



CHAPTER 2

‘Like a Madd Dogge’: Demonic Animals and Animal Demoniacs in Early Modern English Possession Narratives

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In the demonic possession narratives of the early modern period, animals played a central role. During the 1574 possession of Robert Brigges, one of the earliest recorded cases in Reformed Protestant England, a black dog stalked the ‘demoniac’ (the possessed individual) through the streets of London. Brigges, a wealthy lawyer, first encountered this creature, an ‘uglye dogge, shaggey heare, of a darke fuskey colour, betweine blacke and redd’, one morning as he journeyed into Southwark on business (‘Master Brigges Temptation’, sig.H.7). In this narrative, the black dog was the Devil incarnate, a visual metaphor of Brigges’s possession by demonic forces. In other early modern accounts, demoniacs embodied animalistic behaviour in their demonic performances. One young demoniac by the name of Alexander Nyndge was described in a 1573 pamphlet as looking ‘much like the picture of the Devil in a play, with an horrible roaring voice, sounding Hell-hound’ (Nyndge 1615,

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sig.B1r). Similarly, in 1597 a boy by the name of John Starkie (one of the ‘Lancashire Seven’ demoniacs) struck and bit at everyone who came near him ‘like a madd dogge’ while in the throes of demonic possession (More 1600, p. 15).

The presence and symbolism of dogs in these cases illustrates how animals were portrayed in early modern demonic possession narratives. Animals typically coexisted with early modern communities without issue but during heightened periods of anxiety and tension, such as when an individual was believed to be afflicted with a demonic spirit, their presence came under scrutiny. Early modern cases of demonic possession were predominantly manifestations of these anxieties, and animals—whether envisioned as demonic constructs, or the Devil himself—were given prominent roles in such instances. Dogs, goats, cats, rats, bears, oxen, and even creatures such as toads and hedgehogs were given significant roles in possession narratives, commonly identified as the Devil, demons, or a witch’s familiar. This particular narrative convention concerning the role of animals in early modern English demonic possession narratives is what this chapter is concerned with. The William Sommers affair of 1597–1598, involving the renowned Puritan exorcist John Darrell, is one of the most notable episodes of demonic possession in the early modern English context. Sommers both invoked beastly behaviour and physically interacted with animals throughout his possession, demonstrating their dual role in possession narratives. Using the Sommers possession as a case study, along with drawing on related early modern source material, this chapter argues that the perception of animals shifted radically during episodes of demonic possession. In similar terms, animalistic behaviour is also framed in this chapter as a performative model for demoniacs, inspired by the theoretical approach established in Stephen Greenblatt’s 1985 essay ‘Shakespeare and the Exorcists’ and elaborated upon in Brian Levack’s monograph *The Devil Within* (2013). This chapter highlights how animals were configured and embodied within the spirituality of the early modern period, thereby highlighting the demonic animal motif that emerged from this literary tradition.

In turn, the figure of the Gothic animal is also explored in relation to its early modern precedent, highlighting its significance within both of these contexts. It is in the early modern possession textual tradition that the conception of the Gothic animal takes form. While the term ‘Gothic’ in literature would not really gain traction until the

mid-eighteenth century, it is really a post-medieval and post-Renaissance phenomenon (Hogle 2002, pp. 1–2). It is primarily in the early modern period that the notion of a supernatural demonic construct, embodied in an animal, was established in the English literary canon. As Cyndy Hendershot explains in *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic* (1998), the Gothic is a disrupting presence that invades societal norms with an unassimilable force, and the supernatural figures that haunt these narratives may be read as expressions of a dissatisfaction with reality (pp. 1–3). Early modern demonic possession narratives exemplify this point. Demonic possession can be read as a struggle between the human and the animalistic, a manifestation of societal anxiety and cultural disruption. This is a theme that occupies a central position within the Gothic as it is only in this tradition that ‘demons would once again take centre stage in the theatre of world literature’ (Kallendorf 2003, p. 200). Animals as a demonic construct, or supernatural beings of an animalistic nature, are figures well known to the Victorian Gothic. As illustrated in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), or H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), the threat of a demonic animalistic force lingers on the periphery of human society. The Victorian fascination with the human body being invaded by the animalistic, underlined by Darwinian theories, is an evolution of this early modern conception, and this chapter addresses the link between these two literary traditions.

