prevent me locking up at night! [The evil can sometimes take the shape of animals] ... In a house said to have a ghost cat (I only found this out just before I left) I seemed to be attacked by evil personified by a wildcat (not seen, but 'felt'). [001160, F; event: in her 30s]

A less dramatic but still frightening experience is described by a visitor to a cottage in Småland in Sweden. The writer was sitting in a chair in the kitchen when he felt that he was being watched.

I turned my head and saw an old woman standing behind the curtain and watching me. She was about 150 cm tall, clad in clothes of a bygone age. A long dress of dark blue shade, and over the dress an apron with a bib, in somewhat lighter blue, probably the material of her dress was handwoven. Her face was pale and unbelievably wrinkled, her eyes were light blue, and her glance terrible. Later I heard from neighbours that this was Mina. The family had paid to have her looked after, but she had been badly treated. She had been mentally disturbed. [003676, M, 62]

In most cases, however, the presence is not described as a ghost but rather as a destructive force.

Out driving a dog-cart with my father and driver. A call is made at a cottage standing above a wooded hollow and for a little while I am left alone with the old mare in the shafts – there comes an overwhelming sense of evil around me and when the men return, they find me weeping bitterly, but it was not that I felt lonely or deserted, it was from the dread of some unseen force which I did not attempt to explain nor never have. [003320, F, 80; event: childhood]

This force can also be present in a church:

This is an experience of Evil. As Archdeacon of St. Kitts, Canon Missioner and Rector of Basseterre (St. Kitts) it was one of my jobs to 'direct' young priests, and examine them. One of my curates was a very black West Indian. It was our custom to say mass every day and meditate for half an hour afterwards. He, the black curate, used to meditate in his stall in the choir, and I likewise in mine. There came a day when I felt beset by an evil power during my meditation. I had never experienced anything like it. It was like a grey cloud of evil. After about ten minutes I could stand it no more. I arose from my knees and went home.

The second day it happened again. I got up, and moved to the nave and prayed there without distraction. The third day I went back to my stall for meditation, but was restless. Then my curate got up and went into the nave and knelt there – as if he were conscious of something he didn't like.

The next day he came to see me (I was on the most intimate and friendly terms with the clergy in my archdeaconry – black as well as white). He said: 'Arch, have you been noticing anything in church after mass lately?' I asked what he meant. He said 'The Spirit of Evil'. He said, 'For several days I haven't been able to pray because I felt this evil around me.' I was very relieved to hear this, and told him of my own experience ... The whole thing cleared up after a few days. Of course, in the West Indies there is a good deal of 'Obeah' – Black Magic, and we are constantly having to deal with it. But on this occasion we could not relate it to any person or special happening. [000510, M, 70]

As the Archdeacon was disconcerted and went out of the church to avoid the sense of evil, so did the next writer. The Archdeacon, however, had his clergy to share the unpleasant experience with, whereas the next writer lost her nearness to God after the experience:

The following Sunday we attended Matins as usual, but on entering the Church at Bakewell, I felt a great warmth within me. I could not get to my pew fast enough – and as I knelt I felt myself enveloped in a great Love that seemed to come from a concentrated 'mass' at the foot of the pillar on my right. This 'heavenly' experience was suddenly rudely shattered by my becoming aware that my body was like a black pit, as big as a bucket, wide open for anything to enter! Appalled, I held my arms tightly across myself to close up this awful hole. What did I shut out? From that moment, and for the next two years, I had no interest in my church going. I seemed to be completely cast out from a feeling of nearness to God – and what was worse I did not want to be near. [003706, F; event: 1965]

The next description, although no doubt frightening, had a more amusing side to it as the Writer describes how she stays overnight in a chapel:

I have also had frightening experiences, and some difficult to explain. Once I had to sleep in a chapel, and in the night I was rudely turned over by some invisible person and told not to snore. I was so frightened that I crossed myself and sat up and read my bible. This comforted me so I went back to sleep again. The next night the same person told me to turn over, but I was not touched, much to my relief. [000958, F]

A negative experience can also happen in a random place as if the evil were suddenly present for no apparent reason. The following writer had spent a couple of pleasant hours with an aunt and then on the way home on the subway, she had the following experience:

I was in a pleasant relaxed frame of mind – my mind idle – my eyes shut when I was quite suddenly ‘assaulted’ by a sense of Evil. I opened my eyes to see if anyone had entered the compartment of the train but it was empty but for a middle aged man who seemed to be snoozing in the corner diagonally opposite and for a pleasant looking girl who sat opposite. I was filled with an indescribable feeling of mental revulsion and horror, but my mind seemed to work like that of a threatened animal as I tried to sense from where the threat came. I felt as if my mind was being threatened by some destructive force and thought it might be associated with the people or the compartment and determined to leave the train some three stations before I should normally leave and either get a train or walk. I left the train and was aware that the evil was with me. I felt I couldn’t combat it, then argued that I couldn’t recoil so completely if it were part of me and that I must pray for help.

The writer used the Lord’s Prayer to combat the sense of evil. She felt mentally out of balance:

The strange thing was that one part of my mind seemed to be in with this conflict and seemed to direct me, and to reason fairly logically with me, but somehow could not reassure. I stayed in my room for a day and contemplated going home as I felt that I was mentally deranged.

By the end of three days this horror had departed and the memory gradually became less vivid, but it was one of the moving factors in my life. I have no way of describing this evil force and never thought there was a similar force till I read of the German concentration camps and thought that this was the force that planned them.

I know that I haven’t given any idea of the ‘destructiveness’ of this evil and I really know of no words to describe this. I still am reluctant to resurrect this horror. I felt, however, that there was a tremendous conflict between what I perhaps could call – elemental – unhuman forces and that some part of me – not my reasoning mind – was engaged. [001476, F, 62; event: 42 years ago]

The disconcerting aspect of this experience seems to be its randomness. The sense of evil turned up out of the blue and, according to the writer, was not in any way connected with her frame of mind prior to the experience. The evil followed her until it gradually subsided. The same sort of randomness is described by the next writer. He encountered a presence when he was out walking one evening. He felt a shaft of icy cold air about 3 ft. in diameter and taller than him. It followed him home and he could feel it while in bed. The next day he ‘was somewhat a little frightened and I was convinced it was an evil spirit.’ He used the crucifix and prayer and found that his room seemed charged with electricity. ‘I felt “fresh” and “clean” so with a sigh of relief I offered thanks to God. I knew then that I would not be troubled by any evil spirit again.’ The writer then experienced at midnight what he interprets as the ‘pain of the cross’ and he wept for mercy.

My prayers were not answered and this pain continued. From prayers I turned to curses at a cruel and merciless God and that had no effect either. As I rolled and groaned I thought that this must be the work of the devil and the crucifix has lost its power.

He then hears the word of God that he is his son and his name will be known all over the world. He sees himself as going mad. ‘I was being tortured and tormented by a God of Love – for no reason at all.’ The next morning blood appeared on his head and for two months he suffered the pain of the cross. He experienced suffering for several years. [003096, M]

This experience shows clearly the ambiguity of the experience of evil. The expulsion of the evil spirit leads to an experience of the torment of God, which the writer at first interprets as the work of the devil because of the suffering that he is sharing with the son of God. There is a very fine line between a positive suffering and a negative suffering. Somehow the price to pay for the cleansing of the evil spirit is to share the pain of the cross. The next writer is ‘walking’ just as fine a line:

It was a cold, dark, wet Sunday evening; we had almost driven through Huddersfield when my husband stopped the car on a hill to put in a spare can of petrol. I looked across the road and noticed in the gloom a very large wooden cross on the brick wall of a modern church. I went over to have a closer look and as I was peering at the cross a 'voice', not mine, yet within, said 'All the churches are wrong; I come from a world beyond worlds.'

I was not in a religious frame of mind at the time and was very surprised. In fact, those words have haunted me to this day. [003349, F; event: September 1977]

A place in nature can also suddenly induce fear.

Sometime in July 1969 we [my husband and I] drove through Sweden on our way to Denmark. As we aimed at arriving in Dragør near Copenhagen early in the morning we decided to rest for some hours in the car next to the E4 road. We stopped in the middle of the night (or at least late evening) somewhere in Småland, where a small gravel road (without road signs) led into the wood. We did not drive very far from the E4, perhaps 100-200 metres where we found a dark opening between the high trees. We parked, turned off the lights and leaned back in the seats.

I felt a strong sense of uneasiness, almost fear, and looked round me, but did not discover anything out of the ordinary. The sense of uneasiness only increased, so I told Henrik, my husband, about it, who admitted to also feeling ill at ease. We both wished to leave the area immediately and instantly turned the thought into action. We drove back to the E4 and before we left the area I looked back and imagined that the opening in all the dark green had, at some stage, been a place of sacrifice. Where this thought of the past came from I do not know, there was no apparent reason. The mixture of fear and horror did not disappear for either of us until we had driven some kilometres further down the E4. After the sense of fear disappeared we both felt greatly relieved.

As there were no road signs I do not know where we were in Småland, but after a couple of hours we were in Helsingborg, from where we took the boat to Helsingør in Denmark. I have not been able to find, on later journeys, the same slip road into the wood. [005217, F, 53; event: July 1969]

The writer above had a sense of having stumbled on an ancient sacrificial place whereas the next writer later realised that she had, indeed, been to a place used by a satanic cult.

Approximately 20 years ago I had an experience that I will never forget! On a lovely Monday when the sun was shining and the trees had just fully come into leaf we were staying in our cottage in the country. The cottage is situated by the sea and an attractive smaller wood where I have been walking many times with our dog, on my own or with my husband.

This Monday my husband suggested visiting another wood which was about ten minutes by car and go for a walk with the dog there. This wood turned out to be much larger and equally beautifully situated by sea. As we went into the wood our little dog, who never went far away from us, would not leave us at all, but walked all the time between us, which very much puzzled us. When we had walked for a while deeper into this wood I noticed a large impressive swan lying with its wings and neck stretched out. It was clear that it had not been dead for a long time. I had already by then started to feel uneasy and had a sense of horror which I had never experienced before and definitely not in a wood.

