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**“A Small Demon is Better than no Demon”: An Analysis of the Different Faces of  
the Devil in Isaac Asimov’s *Azazel***

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*I would like to thank my wife Bruna Bergman Machado for being my family, to inspire me and for the unconditional support throughout the years.*

*To my advisor Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes, for trusting me and in my subject of research.*

*And to professor Salma Ferraz, who presented to me the field of Theopoetic studies.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The subject of investigation in this analysis is the Devil created by Isaac Asimov in the fantasy book called *Azazel* in comparison to the Devil of the Bible, created and implemented throughout history by the Christian tradition, Catholic Catechism, popular tradition and collective imagination. Furthermore, by investigating how the Devil is portrayed according to their aesthetic aspects, behavior and skills and taking into consideration the Bible as a literary text and the field of Theopoetics, I will analyze how similar and/or divergent they are from one another in terms of physical and behavioral characteristics, the background information and their superpowers. This research aims at establishing contrasts and analogies between the different facets of the Devil in the light of the portrayal of the Devil in Jerusalem's Bible at the interface of English Studies and Theology.

**Keywords:** Devil, *Azazel*, Isaac Asimov, Theopoetics, Jerusalem's Bible.

## **RESUMO**

O objeto de estudo desta análise é o Diabo, criado por Isaac Asimov, em seu livro de fantasia *Azazel* em comparação com o Diabo da Bíblia, concebido e implementado ao longo da história pela tradição cristã, o Catecismo Católico, a tradição popular e o imaginário coletivo. Além disso, ao investigar como o Diabo é representado de acordo com seus aspectos estéticos, comportamentais e suas capacidades, levando em conta a Bíblia como texto literário e os estudos da Teopoética talvez possamos descobrir se estes dois personagens possuem semelhança ou são completamente divergentes quanto a características físicas e comportamentais, o cenário e seus superpoderes. A pesquisa estabelecerá contraste e analogias entre as diferentes faces dos “Diabos” sob a luz da

Bíblia de Jerusalém e como ele é representado nela, sendo assim, trazendo também proximidade entre os campos dos estudos das literaturas de língua inglesa e a Teologia.

**Palavras-chave:** Diabo, Azazel, Isaac Asimov, Teopoética, Bíblia de Jerusalém.

## 1. Introduction

I think the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness. – Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The Devil is one of the most omnipresent figures in Western Literature; it is known by a variety of different names such as Mephistopheles, Satan, Lucifer, Demon, Fallen Angel, among many others. This character has been portrayed and described by many authors in their works throughout history. The malevolence, flexibility and the physical features of the devil that are used to portray it are unique and have been interpreted and described in different ways in works such as Dante's *The Divine Comedy* [1308-21], John Milton's *Paradise Lost* [1667], Goethe's *Faust* [1808] and the remarkable Gil Vicente's *Act of the Ship of Hell* [1517]<sup>1</sup>. Since the Bible, the Devil has been "acting" as the primordial enemy of morality and "decency". In the middle Ages, religion and the Catholic Church were very present on people's days and reality. They created rigid laws, persecuted, and investigated many citizens for their sins and "heresy" against their political and economic hegemony and interests. In Europe, in a time when peasants feared witches and used to be victims and witnesses of mass killings and torture from the Great Inquisition, heavily institutionalized by books such as *Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenge, the figure of the Devil transcended the Holy Scriptures to become a permanent presence in the peasants' daily lives, becoming a tool of social oppression, bestialized and empowered by the Catholic Church. This research aims to make a comparison between the multiple faces of the Devil

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<sup>1</sup> All the years mentioned between brackets regards the year of the works cited original publication.

portrayed in Isaac Asimov's short stories collection *Azazel* vis-à-vis with the Devil portrayed in the Bible.