Consequently, the ‘monster’ of the Victorian Gothic is profoundly shaped by concepts of early modern animal–human hybridity. Philosophical discourses concerning animality formed the basis for many of the monstrous constructs that featured in Gothic literature as such discourses established the symbology from which to define these monsters. Giorgio Agamben terms this process the ‘anthropological machine’, a discursive tool that isolates the non-human within the human and thereby animalises the human (2004, p. 37). This process also highlights the act of transformation, a concept that is central to both early modern demoniacs and Gothic monsters. Monsters are not simply conjured from non-existing matter but rather manifest out of a pre-existing state, requiring some form of transformation. They are hybrid beings, symbols of *otherness* that disrupt boundaries or categorisation. As Mario Ortiz-Robles surmises, Gothic monsters ‘typically do not show themselves as fully formed monsters when they make their entry into the fictional worlds that resist them but rather *become* monstrous

through transformative processes' (2015, p. 11, emphasis in original). Demonic possession is such a transformation as the human form is overtaken by the demonic, locating them in an intermediate zone between the human and the animal. The Gothic monster (be it Dracula, Mr Hyde, or any of Dr Moreau's animal hybrids) is also transformative in nature, emerging out of another form yet not beholden to either of these. Both of these monster types are shaped by the same philosophical consideration of animal-human hybridity, signalling the existence of a tangible thread between the early modern demoniac and the Victorian Gothic monster.

THE ANIMAL AS *OTHER*

Animals in the early modern period came to represent a form of *otherness*, appearing in the literary sources as both a supernatural creature and a symbol of human bestiality (Fudge 2002, p. 4). Whether real or imagined, animals became a reoccurring figure in possession accounts as they functioned as a means of 'normalising' and configuring the supernatural. The presence of an animal during a possession narrative therefore carried a number of connotations that were recognisable to early modern audiences. In these accounts of demonic possession, animals were transformed into demonic entities as the Devil often assumed the form of something ordinary or familiar (Thomas 1997, pp. 470–71). Animals were thus prime candidates for demonic transmutation as the authors of demonological treatises and possession pamphlets persuaded their audiences to discern the Devil's agency in their most commonplace experiences (Johnstone 2006, pp. 60–61). In these instances, the creatures that featured in possession pamphlets were transformed into diabolical apparitions, abandoning their naturalised origins (Walsham 1999, pp. 186–87). Yet, more often than not, these demonically influenced animals retained their natural forms and continued to exist alongside humans. The behaviour of these demonic animals was largely consistent with the behaviour of ordinary animals but the perception that dark forces were lurking in disguise was insidious to the early modern imagination (Salisbury 1994, p. 141). In this sense, the presence of animals in these possession narratives was significant for what it revealed about the human-animal relationship within the structures of early modern culture and theology.

The role of demonic animals in possession narratives was not a purely literary theme, but a concept that was deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian

theology and early modern demonology. As Guy Williams attests, many Christian writers interpreted biblical accounts with wild animals as a conflict with the Devil, highlighting the importance of 'animal imagery in early Christian demonic discourse' (2006, pp. 46–47). As established in the scriptures, humans were torn between their enlightened godly side and their more bestial, primal desires. By this, the animalistic was cast as an inversion of the desired model of Christian behaviour. Inversion was a primary theological consideration across the different Christian faiths, a simple means of defining what was the work of God and what was the work of the Devil. As such, the demonic embodied this inversion. Theologians often referred to the Devil as 'God's ape', a being that existed as a poor imitation of the one divine Lord (Clark 1999, pp. 80–93). The theology and philosophy of this period emphasised this demarcation, perpetuating this conceptualisation of animals as lacking reason or a divine soul (Ritvo 1991, p. 68). In *A Discourse of Conscience*, William Perkins—one of the leading theologians of the sixteenth century—asserted that animals were shadows of humans, pale reflections that did not possess the attributes that defined humanity (Perkins 1596, p. 3). Accordingly, the animalistic emerged in early modern theology as a means of identifying what, and what was not, human.