As we progressed we found several dead birds along the path. We also reached an open space where there had been a bonfire. I felt more and more anxious and eventually said to my husband: 'I don't know how you feel but I have a sense of evil and horror in this wood.' My husband then said that he had not wanted to tell me but he had heard that a satanic cult had used the wood. I wanted to go home immediately. I find it extraordinary that human evil can change the whole atmosphere in a large wood. [005218, F, 78; event: 1970s, in Denmark]

The writer of this letter had no doubt that the evil she felt was connected with the deeds of human beings still lingering in the wood. The next description, however, seemed to arrive out of the blue in a beautiful landscape. The writer had had previous positive spiritual

experiences that were connected with music. She was walking on the slopes near Lausanne, the sun going down over a lake, the scene indescribably peaceful. She heard a click that she connected with an attack of mania and some sort of depersonalisation took place.

I heard the distant music but it was different. Soon the whole sky seemed to be rocking, the impression was sinister and awe-inspiring, impossible to describe in words. I thought of the tramp of armed hosts, did this mean another war was coming? There was a distinct menace in the air, a motif I could not understand, a thudding, rocking, reverberation, ominous and sullen with some meaning I could not fathom. I held my ground, what was all this about? What did it mean? What was the message? The air was full of sound, musically discordant, raging, menacing and terrifying – the cosmic orchestra was angry, charged with doom.

She stood frightened and heard the pounding of hooves. Later she interprets the experience as the 'Centaur's Hooves'. The divine human head and the animal parts represents man's lower nature. 'So the struggle had begun for me!' [002245, F, 60+; event: 1936]

This experience is different from the preceding two by being connected with a state of mind in the experiencer. It is also believed to carry a message and might be understood as a prediction of war.

War as the incarnation of evil is described in the next letter, where the writer experienced the evil of the battlefield.

I remember looking over the battlefield after the fury of the struggle had subsided. I think I passed through this experience first at the battle of Wadi Aparit in North Africa and I felt much the same thing at Monte Cassino in Italy.

The desolation of the battlefield was obvious enough but the case of a brooding evil over the scene was overpowering. The words 'The Spirit brooded over the waters' from Genesis seemed the most apt way to describe the impression created ... Although the experience I have described took the form of a brooding spirit of evil I do not believe this was personal spirit in the form of a Demon or Devil. It might have arisen from a sense of horror and remorse at the sight of war. It might be the effect of a collective sense of horror or guilt and shame felt by many soldiers who had taken part in the battle and survived. In each case I have mentioned I was alone and looking over the battlefield and without much evidence of troops about. Still there were troops in their battle position all round.

I conclude by suggesting that this was a community of souls sharing under stress of war, their common opinion of war as profound evil. [000619, M, 60; event: during the Second World War]

The experience of evil in connection with the life of the soldier is also described in the next letter although it might not be directly related to war.

Twice in Egypt I had a sense of overpowering evil. They cannot be related to anything specifically Arabic or Ancient Egyptian. Both occurred at night, one of them with the tent lamp still on and three other officers present. This occurred soon after landing, when we were still in the Eastern Desert; the other came later in the Western Desert. Both times it was the seeming awareness of a malign presence so tangible that it was endowed with something like a shape. The effect was to make my limbs rigid and induce profuse sweating. I achieved nothing closer to prayer than a mental scream for help when the shape glided away. On both occasions I had retired to bed which is probably why my fellow subalterns saw nothing the first time but I am quite clear that I had not even begun to fall asleep. [000876, M, 52]

Lastly, a sense of evil can also be connected to a famous place. 'I have always been susceptible to atmosphere, i.e. a feeling of Evil and sadness at Bedruthan Steps in Cornwall and the same feeling when in a room that had a clock commemorating the French revolution'. [002365, F, 51] The last writer in this chapter connects in her letter the dream

and the place. The writer is narrating a dream where she experiences in great horror how Greek carved figures take on life and change into living beings:

My horror increased as I became aware that they were all slowly insinuating their bodies towards me. Then, one by one, with the same fearful slowness, they began to step down from their pedestals to close in around me, and sheer panic-stricken terror sent me screaming, yet unable to make a sound, out through the door and down the wide steps, only to find myself confronted by water.

She was then rescued by Pegasus. She, however, knew that she has to turn back to a Rotunda. 'In spite of my terror I re-entered the Rotunda and there the evil figures were awaiting me.' They closed in on her and she woke in a terrible state. When she visited Stourhead later she recognised there her dream to the last detail. 'My friend says that I gave a cry of terror, turned and flew down the steps ashen faced and trembling,' She had another asthma attack. She had never seen Stourhead before. [003221, F]

3. Evil present in or entering into a human being

In several letters there is a sense of evil penetrating or present within the writer's body. This sense is obviously very frightening and some of the letters describe experiences that are leading to or verging on mental illness: 'Since 1954 I was sent berserk, heard voices and felt "possessed". Obviously evil spirit entities overpowered me and prevented me earning my livelihood. I have been a prisoner since, having to rely on drugs and shock treatment'. [002073, F]

The letters cover a wide range, including one from a child sensing himself as evil during a raid to steal from a church:

On the side hanging from the wall was a statue of the Virgin Mary and I couldn't take my eyes off her. I felt cold and evil and the more I looked her eyes seemed to burn into mine.

Then I started to cry, and that is something being born in slums you learn not to do. Anyway I ran out of that church all the way home. My mother thought I was ill – there wasn't a bit of colour in my face.

And to this day I haven't stolen a single thing and everytime I see a statue of the Virgin Mary I think of the time in the church and I really believe that I was saved from a bad life of crime. [001830, M, 35; event: 14]

On the other hand, someone recounted the more sinister sense of having become the son of Satan:

I was walking down a street (I was ten) and I suddenly thought 'Am I the son of Satan?' A curious thought which I always remembered. Why had God directed me to this memory. I suddenly KNEW that God meant that I was the son of Satan!!!

An intense self-loathing overwhelmed me and I fell to my knees and desperately prayed for God's mercy!!! (I realised that if the Rector suspected I was the Son of Satan he would murder me!) ... As Christ was the Son of God, so I was the Son of Satan.

The writer understands that this was connected with original sin and that 'We are ALL Sons of Satan'. When he had a nervous breakdown he had been 'in Satan's clutches!!!' He understands that God's colours are blue and white and Satan's are black and yellow.

Suddenly I saw Satan. He was a brownish-black demon with close-set beady black eyes, pointed ears and forked tail. In his right hand he carried a 3 pronged fork: in his left hand he carried a long pair of pincers. He was surrounded by rat-like devils. Satan caused the room to become icy cold (God is hot, Satan is cold). Satan gripped my toes in his pincers causing excruciating pain. (God 'attacks' the Head, Satan attacks the toes.)

He then exorcises Satan with the help of God and the cross. 'To my relief, Satan went: the room felt hot again and my toes lost the excruciating ache of Satan's pincers.' The writer then proceeds to attend church and sees the sign of God in many occurrences. [003024, M, 43]

The power of calling for God when the feeling of evil is overpowering is mentioned several times: 'One day (it was early afternoon) and I was tidying up the living room I felt a terrible sense of evil within me, it was absolutely horrible and I suddenly knew at that moment that I had to find God, I just knew he was there.' [001737, F, 52]

One of the more dramatic descriptions of possession and exorcism is by a man who, at a convention, walked together with a young man who narrated falling into bad company and being unable to resist temptation. The writer considers how to help when:

What happened next was over a very short space of time. Breaking through the silence, and crashing through the darkness with tremendous power came my voice: 'IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST DEPART.' Immediately N- let out a half shout, and fell towards me. He said afterwards, 'At those words, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" I saw a black form appear from somewhere at my feet and vanish into the wood, and, at the same time, something indescribable left me.' [M. prays for N-.]

It seemed as if horrifying pandemonium had been let loose; as if all powers of Hell were concentrated in that spot in the wood. I saw numbers of black shapes, blacker than night, moving about and seeking to come between me and N- who I was gripping hard. I saw three demon spirits, perhaps more, between N- and myself. These shapes were intelligences. They were different from one another. Each had a personality of its own. They began to buffet me, not striking me physically, but thrusting me backwards in spirit away from N- so as to make me recoil, perhaps from fear, and so lose my hold. Two other demon spirits, about shoulder high were just behind me. One on my right, the other on my left. These two were moving about with a swaying, menacing up and down motion, such as boxers use when seeking an opening for attack.

The writer cried out for help in prayer. In the end he shouted a verse from the scripture and the atmosphere changes. N- feels delivered from the evil. 'Quite independently N- told how he had seen seven black forms emerge from the trees in the wood, and how he felt some power pushing him forward out of my grip'. [000248, M, 45] The description of the spirits is intriguing as they are seen as separate personalities and therefore resembled the kind of spirits that are described among indigenous peoples.

The next writer also experienced that evil left her body with the help of God, but from within herself:

The most extraordinary experiences occurred on a couple of nights close to each other, whilst we were living there, in that house. Lying awake and relaxed, I was suddenly aware that two strangers, one good and one evil were battling inside me whilst I remained an impartial observer of the conflict. Deep inside me a little voice said 'Father, Thy will, not mine, be done'. The 'evil something' was pulled out through the soles of my feet, as though by unseen hands. The experience was rather exhausting. [001425, F, 45; event: early in married life]

Seeing evil entering as a silver flash into the leg was what happened to the next informant who, however, had a more complex understanding of the role of God, which she did not see as necessarily benevolent, but just powerful: she experiences an icy feeling in the leg and a friend screamed that he has seen a silver flash near her leg. She repeated the Lord's Prayer but felt as if something was choking her. Exorcised in Westminster Cathedral she did not think that it had worked and lived in constant fear of being possessed.