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. The Bible as a literary text**

The Bible is a miscellaneous collection of texts or scriptures that Jews (regarding the Old Testament) and Christians (Old and New Testaments) consider to be a product of divine inspiration, a record of the relationship between God and humankind. The Bible can be considered "more like a small library than a real book" (Frye, 6). The Jerusalem's Bible<sup>2</sup>, which is the version used in this research, is divided into the Old Testament, which contains 46 books regarding mainly the laws of God, and the historical trajectory of the people of Israel and their philosophy; and the New Testament, containing 27 books, which narrate the birth of Jesus Christ, his history, reflections and legacy. It is an important book not only for those who consider it sacred, but also for Western Literature as a whole. Northrop Frye (2002) once stated that:

I soon realized that a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads: the most conscientious student will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning. (5)

The author makes clear that this knowledge is important because the Bible is a type of literary source that has been revisited and used by countless writers and artists since the middle Ages. Biblical characters and archetypes have been used, modified and

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<sup>2</sup> *The Jerusalem's Bible* was the chosen version to be part of the corpus of this analysis because it was also used in one of the other work cited and base text for this research, Henry Ansgar Kelly's, *Satan: A Biography*.



adapted into many other works in Literature, and the Devil seems to be one of the most explored character of them all.

## 2.2 Theopoetics

According to NUTEL (Núcleo de Estudos Comparados entre Teologia e Literatura) Theopoetics is a research field concerned with the literary analysis and criticism carried out through a theological reflection and the possible interdisciplinary dialogue between Theology and Literature. The perspective that will be applied to this work, then, is one of the strands of Theopoetics, as proposed by the theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel in his book *Os escritores e as escrituras: retratos teológico-literários*, originally published in 1991 and translated from German to Portuguese and published in Brazil in 1999. Kuschel's work focuses on the comparative studies between Literature and Theology. Bugliari and Longsdale explain that Kuschel proposes a method called "structural analogy", which refers to "thinking in structural analogies is [...] to perceive correspondences between one's own thinking and that of someone else" this would create "the possibility of a dialogical theology, which accepts the challenges of modernity and supplies convincing answers." (Kuschel, qtd. in B&L, 2015, 46). For many years the Church held a historical hegemony in terms of interpreting the Bible and suppressing different points of view and sometimes discussions about it, so by modernity Kuschel is referring to fairer and more "neutral" studies about it with new perspectives.

Kuschel wanted to establish a "mutual challenge" between Literature and Theology and to highlight the importance of this double perspective. For this reason, he also mentions that:

This applies to the reverse, contradictions of Christian explanations of reality in literature must be clearly recognized and named because only in

this way does the relationship between theology and literature turn into a relationship of tension, dialogue and struggle for truth. (Kuschel, qtd. in B&L, 2015,46)

In other words, Karl-Josef Kuschel proposes that theologians should, for instance, leave their pride behind in favor of a more neutral literary text without any manipulation or substitutions, likewise, the literary critics to leave their pride behind regarding not accepting the latent religious elements present in many texts.

Additionally, the Canadian literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye, in his introduction to the book *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (2002), consents to and enriches Kuschel's views with his own perspectives. He argues that the Bible must be taken as a literary work that has influenced many nations in many distinct instances, but warns that one should refrain from taking it as a "book of revelations" or a book that carries "extraordinary inherent value":

The intention is to free the hoary ancestral text from centuries of doctrinal accretions and of having been misread as history when it is not, except in vestigial ways, so that it can work again for thinking men and women (not necessarily religious ones) as the great visionary document of Western culture. (17)

Frye wants to affirm that, like any other book, the Bible must be taken as subject of analysis and discussion as part of the study of literature<sup>3</sup>, which goes hand in hand with Kuschel's "mutual challenge" perspective. To complement this idea, according to Grivel

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<sup>3</sup> I emphasized this part because, although studies taking the Bible as subject of analysis (specially in Literature) is a long-established field of research, I could not perceive this topic being addressed in class or in pieces of research carried out at DLLE (Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras), most articles and books bringing this discussion and dialogue between the fields of Theology and Literature was found in DLLV (Departamento de Língua e Literatura Vernáculas) at UFSC.

(1978) “no text exists in isolation but is always connected to a 'universe of texts' [...] whenever a new text comes into being it relates to previous texts” (13). Thus, they are intertexts, and this concept is applied in the case of the Bible.

### **2.3 The different faces of the Devil.**

The present study focuses on the character Azazel in relation to the Devil as portrayed in Jerusalem’s Bible. The following books will be used as aids to my analysis: *Satan: A Biography* (2002) from Henry Ansgar Kelly, and *O diabo no Imaginário Cristão* (1986) from Roberto F. Nogueira.