Dogs, in particular, were a prominent demonic construct in early modern possession pamphlets and English folklore in general. Dating back to the Anglo-Saxon era and developing into a prevalent figure in Medieval and early modern demonology, the black dog was interpreted as a harbinger of ill-fate or death (Salisbury 1994, pp. 134–35). For example, Black Shuck, a dog supposedly the size of a calf or horse, was said to have attacked the churches of Bungay and Blythburgh in Suffolk on 4 August 1577, mauling parishioners, destroying the interiors, and leaving scorch marks on the church doors. Dogs were perhaps the most prominent animal in early modern possession narratives as their (potentially) vicious nature shaped them as especially susceptible to demonic transformation. These animals functioned as an anthropocentric focus for social anxiety in early modern possession narratives: an expression of human bestiality as a result of prolific collective sin (Jenner 1997, p. 54). Because these animals were so numerous in early modern communities, sharing the food, living spaces, and names of these populations, they became convenient scapegoats when societal anxieties were prevalent. As Kathleen Sands notes, dogs personified human beings as they shared common spaces with us, and the focus on these animals can be seen as

a symbolic suppression of bestial behaviour in ourselves (2004, p. 51). Dogs represented a range of negative human abstractions, and the sight of them fighting, fornicating, or defecating in the streets was a constant reminder of humanity's capacity for beastly behaviour.

In the possession narrative of Robert Briggs, *Master Briggs Temptation*, the symbolic presence of a demonic dog (referred to as the 'Southwark Dog') is revealing. Animals commonly appeared as portents in possession narratives, precipitating the eventual possession of the demoniac, and the Southwark Dog clearly fulfils this role (Almond 2004, p. 17). First encountering this creature as he travelled to Southwark one morning, Briggs was stalked by it through the streets until he struck the dog with both boot and stones. Yet, this did not deter it. A gravel digger even turned his spade on the creature, the blow delivered with 'such force as might have cloven a dogg in the mydest', yet it continued to stalk Briggs unabated ('Master Briggs Temptation', sig.H.7). Briggs eventually plunged into the Thames to escape it, looking back to it on the bank and realising that it was 'no dogge, but the devill cum hether of purpose to awayte for my sowle' ('Master Briggs Temptation', sig.H.7–8). The dog only disappeared when Briggs made it home, but its lingering influence is evident throughout this narrative. The Southwark Dog exemplifies the fact that 'the early modern imagination was highly attuned to visual metaphor' and was culturally conditioned to perceive moral abstractions in concrete images (Sands 2002, p. 27). This creature functioned as the source of cultural and spiritual conflict in this instance, personifying the antagonist force required for this possession narrative to develop. Consequently, the Southwark Dog demonstrates how early modern audiences constructed and depicted the demonic *other* in possession narratives.

This early modern conception of animals as visual metaphor is echoed in the Gothic literary tradition. Gothic animals are representations of cultural anxieties, a supernatural force that threatens to disrupt social norms. The nineteenth century was a period of profound social, philosophical, and scientific reassessment with Darwinian evolutionary paradigms challenging the boundaries between humans and animals (Hendershot 1998, pp. 97–98). *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) clearly embodies such anxieties, with the animal hybrids functioning as symbols of inter-species degeneration and the breakdown of the animal–human binary. In a similar fashion, the demonic black dog archetype developed into a prevalent figure in Gothic literature. While the Gothic black dog was moulded from existing folkloric traditions, it