I prayed and prayed. One night I felt a force, it was greater than the 'spirit thing'. I thought it must be what we call God. I was suddenly no longer afraid of spirits, as I felt this force to be far stronger. Something that could snap the earth in two. Like a tremendous id. But I did not feel it to be at all a benevolent force. It was neither good nor bad, just all powerful. But not the 'all good' idea that I had of God. Since then I have stopped praying, as I believe, this force could move mountains, if it so wanted, but as I said, was by no means a benevolent father figure. [003518, F]

The next writer encountered the old method of spreading salt against evil spirit. She had played 'Cupid' in a marriage that proved a failure. She then believed that the mother of the bride had put a spell on her. She found salt had been put in special places and felt influenced by the spell. She became more and more restless and ultimately, when her son visited, she rambled on about the evil neighbours. 'The next day he went to work and we spoke on the 'phone – I was feeling more reverent – and the restlessness continued. Knowing now some evil force was taking hold of me – I wanted a Priest.' After a visit from the priest she felt that 'the Holy Spirit had entered my body. It was helping me to destroy an evil force and truly showing me the way.' [001121, F]

In this description it looks as if the mother of the bride has seen the writer as evil and that the writer herself then incorporated that concept into her own body as she believed herself to be under a spell and experienced the evil. This is apparently a well-known phenomenon in witch-craft accusations.

The sense that you can actually induce evil into another person's life is what the next writer experienced at the illness of her sister's husband:

It was such a grotesque coincidence [the illness coincided with the anniversary of the death of her own husband] that I somehow used destructive energy to take away her husband too, that a deep jealousy of which I knew nothing had piled up year after year until the anniversary had at last come when I struck. (Some evil generated within me. I by no means credit myself with such powers! It was long before I quite got over it.)

All this had gone. Peaceful is the wrong word but I felt in the hand of something positive and harmonious. This was plainly and quite ordinarily conscious. [000767. F, 48]

A wish for the death of another person takes on a murderous scale at the following writer's hand:

Shortly after I first wrote to you, I entered one of those unpleasant negative cycles, that strike most of us at times called by the mystics 'dark night of the soul' or 'desert journey'. I suppose it helps somewhat to dramatise these things, if one does not understand their reason scientifically, and even the best have a very human tendency to gloat over 'bad trips', and get a certain satisfaction out of relating their unpleasant experiences!

She continued to describe her relationship to her family and her general life as being difficult. Her husband had been ill and slept with a gun near the bed. She experienced a ten feet high 'space friend' in her bedroom.

Then a dreadful thing occurred. I was washing Roy's [her husband's] back, him sitting in the bath, when suddenly like a flash, from somewhere deep inside me shot out a violent urge to murder Roy, drown him in the bath! It was almost obsessive, and if I hadn't acted like lightning I'd attempted it. Instead I ran for the door rushed out slamming it and threw myself on the bed weeping. I was horrified, because I really did love Roy, and had no desire at all to put him out of the way or hurt him in any way at all. Then I knew what he meant by 'blackness'. It was there all right, a horrid evil kind of 'atmosphere' which seemed to be concentrated in one particular corner of the room. Then I wasn't scared any more because I thought I knew why the space police were there ... to protect us.

She has considered burning the house down because of a bad financial situation. She is then taken by the 'space friend' to a desert and underwent a contest where she had the existence of God confirmed. She then decided to contact a medium who gave her a prayer. She first thinks that she has 'cleaned' the house but then had the following experience:

I rushed into the bedroom and lay down to be immediately scared nearly out of my wits. In the 'bad' corner of our bedroom were two or three enormous 'suggestions of figures', sort of misty but terrifically strong, emitting vibrations so strong one felt quite powerless to rise or even move. I now know what a rabbit feels like when caught in the headlamps of a car. I call whatever it was the Tall ones', because they were so tall they had to bend over to get in the corner at all. And they seemed to be doing something to that corner with enormous power. 1000166, F]

They then communicated with her that they were harmless to humans. She recounted that when they sold the contents of the farm, which took place after the exorcism, they got terrific prices.

There is sometimes a compulsion to destroy which is then converted by exorcism. The category of mental illness springs to mind in this description, especially as the experiences seem to have prevailed over a long time, the powers then being incorporated into the life of the writer. This is, however, realised by the next writer. After a mental breakdown, the writer felt that she had regained her awareness of God.

I have said the years of illness robbed me of awareness of God. They also brought me something else – an awareness of evil. The way my mind worked during the mental breakdown – or rather when partly recovered – gave me a powerful feeling that some evil power was taking advantage of the circumstances, and trying to hold sway in me. This was unexpected, but was so real that I came to think that perhaps after all the New Testament idea of devil possession in illness was not so wide of the mark after all!

She forced herself to go to a church meeting: 'They meant little to me and sometimes caused me extreme mental suffering or emotional disturbance which it took all my will power to control.'

Again this time, but in a different way, I had the feeling of some evil force working against my recovery. I experienced an inability to do some of the most ordinary and simple things and although I am a very strong willed person, it was impossible by willpower to overcome this. It seemed as though some power gripped me, a power stronger than myself, which has determined that I should do nothing.

After a sense of well-being for several months, she continued. She questioned whether her own situation had given evil an opportunity. [001327, F, 61; event: in her 30s] The question of whether a mental disease opens the doors for evil or whether mental disease is the result of evil is what this writer is toiling with. As mental disease often leads to a lack of control, and possession is seen in the same light, there is an understandable correlation between these two angles on the cause of mental illness.

The last writer became ill by seeing her dead mother and connecting this experience to evil. She experienced her mother's death as facing hell and started her letter; 'It wasn't in heaven that I found God. It was in Hell.' When her mother was ill in hospital the writer went to visit her. She had seen her as very beautiful when she last visited, but then she was faced with the following experience:

When we got round the screen an horrific sight met our eyes. My mother's face was the colour of aubergine and she was panting like a stricken animal ... For the shock of seeing her in this ghastly condition went inward with me and I stood rooted to the ground and overcome with the terrible sight which seemed to me to be something evil. [003066, F]

The writer became mentally ill and was admitted to hospital three days later. It is understandable that, if the death struggle is connected with evil, for the relatives of the dying person the whole concept of that person alters and must have had a considerable impact on the relatives' experience of the loss of the person. As mentioned earlier (see p. 16, and also see p.40), in many cultures the dead body is seen as 'unclean' and dangerous and the relatives dealing with the body equally so. Evil and death are intertwined.

4. Evil intent in another person

A few writers narrate encounters with evil intent in another person or in a group of persons. To attach the sense of evil to a known individual is difficult in this age of scientific enlightenment and New Age compassion. It is as if one is restoring the witch craze and it is, therefore, not happily acknowledged. Although the evil eye and the curse are common in indigenous cultures our Western society seems to shy away from these concepts. 'I also know the sickening effect on the body, mind and spirit of confused, anxious or evil thoughts and emotions emanating from other persons. With Christ's help my natural re-actions are being transformed into expressions of understanding and goodwill, replacing all forms of aggressions with love'. [001317, F, 63] Some, however, do not attempt to transform a perception of evil or hate in another person: 'I am very aware of the forces of pure good in people just as I am aware of the evil and hate emanating from people. I was once acutely aware of this hate directed at me. The person was a member of my family; we were not having a disagreement or a quarrel, though we were out of harmony. This sensation, call it ESP or what you will, became violently clear to me and filled me with fear because of the strength of it'. [001936, F, 54] One writer even felt joy in the face of hate by adhering to the words of Christ. In a disagreement with a fellow assistant in a laboratory a fight started, but the writer literally turns the other cheek: 'Our eyes met, and I experienced ecstasy (spiritual); and he the opposite in hatred and evil.' He felt detached from the body and an intense joy. [001051, M]

The writer of the following letter experienced a need to help people in pain, including a person who had fears of persecution and who was unpopular with other women. She tried to aid the person but admits her own fault in starting this process at all.

Anyway to cut a long story short I more or less offered to take her pain. Everything started from then. The next day I saw the shop through her eyes – friends I viewed with suspicion, I saw plots where none existed and felt a menace which was quite alien to my normal perception. That night she telephoned (very angry because something in a book I had lent her triggered off a reaction which I rather think she had suppressed for many years). When I heard her voice I experienced a terrible feeling of fear. As the evening wore on I had an awareness of fear and evil more than anything I have ever experienced in my life. I telephoned a friend who had warned me against the person (on the advice of her spiritualist medium). As I spoke to her I felt some of it physically drain away. Then the person telephoned again and apologised. The following two days and nights were like a nightmare: I was continually aware of evil and fear – a dreadful atmosphere and experienced the most alarming nightmares. I dreamed at one point that I was going out of my mind. [000736, F]

The other person, however, improved, when she went through the same experiences as the narrator. 'She experienced such fear and awareness of evil as to bring about vomiting and was so frightened that she took to wearing a cross for protection.' The writer is sure that this person had some power of hypnotism which had influenced her. Here it seems as if in taking an interest in the well-being of another person the writer exposed herself to the evil that was connected to that person. The fear and sense of evil seem to become apparent to the other person and as she recognised them she also started to take precautions against them.

A group of people can also be seen to be the tool of evil as in the following experience. The writer took part in a healing service which restored her health. She then feels full of vitality and new life, working harder than she had ever done before for the House of Divine Healing connected with the church.

It seemed as though this happy state of things could go on indefinitely but it was not to be. I feel that the sequel to this story should be told, because religious experiences are not only of the sublime, uplifting kind described above, but also of the evil which seems always to be at work to undermine the purposes of God.

Suddenly and for no apparent reason members of the staff working with me launched an attack on me, making false accusations against me and refusing to listen when I tried to refute them and reason with them. A storm of anger and abuse arose against which I was powerless. I felt the God-given life and vitality draining from me, illness returned, and I broke down completely. The vicar concerned was so much influenced by these people that he did nothing to help me, and I was left to suffer alone.

I am as vividly aware now of the power of evil as I was previously of the power of the love of God, and am left wondering which of the two will eventually prevail. [002949, F, 69]

Even the vicar was believed to be under the influence of the malevolent intent of the group of people and the writer therefore wondered which force was the stronger. It is tempting to reflect on the nature of the persecution complex in this description of evil.

The existence of evil intent influencing missionary work is narrated in the following account. The writer describes being at the Cyrene Mission where 'cripples' lived. She saw an ape-like figure who turned his head when he saw her. Her husband later met him at the church and had a similar experience, wishing to leave. 'Later our camera set on a tripod to snap the group outside the Church on a windless day suddenly appeared to be flung on the ground. I could not meet the eyes of the apparition when he turned his head and I heard a curious drumming sound as he passed. He was undoubtedly evil.'