The first one shows a clear-cut portrait of the Devil in the Old and the New Testaments by means of a close-reading of representations of the Devil in Jerusalem’s Bible. The second one highlights how the image of the Devil exceeded the Bible and became an omnipresent figure and significant inspiration for artists throughout history. These works are valuable for the research, as they present and discuss not only the Devil’s physical and behavioral characteristics but its mental traits and influence on people’s lives.

### **2.4 Azazel, the character**

*Azazel* was written from 1980 to 1988 and published in the same year by the New York publisher Doubleday. All the short stories are presented in a satirical tone and from a third person perspective with limited knowledge, which means that the focus of all stories goes around one character, Azazel. The narrative is mainly set in dialogues between George Bitternut (the main narrator) and the other narrator, which has no name. Even though George is a scoundrel, he presents himself as being intellectually superior and as a highly cultured person from the Danish aristocracy. He claims to be able to conjure up a two-centimeter demon (called Azazel) who helps him make wishes come

true. The storyline focuses on Azazel's "restrictions", since he is not able to benefit George directly. The linguist can only evoke Azazel to help his friends and family, and for this reason, Azazel considers itself to be a good demon. However, the plot most of the times ends up converging into those "be careful with what you wish for" stories.

*Azazel* is considered Isaac Asimov's first attempt at pure fantasy short stories. The author is best known by his science fiction works, like the *Foundation* trilogy, or *I, Robot* and *The Bicentennial Man* which were adapted for the cinema. For this reason, he mentions in his introductory essay in *Azazel* that the stories were intentionally meant to be "un-Asimovian" materials, as a warning to his sci-fi fans so as to prevent any possible disappointments.

Many of the short stories in *Azazel* were primarily created to be published in magazines, and the first story was published in Eric Potter's magazine *Gallery*. In the book, *I. Asimov: A Memoir* (1995), chapter 149, Asimov himself mentions that he published the subsequent two original short Azazel's stories in F&SF (*Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine*) from April 1982 to July 1982.

Nevertheless, Isaac Asimov, who by that time was also director of a Sci-Fi magazine, IASFM (*Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*), together with his assistant and editor Shawna McCarthy, decided to start publishing the stories of George and Azazel in his own magazine. They both agreed and changed Azazel's "nature" from a little demon to a far galaxy alien to better fit in with his magazine proposal, so from 1982 to 1988 the stories of Azazel were all published in IASFM. Nonetheless, after seventeen published short stories, Asimov decided to publish all of them in book format, what consequently became a journey back to the original form of Azazel, as he says in *I. Asimov: A Memoir*:

By the time I had published seventeen of the *Azazel* stories, it seemed to me that it was time to put them out in book form and I brought the collection to Doubleday, where Jennifer Brehl had succeeded Kate Medina as my editor. Jennifer objected to *Azazel* as an extra-terrestrial. She wanted him to be a demon. I said that was what he had been at first but my magazine had made me change that. Jennifer said, “Change it back. We want to be able to say this is your first book of fantasies.” (Asimov, 149)

Isaac Asimov, in the same book, comments about the process of writing *Azazel*:

The stories are deliberately overwritten and there is an atmosphere of broad farce about them. The most ridiculous things are said with a straight face, and I get the chance to satirize many of the aspects of society that I think are worth satirizing. (Asimov, 1995)

Isaac Asimov was a North American writer and biochemist born in Petrovichi, Russia in 1919. According to Freedman in his book *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000). Asimov, is one of the most beloved and respected authors, considered a founding father of the science fiction genre, alongside Robert A. Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke. Asimov wrote and published more than 450 books, besides hundreds of critical articles, short stories and reviews over a fifty-year career. Isaac Asimov died in 1992 at the age of seventy-two, and the legacy he left behind has been used, visited and revisited as a source of inspiration and ideas for animations, comic books, films, music, video games and, certainly, literature.

Below we can see the illustration used in the first German edition, published in 2004. I think the way it was depicted perfectly matches with what we read throughout the short stories.