was repurposed to reflect Victorian attitudes towards this creature. The late-nineteenth-century fear of rabid dogs shaped depictions of this animal in literature, intertwined with the bodily pain of infection concept, the biting motif, and the theme of human–animal transformation (McKechnie 2013, p. 115). *Dracula* (1897) encapsulates all these points. Dracula is the embodiment of the diabolic, a possessing force that infects others through the animalistic means of biting. The novel describes the vampire as master of animals, corrupting them with his demonic influence and compelling them to carry out his bidding. Van Helsing remarks at one point that the vampire ‘can command all the meaner things, the rat, and the owl, and the bat, the moth, and the fox, and the wolf, he can grow and become small, and he can at times vanish and come unknown’ (Stoker 1897/1979, p. 209). Furthermore, Dracula also takes on the form of these animals himself. When he arrives at the shores of Whitby, Dracula appears in the visage of the black dog, invoking the established literary convention of the diabolic. From this point on, Dracula proceeds to possess several characters, a demonic incursion let loose on the English lands. A number of underlying themes can be read into this use of the black dog archetype, most pertinent being the threat of degeneration through viral contamination. As such, the Gothic animal can be read as engaging with the early modern demonic animal, recontextualising this creature to reflect the cultural anxieties of nineteenth-century England.

EMBODYING THE ANIMAL

In the early modern context, animalistic behaviour became a defining characteristic of demonic possession. In possession narratives, demoniacs were often described as invoking different animals in their fits, visions, and utterings. Animals—whether actually present or invoked by the demoniac—were notable in these possession narratives for how they shaped the behaviour of the demoniac. As Keith Thomas exclaims, ‘wherever we look in early modern England, we find anxiety, latent, or explicit, about any form of behaviour which threatened to transgress the fragile boundaries between man and animal creation’ (1983, p. 38). The English in particular were quick to label any threatening force as demonic: *otherness* was almost always equated with ‘demonic’ (Mollmann 2008, p. 37). To defy the moral code was to act ‘beast-like’, to allow the inner-animal to materialise. Defining what was animalistic was therefore

an assertion about what was human, with spirit possession a direct manifestation of the struggle between these two states (Caciola 2003, p. 16).

Philip Almond outlines that 'because the demonic and the animal overlapped, in occupying the border ground between the human and the animal, the possessed threatened that essential distinction' (2004, p. 35). Adopting an animalistic mode of behaviour emerged as a primary means of communicating demonic affliction to a community, building on existing cultural perceptions surrounding animals in this period.

In determining the presence of a demonic spirit within a human vessel, early modern audiences relied on a series of telltale signs. As illustrated in many of Christ's biblical encounters with demons, the accepted signs of demonic affliction were linked to animalistic behaviour. Throughout the gospels (namely Mark 5:1–20, Mark 9:14–29, Luke 8:26–39, and Matthew 8:28–34), demoniacs were described as exhibiting behaviour in which they gnashed their teeth, foamed at the mouth, and convulsed their bodies. For later audiences, these descriptions were central to their understanding of the demonic (Salisbury 1994, p. 141). As Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe explains, there is absolutely no description of the appearance of demons themselves in the gospel accounts of Christ's exorcisms (2012, p. 449). These demonic spirits were outlined in abstract terms, unable to be discerned by the human eye. Rather, their presence was conveyed through a series of physical and behavioural cues in the demoniac. Accordingly, the exorcism of the demons in these instances was deduced by theologians and audiences from the changed behaviour of the demoniac and the exorcist. It is only in later periods that demons were explicitly described as assuming the appearance of an animal.