She continues to describe the negative events happening to the mission: the breakdown of the priest, fear of bewitchment, nightmares for children, the chapel set on fire. The 'cripples' were moved. The wife of the assistant priest believed that the stresses and strains of the 'crippled' had led to these events.

It was not the first time that the writer was aware of evil intent in another person. As a young woman she had experienced a meeting in a hotel with a doctor who showed her unwelcome attention in the hotel kitchen.

I found myself looking into the eyes that engulfed me in darkness. I saw a wall of dark water approaching and I felt my will was not strong enough to withstand the onslaught. I prayed. [She receives help] At the same time I found myself blinking as my normal vision returned and before me the doctor was bowing from the waist. The entire kitchen appeared to be turned into stone as everyone stood staring in astonishment. [003919, F]

She feels the evil hanging over her for a month until she sees a giant angelic figure. She then feels freed from the power of the 'hypnotist'. This sense of hypnotism attached to a person of evil intent might be a way of describing the loss of power over one's own senses. The evil is perceived as penetrating into the mind of the narrator (see also no.000736, quoted on p.26).

A preacher described an experience during the period when he was accepted for the ministry. After a conference, the writer gave a lift to another preacher who tried to persuade

him to join his fellowship group. This other preacher talked about the second blessing and speaking in tongues. He also spoke of how he had predicted another man's death because of his resistance to this message. The writer knew that the person who had been mentioned was actually dead and realised that he was in contact with evil. He was later contacted by followers of this preacher while he was preaching but decided to ridicule them and was left alone. Watching a group of Morris dancers later induced a feeling of evil. 'I had this terrible sense of evil. As if their dance was evoking forces in me which were hidden or locked up.' He has a similar experience watching a dance on TV. The dancer tried to capture a young girl under the skirt of the horse costume that he was wearing. 'Just as when I saw the Morris Dancers I had this sense of evil. Thinking about it now, perhaps a better way to describe the feeling was one of impending doom.' [003921, M]

Again the evil in another person or group of persons finds a sounding-board in the writer. Somehow recognising evil made contact with aspects of himself that he was unwilling to face. Another writer recalled her experience when as a child of eight she encountered a person who, in her young eyes, represented the personification of evil. During the beginning of a storm she got afraid and she then spotted an elderly gentleman, Mr. Spiller, who always wore black gloves. 'Mr. Spiller was to me, the personification of the evil and the unknown. I was frozen.' Then the sun broke through and 'Suddenly I knew that there was light in dark places; and I experienced a security in the face of which evil palled.' [001520, F, 59]

The last description is more like an encounter with an evil spirit. After having lost her young son in an accident, the writer felt his spiritual presence and after having placed the body in a coffin she had an experience in which he began to drift away and part of her decided to go with him. On the journey she asked for help from dead friends. 'Soon after this, our travelling spirits encountered a man to whom I had been formerly engaged, Harry Whittaker, who had died in 1953. To my surprise, he seemed to encircle us like a dark, evil and powerful cloud, and I clearly remember asking someone in authority to help us get clear and we shot by and went on our way.' She continued her spirit journey with her son and the contact with the spirit world. Then she realised that her son had arrived at his destination. She finally saw herself as a channel for the healing of God. [002719, F, 48; event: May 1957, 33] The mother is here functioning as a psychopomp.

5. Evil as a state of mind

A state of depression and evil are explicitly connected by many writers. Depression is likened to a sense of being dragged down into hell and the idea of God being beyond the grasp of the person who was experiencing this 'terrifying blackness'.

Conversely, one could I suppose just as well believe that depression itself is an evil power beyond and outside one's individual self, dragging one down into the pit of hell. At the time it certainly feels like this and of course in these dark moments any idea of God, divine power or whatever, is totally outside one's conscious mental life. As far as I am concerned certain kinds of depression can only be cured via a synthesis of religion, 'psi', medicine and psychiatry. No such synthesis is available to the sufferer who has pulled himself out of the hellish pit with his own bootstrap. [000280, M, 36]

The depression is sometimes contrasted with a sense of peace and happiness or light. In the following account the writer had an 'out-of-body experience' which has left her in great peace and happiness.

This experience occurred a few days after a dreadful 'Valley' experience, when I felt that I was buried in the bottomless pit – an agonising, indescribable, horrifying sensation of passing through

‘the valley of the Shadow of Death’ – this came upon me, following a period of doubt and permitting humanhood and world hypnosis to enter my consciousness – an experience I now wish to forget! [002251,F, 63; event: 1971]

A friend helped her into the light again. Another writer had the opposite experience. She had been ill for some time and cried out in despair for help. She first experienced an ‘indescribable light’ and then cried:

As suddenly as I had been transported into the light I was flung, literally flung, into the most terrifying blackness. It was such a shock that I cried out loud and prayed that I might be allowed to see again that light if only for a few seconds to let me down gradually. But there was no answer and after a period of depression I slowly returned to normal. [000683, F, 73]

The next two writers were helped by their belief in God as they felt ‘possessed’.

During the period before the breakdown, I suffered terrible depression when all I could see and feel was darkness and evil. I felt that I had been possessed by a dark and terrible force, which was bent upon destroying me. I prayed that ‘God’ would help me and even wrote down, in the form of a poem, my despair. My prayers were answered. I was given strength to fight this evil. The battle for my life has made me grateful and I try to live each day as fully as I can. [000893, F, 34]

and

After the war ended and after a period of intolerable strain I broke. For about nine months I lived in intense misery, and it seemed as if someone was presenting my whole life to me, and only one action at a time. Clairaudiently a voice spoke and said ‘This is hell’, and although before this breakdown I had thought of myself as a reasonable good living woman I now saw myself as black and evil. It was also as if a corner of a veil had been lifted, and I saw in my own life and in the lives of those around me the return of all actions both good and evil. From this I judged that there was an order scheme in the universe and that therefore a Universal Spirit existed.

During this nine month period it seemed as if I was possessed by evil and for most of the time I raved. [003585, F; event: after the war]

The second writer believes in the existence of God and obtained help by calling Him and eventually lived in ecstasy ‘possessed with the desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.’ The sense of fighting for one’s soul prevails behind these examples. Depression could be linked to a lack of grace, a feeling that the divine somehow had left the person to fend for herself. The writer experienced a burst of writing in the early mornings. She talked about having the right spirit. Then she went into a depressive state, feeling despair even at church, that the holy spirit had been taken away from her. ‘When I couldn’t sleep, the nights were sheer hell, full of terror and remorse. My husband was, as always, kind and understanding but though sympathetic, nobody could have any idea of the torment I was in’. One particularly awful night she told him:

‘It is as if the devil is fighting for my soul’ ... The depression in which the mind can see only evil unadulterated renders one useless – one is turned to stone ... The same acute perception which enables you to see Good magnified also makes you see Evil magnified. You feel ashamed and guilty and naked – exposed to the thorns and thistles, the toil and pain of the human condition on earth. [003433, F, 58]

A sense of depression can also be seen as a foreboding of sad news. The next writer experienced on a Saturday morning that she was ‘suddenly overwhelmed by a feeling of intense darkness, foreboding and depression and cannot describe the horror of it.’ She was later informed that her husband’s ship had been hit that very day. Her ten year old daughter was contacted in a dream by her father, who asked her to tell her mother not to go on hoping, because he was dead. [001033, F; event: 1943]

Complicated relationships to other people might also induce a sense of being in hell. 'I have had a very intense experience of "hell". In certain circumstances I felt completely cut off from people and from God because of a particularly messy personal relationship.' [000871, F, 53] The correspondent felt the love of God as an intense sensation. 'Then for, what seemed like an instant, the love-feeling disappeared and I had the sensation of total disintegration, of being torn asunder atom by atom; it was inexpressibly horrible. I interpreted this as a feeling of eternal damnation.' But then the feeling of love returned. [003532, M, 35; event: winter 1962] The next writer found herself facing the terror of being rejected by God. During a very severe attack of asthma and while feeling close to dying she tried to give herself back to her creator saying, 'Thy will be done', and to her horror,

I realised that I was not accepted. An unutterable loneliness and desolation came upon my very innermost spirit. I was rejected. With a great vagueness, a chasm of emptiness and loneliness and terror – stark terror, gaping before me. As I write this I recognise that the memory can bring a wave of near panic into my mind. Nothing can describe it.

After this experience the writer was afraid of going mad but was told by her eldest son 'that these experiences have been known, and are recognised and can be given to people. And it meant nothing sinister. What a relief of mind.' She continued,

However, I hope never to have even a glimpse of that terrible thing again. Coward for physical pain that I am, I remember knowing in my mind soon after, that if I had the choice between physical torture or this spiritual agony of terror and rejection – I would not choose the latter. [001276, F; event: late 40s]

Confronting the dark side of the soul is described by several writers as a constant struggle: 'It was not just that I realised that God became involved in human affairs for our sake in the Person of Jesus but that I, too, am involved in the eternal struggle between Good, and Evil and this struggle is both real and Personal. The conviction that Christ dealt with the problem of Sin and effected the ground of a new relationship with God was growing in my consciousness.' [000891, M, 40] 'I no longer profess to a Christian belief or any named religion as such, but I have always looked for and used the faith of others in times of stress or whenever extra strength is needed. I am ready to accept that any faith in the power for good is necessary for mankind, to combat the equally powerful forces of evil which I think are obviously just as real.' [000920, F, 45] 'This cosmos that I become aware of is entirely good; evil appears to result from attempts of my ego, my normal consciousness, to take control.' [000937, F, 56] 'In a circumstance I was doubtful about whether I experienced another kind of "entity" outside myself and would be terribly afraid if I got into its clutches, it was a "horror" as is written about by Conrad I think and probably the "Devil".' [001302, F]

6. The nature of evil

Several writers try to come to terms with the duality of spirituality both outside themselves as well as inside their own mind or soul. Some attempt to explain evil as one side of the god-head, others understand evil as detached from the concept of the Divine and residing inside the human being so that evil is understood as original sin. In the words of the General Confession: 'there is no health in us, miserable offenders'. Somehow, however, the responsibility for many writers ultimately lies in the attitude of the person:

This spiritual life is all about us, and plays a much greater part in our lives than most of us believe. Such enters into our minds and our thinking even though we are not aware of it happening. It is the source of higher and uplifting thoughts, creative thinking, and also evil and perverse thinking, because this spiritual life occurs in both good and evil forms. Good can come only from good, and evil only from evil. Evil men who lived in the past remain evil when their spirits left their bodies and went into spiritual realms. [001985, M, 62]

and

It was then that I realised the meaning of Hell: as the state of being is eternally present in every moment when the soul exists in denial of itself. No words can describe such a phenomenon without evoking it in the mind; all that I can declare is its meaning. To be in Hell is to have given to one all the accumulated returns of one's will, all one's private hatreds and fears, and everything which one has always sought to reject, to repress, or to avoid by explaining away. In a word Hell is oneself alone. [002295, Anon]

The duality of God, the dark side of the light, is expressed in the following letter but this is placed outside the influence of the writer who is more a 'victim' of events:

All this feels like some sort of belief in God: a benign God who has worked things out for me and an angry God who will punish me if I deserve to be punished – or maybe even if I don't. My Jewish upbringing instilled into me a deeply superstitious feeling that one must never eulogise about anything without muttering a prayer against the Evil Eye. Clearly, I don't see the Evil Eye as any sort of anti-God Devil-person; I see it, though as negative manifestation of a God, an outside-of-me-being, who could, and might, withdraw his/its benign influence. [001055, F, 41]

The impotence of man in facing these powers of good and evil was experienced by a young man sitting together with a group of friends, when he suddenly felt totally alone, an awareness that every human being lives in his or her own concept of reality:

I then became increasingly aware of the two forces upon which our universe is based. The two forces which scientists call positive and negative, and which philosophers call good and evil. The feeling climaxed until for one split second I was aware of the meaning of the universe with its many horrors and that I, as a human being, was totally at the mercy of the two universal powers. [002743, M, 19]

This sense of being at the mercy of two conflicting forces is also what the next writer experienced. She explains that she was a very nervous child:

I was as frightened of God as I was of the Devil! As we grew up and began to think, to reason that God only need a second o to make the word good, and that the d taken away left the word evil – these monsters became less alarming and the fact that one was free to try to be good, a good daughter, a good friend, a good person, was a great relief. The next step was to work out what was the goodness in its widest and kindest interpretation.

But evil in the shape of fear has never left me. I am fearful of its power. I can sense it in faces and places, in words, in sounds. I understand what is meant by 'the spirit'. I understand that it can serve good and evil, that it is a power one can 'tap' at will. [002934, F, 69]

It is the vulnerability of man that is of concern. That evil might somehow be available to humans, that God is not just offering protection constantly but that the spirit of evil has a power of its own, which might even possess attractiveness:

Then last October sitting at the fire with no thought of religion or serious matters I heard a clear unmistakable voice command my whole consciousness and say – 'This God you have found is Lucifer. He too is a God of light so good as to challenge the great God himself for the throne: the figments he defeats are the Satanic Powers of natural darkness. But both of these powers are the animal gods of the human species – follow Lucifer who is also Apollo and after returning to the life force at death you will be reborn in the evolving species, time limited on earth. Christ only, the God of the soul, can navigate you out of the gravity pull of the Universal unconscious that would hold you to the mammal. Go with him and escape death and the human condition forever. You are a hybrid species. Go with Lucifer back to the superior mammal or forward to pure spirit with Christ.' The voice finished.

The writer describes how she was grieved at the loss of 'my beautiful Lucifer and could not, cannot, believe that he was evil.' She could not find the living presence of Christ. 'In the end He will be there, the living presence I once knew and now only believe.' [003416, F, 51]

The spirit of evil dominating the world is what the next writer has come to realise. She feels she has received hope in a very lonely situation but then achieves insight to the nature of the world:

I told myself there must be a God after all and at the time it seemed he must be a personal God because I was so conscious of an intimate relationship with this power which had so changed my outlook. I felt I could now go into a church and truly worship, and I did begin to go to church occasionally.

But I must in honesty record that this experience did not carry me through to the remainder of what has been my life so far. Gradually the sense of newness of spirit receded, my old aversion to the average churchgoer (with his spiritual pride and his meanness of spirit) returned and I ceased to attend any church. And during the past five or six years I have had a distinct feeling that God has partly withdrawn from this world and the Spirit of Evil (the Devil) has filled the vacuum. In moments of need I still pray and I am still sure there exists a spiritual plane which man must endeavor to keep in touch with if he is to have a healthy soul, but I get more and more oppressed by the evil in the world – the materialism, the violence, the perverse sensuality. I find I retreat from the world more and more, finding my chief source of spiritual refreshment in creative hobbies and listening to classical music. [000875, F, 63]

Even the word of the Bible might be doubted when the Devil influences the perception of scripture. One writer was attending a conference week at Worthing on Prophetic Witness.

At the end of the week one had a sleepless night. It seemed to be a special attack of the enemy. One was tormented with doubts such as Why should we listen to Paul? Who was he anyway? Thessalonica was just an ordinary town and these people to whom Paul wrote were perhaps a group of poor folk etc., etc. So it went on and on and it seemed as though the Devil was there to make me believe all one had heard was utter nonsense and just not true. [002585, F, 77]

Then she saw the bedroom door open and a figure of Christ appeared, confirming her belief. The certainty of the ultimate power of God is also expressed by the next writer. He experienced a daily communication with God in terms of peace and a sense of rightness.

In addition I am certain of his control over the factors that influence my life from without and within. I am just as certain of the influence, power and evil of the Adversary, Satan. Having been personally associated at one time with one who was possessed by a demon who called himself 'The Lord thy God', I am aware of his reality as well.

I am grateful that God controls my life and not Satan, but everyday the fight against the evil one is renewed. Without God's strength provided for me, I am sure I would succumb. [003998, M]

The same kind of insight is described by this writer: 'I gained also a great awareness of an evil personality in the universe attempting to frustrate God's will for the universe and particularly for mankind. However I have found power in the Infinite One to overcome this evil power (e.g. in evil thinking and wrong actions).' [001533, M, 23]

The archive contains a collection of letters from Kenya [003772-94] which describe the relationship between traditional belief systems and Christianity:

I have been faced by many problems during my youth because I have undergone the teachings of the foreign religions and at the same time have almost inherited the traditional religions and beliefs which have greatly influenced my thinking and living.

After my mother had backslidden, the family was without resistance introduced into the devil's POWER. I could not understand what was going on because this time was before I was even seven. When I got to know and interpret things for myself I was also introduced into the seriousness of the matter.

At this early period of my life, my mother and grandmother told me that mother was to become one of the diviners of the village because 'Kathambi' (the devil) had demanded so.

The writer's mother would develop gifts of healing and divination, and thereby gain wealth. The mother and grandmother wished to clean the family from witchcraft and the writer felt divided between loyalty to the Sunday School teacher, whom he admired, and the family. His grandmother warned him against his lack of belief. She lectured him on charms: 'As you know, you are the only boy who is making good progress in education in the vicinity, you should be completely fortified against an attack from the evil ones.' This split led to severe problems for the boy and the family continuously tried to convince him of the necessity to follow their ways, whereas the teacher asks him to trust God. The writer's mother tried to convince him of the similarities between Christianity and the traditional faith: the communion and the blood sacrifice.

I wondered how I at the same time could owe allegiance to Christ, as well as to Satan ... After all the sacrifices were offered my hand got well. No one could convince me that it was not done by my ancestral spirits.

One day the writer's father came home drunk and wants him to read to him from the Bible. The reason turned out to be financial. 'He had learned that he had wasted a lot of riches on sacrifices to the evil one and yet he had not acquired any sort of peace except that he was faced by more problems than ever.' After reading from the Bible the father decided to have only one master. 'A church elder was called to witness the burning of all satanic instruments and other collections.' The letter ends with the writer stating that 'all the activities which do not conflict with Christianity in the traditional religion can be practised.' [003774, M]

The concept of the old belief system as the work of the devil was introduced by missionaries in many cultures. The young generation is faced with a conflict of loyalty which, as with this writer, resulted in not only an estrangement from his culture but also from his family. Still to use magic and experience positive healing, and at the same time believe that one is tampering with demonic forces, must create considerable spiritual conflict.

7. Exorcism, mediums, colour & light, OBEs, prediction, awe

(a) Exorcism

Exorcism on the larger scale, as described in books like Leslie Watkins, *The Real Exorcists. Fanatics – or Healers*, or M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, is not characteristic of this research although the description in letter 000248 of the young man being 'cleansed' from evil spirits might come close (see the chapter on evil present in or entering into a human being, especially pp.24-25). There are only a few examples of writers taking on the role of exorcist or being exorcised.

The following writer, a vicar, was reading a passage from the New Testament with a friend who had been suffering from depression.

However, when we had turned from reading and discussing to praying, he began to shudder, and said that the phrase 'be silent and come out of him', from the passage, had seemed to strike him. By now we both sensed that this was some sort of demonic possession, and I proceeded to invoke the name of Christ, and to command whatever it was that was troubling him to depart.

The person continued for half an hour to shake, interspersed with periods of calm. In between he was yelling. When he shouted out it was as if 'a shock wave passed against me ... I regard it as valid evidence of some external force coming away from him. This then seems an experience of conflict at a spiritual level between the power of Christ and an evil.' [003284, M]

The next writer was sitting talking to a young girl who spoke to her about non-Christian friends that she did not want to lose.

As we sat there I became very aware of a threatening presence standing behind me. I knew it was not one of the other helpers and thought it must be a prowler. I was verbally wrestling with this girl and felt that any interruption would break her concentration and spoil everything, so I did nothing but continued to speak, praying in my head that whoever it was would go. I felt that presence go, without sound as it had come. The girl lifted her head, her eyes shining and told me that she believed in Christ as her Saviour.