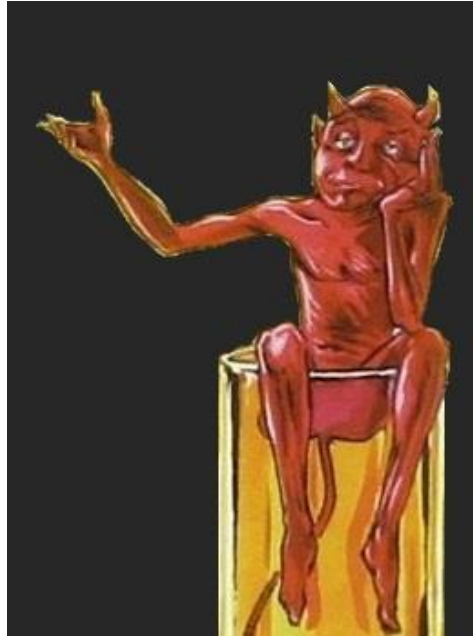


Figure 1. Körber, Joachim. *Azazel*. 2004. Illustration, published by Edition Phantasia, Berlin.

### 3. Method

*Azazel*, by Isaac Asimov, consists of eighteen short stories; it is a collection originally written and published from 1980 to 1991. All the short stories will be part of the corpus of this analysis, since there are different characteristics of Azazel mentioned in different stories. Furthermore, the character of Azazel will be analyzed through the eyes of different theories and perspectives, including Joseph Karl-Kuschel's and Northrop Frye's views in their books *Os Escritos e as Escrituras* (1991) and *The Great Code* (2002), respectively. I will present the different characteristics of the Devil in the Bible, aided by Nogueira's *O diabo no imaginário Cristão* (1986) and Ansgar Kelly's *Satan: A Biography* (2006). It will assist delineate and better understand the character's physical traits and intellect. Last but not least it is important to highlight that the intention here is not to work with the short stories as a whole, but with the character itself and its apparition throughout the short stories.

The objectives of this research are phrased in the form of the following research questions:

- I) How is the Devil portrayed and represented in *Azazel* and in the Bible?
- II) What are the differences and similarities between the Devil of the Bible and *Azazel*?
- III) Which features bring them together or drive them apart?

My hypothesis is that, the Devil created by Asimov (*Azazel*) and the Devil portrayed in the Bible, walks in parallel paths, where *Azazel* borrows some supernatural powers, physical and behavioral traits from the Bible to become another face of the Devil in Literature.

By conducting this research, I intend to tighten links between the study of English Studies and Theology at UFSC, an interface that still seems to be an unexplored topic in foreign languages and literatures.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

The world is a theatre where the Devil plays  
an infinity of diverse and varied roles - Pierre  
de Lancre.

This analysis examines the representations of *Azazel*, the two-centimeter demon created by Isaac Asimov in the late 1980's, in relation to the Devil in light of the Jerusalem's Bible. Some features of these two characters, such as physical and behavioral characteristics, and also power will be compared in order to better outline both characters. Furthermore, in order to show which features, bring them together or drive them apart, I will include some contextual information in the analysis.

## 4.1 Physical Characteristics

In the introductory short story “The two-centimeter demon”, George, one of the narrators, mentions that Azazel’s “voice seemed higher and squeakier than ever”, and gives a clear description of Azazel right after that: “His skin is a bright red and on his forehead are two nubbins of horns. It is fortunate, of course, that he didn't come out altogether, for his centimeter-long, muscular tail is both his most prominent and his most nauseating feature” (16). Other physical characteristics are mentioned throughout the short stories, for instance in “The Dim Rumble” the narrator mentions that Azazel appears surrounded by a pink glow. (52)

In the short story “Writing Time”, George mentions that Azazel has “a perfectly spherical abdomen [...] as though he had swallowed a ball bearing”, and snores very high and in a pitched voice (97). These characteristics mentioned here have to do with the Devil of the Christian tradition rather than the Devil of the Scriptures. According to Nogueira (1986), Christianity has portrayed the Devil with characteristics of the Pagan Gods to distort and bestialize them. For many years, deities, rites, cults, and religious celebrations that had already been institutionalized by other traditions were endowed with a new discourse and a new dressing to hide and erase the pagan origins:

In Italy, the popular cult for the Mother of God (in Napole) certainly comes from the ancient cult of Vesta and Ceres, just like in Rome, where the temple of Vesta was transformed into the Madonna Church [...]; the Bonfires of Saint John, which is related to the summer solstice celebrations [...]; *Saint Anthony* of Padua, which took the place of Neptune Equester [...]. In Greece, the Virgin replaces Aphrodite [...] The God Helios is



replaced with Saint Helius [...]; Aesculapius replaced with Saint Roch, among many other examples. (my translation, 27)<sup>4</sup>