Early modern possession narratives expanded upon the prescribed biblical symptoms in determining diabolic affliction. Individuals afflicted with demonic possession were reported to display great feats of physical strength, muscular contortions, seemingly inhuman wailing, mysterious swelling, the ability to speak in foreign tongues, or more inexplicable supernatural acts. The bodies of demonic spirits were understood to be incorporeal, endowing them with the ability to transform between different monstrous forms (Oldridge 2000, pp. 232–33). In the Lancashire Seven case of 1597, the animal characteristics of demonic entities are articulated in John Darrell's *A True Relation*. The demoniacs were depicted as savage and deranged in their demonic fits, 'beting up & downe with their bodies being held by others, crying ... aloud in strang

and supernaturall manner' (Darrell 1600, p. 10). *A True Relation* outlines the deliverance of each demoniac in detail, highlighting the exact moments in which the demonic spirit is exorcised. This process is especially interesting as the spirits are described in varying forms, conceived as grotesque beings with both human and animalistic characteristics. The demonic spirits were said to have the 'liknes of a crowes head' or resembling something 'like an urchin' (Darrell 1600, p. 11). These spirits were unable to be seen by the witnesses, instead defined by the demoniacs after they had recovered. As these spirits were not visible to the assembled crowd, the actual instance of deliverance for the demoniac was conveyed through a series of physical cues that signalled to the crowd that the dispossession was successful. The description of the demonic spirit was an accepted cultural sign of demonic possession and could be placed within the framework of this religious ritual. As this text illustrates, animal imagery was prominent in the demonology of this period and profoundly shaped the literary visualisation of the demonic.

The embodiment of animalistic behaviour as a means of defining the demonic *other* also emerged in the Gothic tradition. As Hendershot explains, 'a Gothic body is frequently a possessed body, a body inhabited by an alien other' (1998, p. 43). However, the Gothic *other* was not strictly a demonic force as conceptualised in early modern theology, but rather more abstract in nature. The Gothic body, like the early modern body, actively challenges established law, be that natural, political, or social. Looking to the figure of the Gothic monster, there are distinct similarities with the early modern demoniac. In the same manner that demonic forces invade the body and defy the natural boundaries, the Gothic monster is also the subject of supernatural animation: to be the monster is also to be the monster's victim (Punter 1998, p. 45). This state was conveyed through the use of Darwinian language and animal imagery in Gothic texts. The Gothic monster was most often envisioned as a devolved or mutated human being, most clearly exemplified in the figure of Mr Hyde (Morse 2007, p. 186). In the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Hyde is portrayed as a demonic beast, the savage possessing *other* to the respectable Dr Jekyll. The novel constantly invokes the language of the demonic with Hyde described as 'like Satan' (Stevenson 1886/1987, p. 10) or 'the ghost of some old sin' (p. 20). His actions are depicted as animalistic, trampling young girls in the street or brutally assaulting individuals with 'ape-like fury' (Stevenson 1886/1987, p. 26). Hyde is a symbol of demonic bestiality, and in this

period of Darwinian reassessment, this figure indicates that the human and the animal cannot be compartmentalised into binary oppositions (Hendershot 1998, p. 109). The figure of Hyde, along with the Gothic monster, therefore, serves a similar function as the early modern demonic animal. Both archetypes represent a threat to natural law, with the embodiment of the animal in humans emerging as a symbol of cultural and spiritual disorder.