She was told later that no-one was near, and 'I knew that we had been wrestling literally with evil'. [002276, F] The last writer was in a desperate situation trying to preserve the life of her husband, who had been ill but who was then given a good report from the doctors. She was, however, not sure which force she had been up against:

the following day he returned home from the hospital and suddenly fell sideways. I held him in my arms and felt I was almost able to go with him – I was almost through the door, and I found myself mentally pushing someone away fighting them, then the door was slammed in my face and he was dead. Afterwards I felt I had been fighting either God or the Devil. [003580, F]

(b) Mediums

In most of the letters the attitude to mediums and their contact with the spirit world is mostly hostile as they are understood to interact with demonic spirits. I talked to many clairvoyants at psychic fairs in the course of my earlier research and my general impression is that these people believe that they are supported by departed people in their work, and that they are channels for messages from the other side. Claiming ability to contact dead people is, however, dealing with the unpredictability of interaction with the grey area between life and death, an area which is, for some people better left alone:

All 'clairvoyance' and 'telepathy' is via Satan. Many folk have been foretold of facts via the Devil, but these are only of ephemeral value and are often just 'red-herrings'. Satan 'accuses' and 'lies' and is not even consistent in his methods of misleading folk. His aim is to divert from God's purpose ...

After one has prayed sincerely, one is left in no doubt that Christ offers the answer to all man's problems. The closer one comes to God, the harder 'the devil' will work to prevent one hitting the 'power-line'. (The devil is something which most non-christians find it impossible to accept. It was only when I became a Christian that I realised the 'devil' did exist and, moreover, behaves as a coherent personality.) The things I have seen and experienced are certainly 'useful' and some manifestations of Christian faith are measurable but it is the immeasurable ones that are the most important. [001429]

The same attitude to the work of mediums and specifically their dangerous influence on a young girl is expressed in the following letter. The writer has recounted experiences with spirits and continued to describe people meeting with devils.

To call in a medium is to break down forcibly the natural barrier of death. And the spirits who take advantage of it have real authentic evil spirits among them. A near relative of mine got mixed up with them, and a devil, sitting in her open window, waking her up – and a few days later, sitting by her bed – a horror it was, led her to a life of fear to the end that she might see it again. I had to go and live with her for 7 years (until she died) because of her state of terror. A young girl I knew told me how her health was shattered permanently after brain fever. She was six years old, sitting reading by the fire, when a spiritualist party was going on in the room. (She was told they were playing games.) She saw a devil (described as like my sister's later) coming round the table (with a ouija board or something on it) towards her, screamed, fainted, brain fever, nearly died. She was 26 when I knew her, and a shaky nervous young woman. [000124, F]

These are forces not to be tampered with and those who do so might clearly have a destructive influence on other people.

Someone who had become a clairvoyant and healer but felt that she could recognise evil and was, therefore, able to guard against it wrote as follows:

I can also 'speak with the tongues of men and angels', i.e. spirits. My guides are many – including an Indian one – hence the 'shoes' affair [she had felt a strong need to take off her shoes in the Indian section of the British Museum]. I do not work from a spiritualist church but rather from wherever I am if the place is 'right' from my point of view. I have a definite sense of evil, to be guarded against whenever it is present. The previous place I lived in had a most evil feel to it – I often smelt burning wood when there could be none. [002751, F]

Another writer was actually participating in a spiritualist meeting when she had the following experience: 'At the same spiritualist meeting a woman [who] was sitting on my left suddenly asked a woman opposite (we were in a ring), whether her guide was a Chinese, I looked across and saw that the woman's face had taken on a yellow hue and her features had become oriental. I decided not to go to another meeting as it frightened me.' [000101, F] The transformation of the facial features into that of the guide is known in connection with that of changing into the helping spirit animal, a sort of shape-shifting.

(c) Colour & light

As mentioned earlier (see p. 12), coloured light might be connected with evil. Light is normally connected with a positive spiritual experience, i.e. the light at the end of the tunnel, the glow surrounding a divine being, and so on. Special light is also known to represent the coming of spirits among the Inuit people and only a few examples of negative experiences actually mention light, electric light or coloured light. 'When I didn't give the matter a thought I was suddenly awakened in the small hours. My gaze was immediately drawn to the inner corner of the room. I saw there a rectangular object with a green element in it rather like the element in an electric light bulb. (It may have been green with an orange element.) Immediately I looked at it I experienced a violent and painful shock and sense of terrible evil'. [003862, M; also mentioned on p.12] Another writer was in love with a man, the director mentioned in the letter, and that only gave her a feeling of despair:

At about 2 a.m. the following morning I woke up wanting the director. I also saw a huge electric blue figure of 8 before me. I thought it was wrong to even think of the director so I said 'Get thee behind me Satan in the name of the blood of Jesus Christ.' The next thing I saw was blood pouring down the windows (there were no curtains) and the whole room went red. I looked at the wall opposite to the window and saw some shadows making the picture of a cross 2/3 of the way round and a lady with a veil praying before it whom I took to be the Virgin Mary. I was terrified. [003667, F, 38]

The next correspondent has taken her cat to the vet where it was given an injection but it died. She believed that the cat would have survived had she not taken it there. She also had problems with having been in contact with a medium.

After she died I distinctly saw silver tears running down a wall very near me, often [sic] that, lights moving on wall every day, also it would float passed [sic] me and touch my arm. These made me uncomfortable as I believed that they were evil. I wrote to the medium asking her please not to send spirits. She said that she had been sending messages of comfort but did not think that I had seen tears, said that she was not doing now.

The writer thought that the light was connected with the electric light. 'One religious man told me that perhaps there was a wrong spirit in me. When a noted evangelist prayed for me

streams of light came out of two bulbs at the time'. [002130, F] The following writer experienced a light that followed her around. She had just bought a beautiful calendar.

I looked up and saw a light in the corner of the room, and in alarm put the calendar away and walked into my bedroom to remove outdoor clothes. Looking in the mirror I was horrified to find the 'light' had come with me and my appearance was distorted and coloured as if seen under a sodium lamp. In terror I cried out 'Please take this away, I can't stand it'. Immediately everything returned to normal and there has never been a recurrence. [000484, F, 72; event: 1963]

Light as an indication of contact to the 'other world' is known in many cultures. The experience can be one of joy and elevation or one of terror. This is true for the OBE as well.

(d) Out of body experiences (OBEs)

OBEs are presented as predominantly positive. There are, however, a few writers who describe feelings of terror in connection with this.

Sometimes I felt, and still do occasionally, a terrible danger and overwhelming evil. On such times there comes a moment, when I know that I must return to my body, and wake up. This is instantaneous, but sometimes a strong feeling of a presence of evil persists for some seconds after waking. [001560, M]

The next writer experienced leaving her body and observing herself. These experiences made her feel sick and distressed:

Since then, I get these strange feelings when I least expect them, sometimes for a few days, even waking me up at night, then they go and I ask the Lord to help me, as the days that it is around me, it is like something trying to take me somewhere and I want to give in to it, or try to resist it. It seems to connect with trees, sometimes a hospital, but I can never tell quite definitely where it was. Sometimes a pervading sickly perfume seems to accompany these sensations. [002244, F, 50]

The Near Death Experience or, as Maurice Rawlings in *Beyond Death's Door ...* calls it, 'the after-death experience', has for a long time been understood to be predominantly of a positive kind. The person is facing light and happiness on the other side. For Rawlings this is a lopsided picture, as he points out that for some people the experience is that of having been to Hell.

The following writer had several heart attacks and during a major attack, monitored by the doctor and the nurse, he left his body and experienced the following:

Soon after this the ward alerts the nurses to the fact that I had passed on into the other dimension. To me it was of great interest for I had entered the Black Realm, and was watching power plays by beings dressed as men but of superior intelligence and great power fighting for the control of countries, of ideologies etc. in their desire to control the minds of mankind. They used all devices known to man and then give to man his heart's desire and you hold him in bondage wine women power religion and the things he lusts for. Their ambition being to eliminate the opposition. They told me that I was on the winning side but through no merit of mine as I had none. I asked how it would end. They said that it could end in a tie with Good and Bad returning to the Creator who was the source of their being.

It could, however, end in chaos with no one winning. 'It was their purpose to fight for it was a fight for existence and power and control and they were without conscience. I said that is not what the Bible says and immediately I heard the nurse calling [the writer's name] and I was back in my body.' He managed to re-enter life and writes as a conclusion: 'The Dark Powers have not the power of life giving and because I was to live and receive life, they were resentful for they knew what my fate was to be.' [001039, M]

Being under anaesthetic is another way of experiencing leaving one's body. The writer quoted below saw herself lying on a marble slab, high up in the sky. She could see the rain and darkness down below and the streets and cars. Out of the darkness,

I saw an evil-looking old woman coming with a stiletto in her hand. I heard her say 'If I cut her in the side she will die.' [Then, out of a bright light an angel appeared and her dead daughter's voice told her to go back, as she was still on earth.] I made a superhuman effort to roll off the slab and did so before the old woman stabbed me. Then I found myself rolling gently down snowy slopes into oblivion. [002799, F, 59; event: a year after her daughter's death]

There are generally very few descriptions of OBEs of a negative kind. According to Rawlings this is because such an experience can in the context of a Near Death situation be so traumatic that if the person is not interviewed immediately after the operation or the heart attack, the experience will have been suppressed and the person will have no recollection of it.