These Christianization of sites started in the early Christian times as part of the “Interpretatio Christiana”, which is the adaptation of the pagan culture, beliefs and history to a Christian tradition. Pope Gregory mentioned in a letter to Mellitus (Bishop of London), that it would be easier to make people get used to the reform, by keeping the site and changing the symbol of their veneration. Furthermore, other important features were adapted such as the calendars, festivities, solemnities, the studies about cosmology, history, ethnography, and in many cases, even the message and motifs behind objects and artifacts.

Following this idea, Margaret Atwood in “The Battle between action and belief” (2017) argues that:

the church was hard-pressed to make that Celtic festival of the dead very Christian at all, and what Jesus has to say about Halloween is nothing. Every one of this festival is pagan in origin, but – as seems to be the rule with religious – Christianity borrowed each one and put a veneer of its own over top of it, as it did with sacred wells in Ireland. If you can’t suppress it, transform it.

Many scholars argue that most part of the Jewish trajectory in ancient history has a close relation to slavery and being exposed to different cultures, rites, gods and goddesses. In this vein, Nogueira (1986) also mentions that “Judaism lumped all angels,

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<sup>4</sup> Na Itália [...] o culto popular da Mãe de Deus, em Nápoles, procede certamente do culto de Vesta e de Ceres, do mesmo modo que em Roma o templo de Vesta foi convertido em igreja de Madona do Sol [...] o fogo de São João, que se reporta ao antigo solstício de verão [...] Santo Antônio tomou lugar de Nepturnus Equestres[...] Na Grécia, a Virgem substituiu Afrodite [...] Hélios é substituído por São Élio[...] Esculápio por São Roque.

gods and demons as pure diabolical entities; pagan idols were turned into a legion of evil spirits in the Bible [...]. Therefore, all of those who continued to practice the pagan cults [...] were actually worshiping Satan” (my translation, 24).<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, there are three more characteristics the narrator mentions that have connections with the Devil portrayed in the Bible. In the short story “More Things in Heaven and Earth”, we read that Azazel has “a small and forked tongue” like a serpent, perhaps as an allusion to the Ancient Serpent of the Genesis. Ansgar Kelly (2008) affirms that: “There is no devil, Devil or DEVIL in the Book of Genesis. The interpretation of the Serpent in the Garden of Eden as the Devil is one of those retrofittings of past data” (13). Nogueira (1986) complements this view regarding the connection between the Devil and the Ancient Serpent, by saying that this connection actually appeared in an apocryphal text in the first century, when the Latin Church and the Greek Church reached the consensus that the ancient Serpent of the Eden was the Devil in disguise

Only in the New Testament, more specifically in the Book of Revelations, the writer (or writers) consolidates a connection between Satan and the Serpent: “And the great *dragon* was cast out, that old *serpent*, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth” (Rev. 12; 9 Jerusalem’s Bible). Additionally, one of the Devil’s more remarkable physical characteristics are finally uncovered as it follows in the book of Revelations 12; 3: “Then a second sign appeared in the sky: There was a huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and each of the seven heads crowned with a coronet. Its tail swept a third of the stars from the sky and

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<sup>5</sup> O Judaísmo confluiu todos os anjos, deuses e demônios em entidades puramente demoníacas, ídolos pagãos se tornaram legião de espíritos malfazejos na Bíblia [...] portanto, todos aqueles que continuavam a praticar os cultos pagãos [...] prestavam na realidade, um culto a Satã.

hurled them to the ground, and the dragon stopped in front of the woman as she was at the point of giving birth, so that it could eat the child as soon as it was born.”

The image below portrays the passage of Revelation previously mentioned; it shows the Devil as the Dragon of the Apocalypse, one of its most remarkable forms.



**Figure 2.** Dürer, Albrecht. *The Apocalyptic Woman*. 1498, woodcut. Rumyantsev Museum, Saint Petersburg.

In contrast, in the short story “He Travels the Fastest,” Azazel is described as one who has scales over its body and is able to fly as it wishes (albeit no wings are mentioned throughout the whole book, just like in the Jerusalem’s Bible). For these reasons, I suggest that Asimov creates another association with the Devil of the Scriptures and Azazel, by adorning it with horns, tail and the power to fly.