As such, the animalistic is a thematic and metaphoric vehicle for *otherness* in Gothic literature. In the face of monstrosity and the uncanny, falling back on the traditional philosophical binary of the animal–human is a process that can potentially give shape to the *other*. It is through the use of animal language in the highlighted texts that authors were able to represent the unrepresentable (Ortiz-Robles 2015, p. 11). The use of this language also serves to emphasize the animal–human relationship. Monstrosity—as it was expressed through the Gothic monster—was present within every individual, as Darwinian science recognised that the animal was more closely related to humanity than previously envisaged. Fear of the other was thus no longer predicated on an abstract being, but on humanity’s inherent connectedness with the animal world. Dracula, in his undead and beast-like state, encapsulates many of these concerns. In his figure are delineated a number of primitive fears: he is a shape-changer, a merger of species, and the harbinger of ethnic collapse (Bomarita 2006, p. 169). Like with the demoniac William Sommers, Dracula is not consigned to one animal but embodies animality itself. Along with the visage of a black dog, he also transforms into a wolf, blackbird, or bat and is associated with many more. When the Crew of Light encounter Dracula in Piccadilly, the text describes the creature as such: ‘There was something so panther-like in the movement—something so unhuman ... As the Count saw us, a horrible sort of snarl passed over his face, showing the eye-teeth long and pointed; but the evil smile as quickly passed into a cold stare of lion-like disdain’ (Stoker 1897/1979, p. 266). As Ortiz-Robles explains, Dracula is ‘not merely an animal, a single beast; rather, he encompasses the Animal Kingdom as a whole’ (2015, p. 14). Dracula’s forms are multiple as the Gothic monster, the *other*, has no fixed visage. This is because the Gothic monster is a being that is ultimately formless until given shape and meaning by its (perceived) embodiment of the animalistic, as this is the only means that we can come to fully comprehend it.

ANIMAL IMAGERY IN THE POSSESSION OF WILLIAM SOMMERS

As one of the archetypal cases of demonic possession in the early modern English context, the Sommers account offers valuable insight into the role of animals in possession narratives. Furthermore, it also establishes many of the key thematic and metaphoric forms of animal–human hybridity that would reemerge in Victorian Gothic literature. William Sommers, a young discontent musicians-apprentice, was struck down by a mysterious illness in October 1597. After weeks of strange afflictions, the local community concluded that a witch had sent an evil spirit into the young man. Sommers's affliction developed during a period in which Nottingham was experiencing civil and social tensions, with conflict raging over land leases and hay tithes. Unable to be treated medically, the exorcist John Darrell was called for. Sommers's illness was scrutinised by both the Nottingham authorities and the central London ecclesiastical powers, thus prompting Darrell to respond in print. In the possession pamphlets that emerged from this ordeal, *A Breife Narration* (1598), *A Brief Apologie* (1599), and *A True Narration* (1600), the presence of demonic animals and animal imagery is noteworthy. Sommers was described as interacting with both cats and dogs, along with embodying multiple other animals, in his demonic behaviour. What is significant here is just how the spiritual and cultural perceptions surrounding animals in this period took form within this particular narrative. The performance of this demoniac conformed to the model of an animalistic possession that had developed in early modern Protestant demonological thought. The source material on the William Sommers case thus establishes precisely how animals were invoked and depicted in early modern accounts of demonic possession.

During his illnesses, Sommers was continually described as animalistic. At times, he 'fomed like to the horse or boare... scriched or cryed aloude in a strange and supernaturall manner ... roared fearfullye lyke a beare, and cryed like a swyne' (Darrell 1600, p. 19). He even supposedly took on the appearance of an animal, 'that his tongue would be thrust out of his mouth to the bignes of a calves tongue' (Darrell 1598, sig.Diiiiiv). It was also said that Sommers was joined in his bed by a number of cats who were only seen to stir underneath the coverlet. Whenever 'the coverlet sudainly cast up, they were gone: thrown downe, there againe' (Anon 1599, pp. 31–32). This strange feat impressed upon the audience the nature of the young man's illness. On another occasion, during

one of his demonic fits, Sommers carried out a pantomime of various sins before a sizable audience. With his eyes shut and lips sealed, he performed profane acts representing ‘brauling, quarriling, fighting, swaring, robbing by the high wayes, picking and cutting of purses, burgularie, whoredom, prid both in men and women ... druncennes, glotinye’ (Darrell 1600, p. 18). When he reached the act of lust, Sommers attempted to sodomise a dog, horrifying the crowd with this seemingly demonic behaviour.