(e) Prediction of death or disaster

That dreams can have a divinatory aspect is known all over the world and their interpretation has played a major part in predicting the future of human beings. The small collection mentioned here only deals with negative prediction, i.e. that of the death of a relative or a disaster on a major scale. The experience of the following writer is strange as it seems as if death is understood to be moving from the bedside of the son to that of the father:

My young son had been quite ill, and I was very worried about him, so that I sat up late to watch over him. When he seemed quite at ease I went to bed. I was still wide awake, when a dark figure came out of my son's room, crossed the hall into our room, close to my sleeping husband. I screamed a terrible scream, the dark figure turned and looked at me and walked right thru the bedroom wall. About three month later my husband died. [000179, F]

The next writer felt that she had the capacity of premonition and could sense when a person was about to die:

Some weeks before I hear of the death of someone I know well I experience an appalling sensation of death. Oddly enough I always assume that it means that I am going to die (I suppose one day it will!) and the uneasiness doesn't lift until I hear of the event. I also – unfortunately – 'see death' in people's faces, though not to the extent that my mother did – especially when the person was young and was doomed to die suddenly or by suicide. [001389, F, 62]

On a more personal scale the following writer experienced a premonition of the death of a relative:

About 20 years ago I had a vivid, disturbing dream connected with death. I dreamed that I saw a corpse on a bed, and the details of the face which included an open mouth were imprinted on my mind with extraordinary clarity. I awoke feeling troubled and felt that the dream was in some way connected with my mother. Usually I forget dreams quickly, but the impression of this one haunted my waking hours at intervals for the next few days. [She received a week later the message that an aunt that she was close to was mortally ill.] When I entered the room I received a great shock. I was astounded to see the corpse EXACTLY as in my dream (which I had temporarily forgotten) with the mouth wide open and all the details of the face just as I had seen them a week previously. The face, which still gave an expression of physical anguish, of course bore no relation at all to the face of the aunt I had known and loved in life. [000708, F, 44]

Predictions of death, such as in war, can also be experienced. The following writer interprets his as the prediction of the destruction of Dresden:

At the beginning of the war I had a waking experience of a city on fire. I saw this appalling holocaust, buildings falling and people dying on an uncountable scale. All through the war I waited for this fearful thing to happen to me and it never did. Not until long afterwards did I recognise my experience in the fate of Dresden, a city I dearly loved and in which I had spent the last year before the war broke out.

Experiences of this kind made me feel sure that I could find out things that were not naturally visible. It took a terrible effort, a kind of orgasm, I began to fear doing it, and at the same time to study what I could of witchcraft. It was then that I became aware of the other, the widdershins power, evil. Something tremendously powerful was waiting for me to plug in, and I knew that if I did, new potentialities would open up before me – but there would be no turning back. I stopped and since then have deliberately refused even the smallest inkling that might turn into prophecy.

... These experiences, which are defined by us with such homely words as prayer and help, are also part of being plugged in to the positive force, good, which sometimes seems to send out cries for help down quite small local lines like mine when called upon to deal with a particular strong build-up of destructive evil. [000758, F, 50]

The sense of the evil aspects of mediumship have been discussed, in another chapter. The next person was emerging from very deep sleep and felt a sense of horror.

Nothing to do but to get up, to help myself snap out of it. I walk into the bathroom, stare at the cabinet mirror, and see a shadowy reflection of my face in the dark. Still I remain in a twilight state between sleeping and waking, aware only of my immediate self and the compelling horror.

[After having gone to the window, the person returns to the heater and experiences it as] The Fires of Hell. Again I shudder, more deeply than before. Still in a semi-trance, I return to the safety of my bed, dimly perceiving that the horror has not faded at all. But since it seems inexorable and I sense no danger, I resign myself to it and soon am asleep again.

The next morning the person wakes up feeling rested. The feeling from the previous night was powerful but has nothing personal to it. In the afternoon that day the correspondent was informed that Kennedy has been shot. [003712] The last writer also predicted a major disaster: 'I had a terrible dream about tunnels and mud and horror. The next day Aberfan happened and what I saw on television looked remarkably like the dream. (This is something I can't understand. A psychologist friend believes there is no connection and that the horror of the dream simply represented my worries.)' [000192, F, 57]

(f) Awe in the encounter with the divine

Terror and fear facing the divine is not uncommon, the difference from the negative or evil experience is that ultimately it is interpreted by the person involved as something positive. For one of the first writers to Alister Hardy the encounter with God was as fearsome and awe-inspiring as any mentioned in the Old Testament. She was playing the organ in a church, when she had the following experience.

I began to observe without seeing anything and hear without actually hearing anything, a circular movement start in the upper right hand corner of the room. This movement grew and with it a roar, (not audible) grew gradually louder. There was tremendous feeling of an impersonal power entering the room, a power that belonged here and was oblivious of me. By the time the movement had reached halfway across the room and the roar had gathered power to go with it, I was so frightened I realized that this was God coming, and nothing could stand in His way, and that I was utterly unprepared to meet Him and utterly unworthy and if I stayed I would likely lose my mind, and I got up and ran out of the church.

I was convinced then and am equally now that there is an impersonal side of God which is pure power, and it operates without concern for any human ego, that this was the whirlwind the Bible mentioned, and that if I didn't behave I would be wiped out and destroyed and there would be

no personal malevolence about the action. I would simply have been in a place I didn't belong in, the power would have gone by like a steam roller and I would have been rolled. [000012, F, 40; event: 21 or 22]

This experience of God as pure indifferent power that will destroy with 'no personal malevolence' must be extremely frightening as one is left without the option available for the encounters with evil, the possibility of calling for God's help. Another writer was facing terror and suffocation as he lay in bed. He heard a voice speaking to him: "This is not my Church" and then it finished. I was filled with a feeling of sublime Joy which really is indescribable. I took it to be the voice and presence of God speaking to me'. [002112, M, 41] A similar terror was experienced by a man who had tried sun-worship. At night he dreamt that a voice said 'He is coming'.

Terror grew in me. I looked at my mother who was still sewing quietly and who apparently heard nothing. I looked at the door and knew that there was something outside trying to get in. The terror grew. Then the voice, louder now, saying 'He's coming' and the door began to open. Terror mounted in me like a flood, and engulfed me. I woke up in ecstasy, great spasms of electric energy discharged from the base of my brain down through the spinal cord [card in the original], which thrashed like a snake inside me, and out of every nerve in my body. [002607, M, 62; event: 25 years ago]

Then he felt perfectly happy, believing that this is what is understood by the Second Coming. The concept of facing the Divine is what makes this experience positive although in many ways it is identical with some of the negative experiences, the crucial difference being the interpretation of the person. It is obviously possible to claim from a psychological point of view that such experiences are, therefore, of the same nature and the difference is in the individual's perception. As the person stands at the centre of the experience, however, and if the experience is seen as spiritual, it is the quality of the encounter that is of importance. For the people encountering evil there is no doubt that the experience is negative, even if the subject believes in the duality of the Divine.

PROTECTION AGAINST EVIL

Using the bible, the cross, or prayer for protection

It has been shown earlier that people experiencing the presence of evil or demonic forces will often use the cross or prayer as protection against these forces even though they are not regular church-goers or believers at all. The sense of calling for a benevolent force by using the symbolic representation of that power is what the next examples will illustrate. The protection might be needed against visitation of evil entities as this letter describes:

Some time later I almost had a third experience of 'sight' but of quite a different kind. I had just written a letter to a local clergyman, whose faith seemed to be departing, and was trying to revive it. I was under some emotional strain about it. Suddenly I sensed, on the very edge of 'ethereal sight' several hostile personalities. There was a feeling of several angry beings in human form, dressed in white with a certain amount of blue. This I felt to be diabolic and I was able to shut it out before it developed by seizing a Bible, which I had handy for reference in writing my letter, and reading the first passage I came to. [000465, M]

The next letter also describes a vision of evil seen not by the person herself but by another in whose care the writer is:

This spiritual awareness came to me following a close death when I was aged 21 but I was not prepared and got a shock. After that, at times, I sensed evil and good but the edge or presence of spiritual good was not so keen. However, I didn't dwell on it, but last March I went into this

Christian Nursing Home in G– to get better. I had only been there a night and the Matron spoke to me next morning and said ‘I have something to tell you. I went to bed as usual last night and I was awakened at 5.0 o’clock this morning and out of the 24 patients I saw you in bed and I knew evil was near you and got out of bed and prayed and circled you in the light of the Cross and then I saw a vision – at the bottom of the bed was a faceless body and it was dead and I knew the evil that had been threatening you had gone. Now I am not a fanciful person and I was not in trance.’ What she didn’t know was that I had had very close shaves due to intruders last year. [003864, F]

In traditional cultures the dead body is surrounded by taboo-rules as the soul of the dead person might turn against the living in a destructive way. The experience of evil attaching itself to a person who had been influenced by death is dealt with through rituals. Modern Western people may not have access to such rituals and are, therefore, not prepared for such encounters.

The next writer was reading a book by Rudolf Steiner and, although feeling that she should stop reading, she continued when:

I have a light switch in my room that is a string from the ceiling which you can pull to turn the light on or off and round this switch I had a string of bells ringing tied. I had read half a page when I heard the bells ringing and I looked up. The light pull was swinging round and round in circles and I sensed a force that terrified me. It was like a large mass of evil that surged towards me at a frightening rate. It was from the other end of my room and I know that if it reached me I would be completely overcome.

My immediate reaction was to pray. I used tongues and after a few words to my amazement the force was no longer. I felt a sense of power and victory, and was incredibly grateful to God who had given me this gift which was so effective. [001881, F, 18; event: 1971,16]

Some writers describe waking up from a dream and then encountering evil in their bedrooms as mentioned in chapter one. The next letter is an account by the mother of the person experiencing the encounter with evil which is then parallel with the dream of the mother. A young woman trained as a nurse and during an evening gathering she set out her idea of the supernatural. ‘When they all went to bed, she was left to think things over and had, by this time, become aware of a great sense of evil surrounding her.’ The writer, who is the mother of the young woman, then has a dream that same night. She dreamt that she was visiting a Hell-Fire Cave, alone with one other person, when she encountered ‘someone wearing some sort of regalia and robes. He – it was a “he” – had the most evil eyes, glaring and “hot”. I knew that there was only one thing to do and that was to make the sign of the Cross. With very great effort I did manage to make it.’ A week later the writer talked to her daughter who then tells the mother the experience she had with evil:

After they had all gone, I tried everything I could to think of to disperse this dreadful feeling of evil and danger. I tried praying, I tried reading the Bible, I tried to get through to Daddy. Nothing would shake it off and I knew I dared not turn out my light and go to sleep. Quite suddenly something happened and it was alright, I turned off my light and went off to sleep. [000715, F, 55]

The same feeling of entering into a place of evil in a dream is described by the next writer. She also used the symbol of the cross as protection (also mentioned on pp. 9, 13 and 22-23):

Some years ago I had a dream in which I had wandered into a devils and witches coven, with the atmosphere dominated by an evil influence. Everyone was in terror of the hate they had given such power to. It came to me to stretch my arms wide to make myself into the form of a cross and call on God and Jesus Christ in a loud voice. This made the evil power concentrate on me and a timeless struggle between us ended in the evil fading away. I awoke unafraid but complete ‘drained’ and wondered what the dream was for. [002396, F, 40]