To briefly conclude this part, even though Azazel has some physical characteristics that match with those of the Devil of the Bible, most of them have to do with the Christian tradition and people's beliefs. Many of the iconography produced in the middle Ages regarding the Devil, portrayed a horrible creature with bestial appearance and disturbing behavior. On this Nogueira (1986) claims that:

The greatest model, which influenced all the diabolical iconography, was Pan and the satyrs; half man and half goat creatures, with horns, cloven hoofs, slanted eyes and pointy ears. (my translation, 58)<sup>6</sup>

#### **4.2 Behavioral characteristics**

Azazel is referred to as a friendly demon right in the first short story, as an altruistic being who “likes to help out” (15). Contrary to Devil of the Scriptures, Azazel does not know the value of the soul and how all souls belong to God (Ezek. 18;4 Jerusalem's Bible) nor about the idea of trading his services for souls (like Mephistopheles in Faust for instance). Azazel does not want anything in return for the wishes, and neither is familiar with the concept of “soul” (22). In the short story “The Evil Drink Does”, for example, we see the first and only trade between Azazel and George. A quarter of a dollar made of aluminum is offered in compensation for calling Azazel in the middle of a gambling game, but it is not Azazel who asks for it.

In the book of Mathews (Matt. 10; 28 Jerusalem's Bible), Jesus mentions that it is important to fear: “who kills the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” In this light, Azazel differs from the Devil of the

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<sup>6</sup> O grande modelo que influenciou toda a iconografia diabólica foram clássicas imagens de Pã e dos sátiros: criaturas meio homem, meio bode, com chifres, cascos partidos, olhos oblíquos e orelhas pontiagudas.

Bible, for it is a harmless creature and indifferent towards one's spiritual salvation or deliverance and has no interest in human's souls.

One of the main features regarding Azazel's behavior is its mood, the acid temper and its indifference and apathy towards the human race in general. Beginning with his attitudes and overall humor, alongside almost all the short stories, George Bitternut refers to Azazel as an angry, grumpy, sulky and irritated being who is always gets furious for being summoned. In the Bible (Eph. 4; 26-27), anger is what allows the Devil to "take over" a person: "be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." This verse introduces the next topic, the rage demonstrated by Azazel has to do with its second and major characteristic, his indifference and arrogance towards humanity.

Most of the times, Azazel is angry for being summoned by George in the middle of something like sleeping, taking a shower, or in a graduation party. This fact indicates that even though Azazel has magical abilities and powers, he is not able, or does not want to take revenge on George or any kind of retaliation. Perhaps, the explanation for this feeling comes from the pointless wishes George always makes, which, for Azazel, make no sense at all. In the short story "The Dim Rumble" for instance, Azazel suggests to kill a geologist who wants to destroy the Earth: "I can rearrange some of the molecules of his brain and he will then be dead [...]. Just human beings [...]" (54). It's not as though they're people" (55), showing a clear sense of indifference towards human beings. Also, in the short story "Saving Humanity", when George asks Azazel to make his friend Menander less miserable and be recognized as a hero and savior of the world, it answers: "But who in the universe would want to save humanity? Where's the worth in doing that?". (64)

Furthermore, in "Logic is Logic" and "More Things in Heaven and Earth", Azazel directly insults George and humans as "a huge mass of inferiority" (161) and people with

“extraordinary stupidity” (128). Even though Azazel seems to despise human beings, we also see that actually he is not familiar with any social conventions, social standards or any of what is considered “moral” to humans. In the short story “The Eye of the Beholder”, Azazel speaks about human beauty standards, and it says they are too different from its own: “The standards of beauty among your bloated and miserable species of life are atrocious.”(151)

In the book *Azazel*, except for the first short story that reveals how George met Azazel, we cannot actually distinguish if there is a chronological order among the other short stories, however, I suggest that Azazel gradually ends up becoming contradictorily more concerned about humanity. In the short story “A Matter of Principles” George tries to get advantage on a friend who is tired of being an advertising copywriter, Gotlieb Jones’s wish he could profit as a novelist. To do so, George makes Gotlieb sign a contract that would guarantee him money from the book sales. He accepts the deal and George invokes Azazel once more in his house. However, before Azazel gives Gotlieb the power to write in a very clear and imaginative way, he warns George of the dangers of this procedure: “I can remove the obstructing bit but that could endanger the stability of his mind. I think not, if I am skillful enough, but there is always the chance of accident. Do you suppose he would be willing to take the risk?” (76). George confirms, and Azazel grants the wish. However, in the end Gotlieb uses his new powerful creative talent to produce more advertisements and to get rich, leaving the idea of writing a novel behind.