On the morning of November 7, Darrell and three other ministers prepared to perform an exorcism. A large crowd had already gathered at Sommers’s residence, watching as the demoniac was ushered from his chamber into the centre of the house by several strong men, fighting and wailing all the while. Each of the ministers took turns in reciting biblical passages, this lasting for the greater part of the day. During this time, Sommers was:

continually vexed and tormented by Sathan, having little no rest at all, so as the same for vexation by the spirit far exceeded any of the dayes before. His torments in his fitts were most greuous and fearful to behold, wherein his body being swelled, was tossed vp and doune. In theis fits his strength was very great so as being held doune with 5. strong men, he did notwithstandinge all their strength against their wills, rise and stand vpriight of his feete. (Darrell 1600, p. 19)

The exorcism finally came to a conclusion in the evening, with Darrell able to draw the evil spirit out with the power of his biblical rhetoric. As Darrell delivered the lines from Mark 9:26: ‘And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead’, Sommers began to act erratically (1600, p. 20). Sensing the end was near; the crowd began to beg God to grant mercy upon Sommers. After fifteen minutes, Sommers suddenly grew deathly still, and it was declared that the demon had departed.

As the possession and exorcism of Sommers illustrates, early modern possession narratives framed the demoniac’s physical body as a battleground between the forces of God and the Devil: a conflict between the higher, civilised faculties of humans, and their more animalistic side. The notion of the human body as a transcendent battleground pertains to the conceptualisation of demonic possession as a spiritual and cultural performance, a prevalent theoretical model within the scholarship

on early modern possession. In 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', Stephen Greenblatt asserts that there was a significant metaphorical connection between early modern possession and theatrics. As with any dramatic performance, spirit possession relied upon a series of conventional modes of behaviour that communicated demonic affliction to a community, allowing an individual 'to express this distress without alienating him or her disadvantageously from other members in the community' (Sands 2004, p. 9). In conveying their affliction to the community, demoniacs utilised the existing spiritual and cultural construction of the demonic *other* that had been established in early modern demonology. As Brian Levack contends, all early modern possessions were 'scripted' performances that drew from the existing cultural and spiritual values of that particular society, explaining why certain symptoms became prevalent in English possession narratives (2013, pp. 30–31). The purpose of this performance was for the demoniac to alert others of their condition, setting the stage for the arrival of the exorcist (Greenblatt 1985, p. 429). This entire ritual of the possession and exorcism was therefore a means in which societal anxieties were articulated and (possibly) remedied.

This theoretical model of demonic possession as a spiritual and cultural performance was largely concerned with animalistic behaviour. Extreme emotion was at the centre of early modern possession narratives, and the animal was shaped as the embodiment of these emotions. Kirsten Uszkalo's notion of 'rage possession', a form of spirit possession characterised by aggression and violent outbursts, is especially relevant here. Rage possession 'develops from the experience of a normative but unbridled emotion like rage', conveyed through erratic movements and violent outbursts (2015, pp. 2–3). The 'demonic' behaviour described in the gospels and elaborated on in early modern possession narratives, therefore emerged as a means for these demoniacs to express their emotions. As such, the unbridled emotions of the demoniac would feed into their demonic performance, providing these individuals with a culturally and spiritually sanctioned behavioural model. Because the majority of English demoniacs in this period were young and restricted in their social mobility, this mode of behaviour was a means for these individuals to manifest their anxiety and express their discontent. When experiencing adverse circumstances, succumbing to possession developed as a recourse in which adolescents were able to acquire some agency, allowing them to mount a religious and social rebellion (French 2015, p. 75). While under the throes of demonic affliction, the social status of the demoniac was

temporarily upgraded, implying that special divine attention had been bestowed upon that individual. In embodying animals in these performances, demoniacs were therefore able to effectively communicate their affliction and shape their selves as the demonic *other*.