The sense of protection from the cross, and thereby by the symbol of the love of Christ is in the next letter made 'flesh' as it is Jesus himself who is present for the person waking up:

Some time ago I was awakened from sleep and feeling very frightened of something or someone being outside my bedroom window which was open as usual, when all at once The Lord Jesus came to my aid. He came between me and the window and I felt him hold my left hand and all fear left me as I felt that • Jesus was there. I can still feel that grip which was so comforting. [002746, F, 77]

The close link between Christ and the writer becomes more explicit in a letter extensively quoted earlier (see p. 19) in which the writer, after having encountered evil and used the crucifix as protection, is exposed to the 'pain of the cross'. When he was walking one evening he felt a shaft of icy air about 3 ft in diameter and taller than him which followed him home. He continued to feel it the following day and he used the crucifix and prayer, subsequently finding that his room seemed charged with electricity. At midnight, however, he experienced what he interpreted as the 'pain of the cross' and he wept for mercy. He continued to be tormented nonetheless and suffered for several years afterwards. [003096, M]

The concepts of using the cross and prayer almost as if they were amulets against the onslaught of evil demonstrates a need for a sense of protection that is found in all cultures. In Greenland with the advent of Christianity the Greenlanders used the symbols of the power of God in very creative ways such as shaping an old gramophone record into a crucifix or actually eating the word of the scripture. The last two writers were holding on to the cross or keeping an altar for protection. The first had been to see the film *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and was terrified by the picture which was portrayed 'so much so that I was unable to sleep. I am convinced that on that night the Devil and Evil were very close to me.' She then prayed for help and felt a warm glowing light. She was certain of the two great powers in the universe, the good and the evil. Although she is not a member of any churches, she kept a small altar and a crucifix as a link to 'The Perfect Power'. [002314, F, 21]

Though apparently a clairvoyant I have never allowed it to be developed as I feel that God will use me as he thinks best and I stick very strictly to being a Christian, and use the words of Jesus himself to build my life on. Each day I pray that the spirit may enter and stay with me, and that I may be guarded from evil. I wear a gold cross and hold it if I am praying, or evil comes near me. [002638, F, 76]

When these attempts at protection fail, and evil has actually penetrated the person, exorcism may be necessary.

FINAL COMMENTS

'He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath – "The horror! The horror!"' (Conrad, 1995: 112). Joseph Conrad lets the last words of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* echo the dark continent of the soul. Kurtz is not just a mad fantasist coming into too close contact with the rituals of the tribes in Africa, he is a human being whose urge for divine power has made him look into the abyss of the human heart where he has found a horrifying darkness. The horror of Kurtz is not so much the feeling that all human beings contain in their subconscious the primitive man, as it is the sense of the black hole of existence: the negative spiritual experience.

The experience of Hell and horror described in these letters is generally seen as coming from within the people themselves or from forces outside the person: 'To be in Hell is to have

given to one all the accumulated returns of one's will, all one's private hatreds and fears, and everything which one has always sought to reject, to repress, or to avoid by explaining away. In a word Hell is oneself alone.' [002295, Anon] 'The feeling climaxed until for one split second I was aware of the meaning of the universe with its many horrors and that I, as a human being, was totally at the mercy of the two universal powers.' [002743, M, 19]

The representation of evil in this collection is manifold, the attempts to explain evil equally so. Evil might be understood as part of the human condition, the original sin, as a non-human entity at work outside the human being, as Satan or the Devil, as the opposite of good or God, as a state of mind either as choice or as possession. It might be encountered in a state of awakening, in a special place, in interaction with others or in oneself. There is no means of predicting from these accounts how evil might present itself. The writers have used their senses as a way of conveying the experience. Evil is described as vile, rotting, black, crackling, a grinning evil face, a small figure with tail and horns, or with cloven hooves and shaggy hide, black, beady eyes, forked tail, pointed ears, or as green light and as movements, such as the swinging of a bed. The reaction of the person encountering evil can be ice cold shivers, tingling scalp, sweating with terror, paralysed lips, vomiting from fear, shaking, rocking body, being unable to speak or move. Interestingly, the protection against the onslaught of evil does not vary considerably: it is the sign of the cross or the Lord's prayer and in most of the descriptions this seems to prevent further attack.

The difficulty of narrating such experiences is also expressed: 'I hasten to say that although I am a sensitive and sometimes emotional person I am usually sceptical about abstract phenomena! I have not told many people of these experiences because of their "melodramatic" sides.' [003191] 'I know that I haven't given any idea of the "destructiveness" of this evil and I really know no words to describe this. I still am reluctant to resurrect this horror.' [001476] Equally, there is a fear of madness as these experiences often have a similar pattern to mental illness, the difference being that ultimately the person is in control by using the Christian symbols and this may lead to a sense of catharsis. A struggle for the soul is the issue and the battle is a fight against soul loss, be it understood either from a psychological viewpoint as a collapse of the personality or from a theological stand as an attack by evil spirits or the Devil.

From this collection of letters no conclusion can be made as to the nature of evil. What is interesting is the variety of representations, interpretations and reactions to evil. It is, as mentioned in the Introduction, possible to approach the concept of evil from different angles but ultimately this collection shows the vulnerability of people experiencing random attacks by negative forces inside or outside themselves, religious rituals being the only protection against the horror of the darkness of the soul.

CATEGORIES

Experiences of Evil Present in the Room Where One is Sleeping

000038 - 000124 - 000166 - 000179 - 000449 - 000667 - 000715 - 000876 -
001418 - 001569 - 001676 - 001786 - 001881 - 002172 - 002280 - 002298 -
002314 - 002396 - 002475 - 002490 - 002560 - 002600 - 002672 - 002739 -
002767 - 002782 - 002810 - 002977 - 003080 - 003143 - 003191 - 003221 -
003363 - 003496 - 003646 - 003702 - 003712 - 003800 - 003862 - 003864 -
003880 - 005216

Experiences of Evil Present in a Place

000510 - 000619 - 000876 - 000958 - 001160 - 001476 - 001837 - 002245 -
002365 - 002810 - 003096 - 003221 - 003320 - 003349 - 003535 - 003676 -
003706 - 003854 - 003865 - 003880 - 005216 - 005217

Evil Present In or Entering Into a Human Being

000166 - 000248 - 000767 - 001121 - 001327 - 001425 - 001737 - 001742 -
001786 - 001830 - 002073 - 002130 - 002508 - 003024 - 003066 - 003422 -
003518

Evil Intent in Another Person

000736 - 001051 - 001317 - 001520 - 001936 - 002719 - 002949 - 003913 -
003921

Evil as a State of Mind

000280 - 000388 - 000449 - 000683 - 000871 - 000891 - 000893 - 000920 -
000937 - 001033 - 001276 - 001302 - 001327 - 001405 - 002251 - 002977 -
003433 - 003532 - 003585

The Nature of Evil

000862 - 000875 - 001055 - 001092 - 001199 - 001533 - 001985 - 002176 -
002295 - 002536 - 002585 - 002743 - 002752 - 002844 - 002934 - 003416 -
003503 - 003774 - 003775 - 003776 - 003777 - 003778 - 003779 - 003780 -
003781 - 003782 - 003785 - 003790 - 003998

Exorcism

000248 - 000465 - 002276 - 003024 - 003284 - 003580 - 003864

Mediums

000101 - 000124 - 000449 - 000935 - 001429 - 002130 - 002751 - 002810

Colour & Light

000484 - 002130 - 003667 - 003862

Out of Body Experiences

000514 - 001039 - 001560 - 002244 - 002799

Prediction of Death or Disaster

000179 - 000192 - 000708 - 000758 - 001389 - 003712

Awe in the Encounter with the Divine

000012 - 002112 - 002552 - 002607

Using the Bible, the Cross or Prayer as Protection

000465 - 000449 - 000667 - 000715 - 000736 - 001121 - 001881 - 002314 -
002396 - 002475 - 002490 - 002638 - 002746 - 003090 - 003143 - 003191 -
003363 - 003800 - 003862 - 003864

Some of the letters could not be checked against the originals as they could not be found in the Archive. I found the copy of the letters in the typed version to be very accurate. The missing originals were 000280, 001121, 001199, 001837, 001936, 002475, 002638, 002934, 002979, 003066, 003080 and 003854.

The codes [in square brackets] after each letter indicate, where information is available: (1) the computerised number in the RERC Archive; (2) the gender M or F of the writer; (3) the age of the writer; and (4) specific information relevant to that letter.

The accounts/letters have been quoted without any corrections to their original wording, spelling, grammar or punctuation.

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Merete Demant Jakobsen was born in 1952 in Copenhagen. Her first degree was in teaching and she then proceeded to an MA in Danish Literature at Copenhagen University and a BA in Ethnography at Århus University. For the literature degree she wrote a thesis on a modern Danish writer, Vagn Lundbye, and the use of traditional Greenlandic material in his fiction, focusing on Greenlandic mythology and the role of the shaman or *angakkoq*. For her BA she wrote on the Mongolian shaman. From 1994 to 1996 she undertook a doctorate in anthropology at Oxford University, where she was awarded a scholarship by Wolfson College.

She has taught in Denmark, at the European School in Oxfordshire (which is an EU establishment) and at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, where she was also the director of Nordic House, instigating exchange between the university and Nordic countries.

She has had an interest in religion since childhood when, before going to school in the mornings, she sat reading through the New Testament, an unusual enterprise for a child in Denmark in the 1960s. Meeting the Inuit culture in the early 1980s was a turning point. Her interest in the Greenlandic belief system was later widened to cover the northern hemisphere, especially Siberia and Mongolia. Her doctoral thesis was an opportunity to combine this interest with field work undertaken in new Age courses in neo-shamanism.

Her main interests – besides the study of religion and anthropology – are literature, music and psychology. She has had a short story published in an English literary magazine, and enjoys singing. She is about to embark on a diploma in psychology. Travel has been an important part of her life and, among other countries, she has visited Mongolia, Greenland, Ladakh and Ecuador.

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