The imagery and symbolism of the demonic black dog is prevalent in the source material for the Sommers possession. Throughout this narrative, Sommers continually interacts with Satan who, usually, assumes the form of a dog-like creature. The relationship between Sommers and this creature is central to the overarching possession narrative with Satan appearing before Sommers on multiple occasions, offering temptations, or threatening to harm the demoniac. In one instance, Satan visited Sommers in his prison cell, where he was being held by the Nottingham authorities on suspicion of feigning his possession. Sommers reported that ‘there came unto me a thing like unto a Dogg, and said unto me, And if I would consent unto him and say that I was counterfeit, hee would give me a bagge of golde, and if I woulde not, hee woulde make me be hanged, or else he would teare mee in peeces’ (Darrell 1599, p. 5). The source material also explains that the Devil’s possession of Sommers was sporadic, the intention being to plant doubt in the minds of the townsfolk over the true nature of his affliction. When attempting to enter Sommers, Satan assumed the likeness of a mouse as it was believed that demonic entities physically entered into a person through an orifice (Darrell 1600, p. 32). Sommers’s body therefore became the subject of continual demonic incursion and transformation with the black dog fashioned as a symbol of this diabolic force.

Finally, in March of 1598, William Sommers was brought before an investigative commission in Nottingham to assess the authenticity of his demonic possession. Anxieties in Nottingham had been steadily rising over this period, finally reaching a crescendo during this commission hearing. While under questioning, Sommers collapsed before the crowd and commissioners in a demonic fit: ‘At the same time there was seene to three of the Commissioners onely (the rowme being full of people) a black dogge running about *Sum.* head as he laye before them snusung at his mouth’ (Darrell 1599, p. 5). This was supposedly the same creature that Sommers had spoken of and the Commissioners could no longer deny that they were in the presence of Satan. At this revelation, the gathered townspeople were driven to hysteria as the authenticity of the young man’s demonic illness was confirmed. Nottingham appeared to descend into mania, with clashes breaking out in the streets and the

pulpits ringing of nothing but talk of witches and devils. Through the demonic performance of Sommers, or in the form of a monstrous dog-like creature, it was now clear to the populace of Nottingham that the Devil was among them.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has detailed, animals played a prominent role in the demonic possession narratives of the early modern period. In these texts, animals performed a specific spiritual and cultural role that reflected the mentalities of early modern audiences. Portrayed as demonic constructs, animals represented the demonic *other*: a mirror image to the model of Christian behaviour that early modern audiences were encouraged to follow. Simultaneously, animalistic behaviour developed as a means of configuring the demonic in these instances, a model in which demoniacs could invoke in communicating their affliction. As scholars like Greenblatt, Levack, and Uszkalo have argued, demoniacs used a number of performative cues to convey their demonic affliction to their respective community. Animalistic behaviour emerged as one of these recognisable signs of demonic possession, drawn from centuries of Christian theology and philosophy. The William Sommers pamphlets exemplify this multifaceted role that animals played. In this narrative, Sommers's afflictions are enacted for an attentive audience and it is here that animals are transfigured into vessels that the prevailing spiritual and cultural anxieties of the period could be projected onto.

It is thus this early modern perception of animals that figures so prominently in the later Gothic tradition. The theological and philosophical understandings of animals, as both an instrument of demonic incursion and a representation of the beastly state of humans, remained as central themes in the Victorian Gothic. While Victorian England had largely embraced a scientific worldview that recast the animal in a Darwinian paradigm, the early modern perception still shaped how this society defined what was and what was not human. Animalistic behaviour figured so prominently in early modern accounts of demonic possession because it represented the struggle between the two states of humankind. This same struggle developed as a prominent theme in the Gothic tradition, with demonic possession and demonic animals reconfigured in the Victorian context. The Gothic monster, in occupying the intermediate zone between animal and human, also echoed the transformative

process that the early modern demoniac underwent, thereby developing into a vehicle for spiritual and cultural anxieties. In attempting to understand and contextualise the symbolic role of the animal in the Gothic, it is therefore necessary to trace its origins to the early modern period. It is in these early modern demonic possession narratives that the Gothic animal, the demonic *other*, truly takes form.

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