Finally, to conclude this part, Azazel holds a restrict sense of morality and ethics about which he does not give any further explanations or details. For example, when it mentions that is unethical to change the planet’s weather in the short story “Dashing Through Snow”: “If you are going to ask me to rearrange the weather pattern in this world, then I refuse with considerable fervor. That would come under the heading of planet

tampering, which is against the ethics of my highly ethical people” (112). Additionally, in “The Fight of Spring”, in which George mentions that Azazel does not grant wishes twice for the same “subject” (189), since if a wish goes wrong there is no way to fix it over. Azazel, in terms of behavior, also differs from the Devil as, whereas in the Bible people must be aware of their own feelings to avoid being possessed by the Devil, Azazel seems to be very detached and disinterested in humanity in general.

### **4.3 Background Information**

In a very fragmented way, we are able to capture some important background information to build our diabolical character throughout the short stories. However, is that information similar to what we can find about the Devil in the Bible?

We may begin with Hell, where Azazel in these short stories supposedly lives and the biblical Hell, the “place” where all people who do not receive Jesus as their only savior will be punished for all eternity. Even though, according to Catholic catechisms and other interpretations, Hell might be considered not an actual place, but just the separation from God, the Bible describes Hell in a variety of ways, which we can see as a place; similarly, Azazel considers it a “country”.

In what regards Hell as a place, in the first short story “The two-centimeter demon”, George and the other narrator discuss about Azazel’s integrity and where does it come from. The narrator comments: “Come, come, George. Surely that’s not the philosophy of hell.” – then George replies: “Don’t say things like that, old man. Azazel would be enormously offended. He says that his country is kindly, decent, and highly civilized, and he speaks with enormous respect of his ruler whom he won’t name but whom he calls merely the All-in-All”. (13)

According to the Jerusalem’s Bible, most of the times, descriptions of Hell come from the book of Revelations and in the four of the books by the twelve Apostles. Hell is

described as a place for “eternal punishment” and “eternal fire”. (Matt. 25; 41-46) and “fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13; 50). Drawing a very dramatic and chaotic image of a gruesome place reserved for sinners and non-believers. In sum, “it is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire [...], where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” (Mrk. 9; 43-48). A concise and consistent description of Hell is settled, again, when Hell is described as a place of “unquenchable fire” and a place for torment. (Luk. 16; 28)

In the book of Revelations, or in many other cases “Revelations of John”, Hell is a dominion for “the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. [...] Where the beast and the false prophet were” (Rev. 20; 9-10). Additionally, Hell is mentioned as a place of judgment, and not only punishment: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.” (Rev. 20; 13)

All the elements mentioned until now about Hell, extracted directly from the Bible, were many times interpreted by different theologians and priests along our history. Nogueira (1986) mentions that the book of Revelations provided a foundation for a profuse number of deductions and interpretations about demons and what constitutes the Devil’s Kingdom. Different calculations were made and discussed among the members of the Church reaching the impressive number of 133,306,668 existing demons.

This theory of the estimated number of demons was settled in 15th century, however, it was first mentioned by Bishop of Tusculum in 1273, and restated later by Alphonsode Spina in 1460. To conclude this part, Nogueira concludes that:



Thus, the Kingdom of the Devil was represented at the end of the Middle Ages as a vast and organized monarchy presided by Satan and followed by princes, dukes, marquises, counts and prelates. There infernal mansion, as an allusion to the national States in formation in Europe, there was a vast network of officials: ambassadors, secretaries, treasurers, archivists, police force, master of ceremonies, directors of spectacles, chambermaids, cooks, dispensers and bakers. All this body of workers were present in order to keep the eternal conflict between Good and Evil<sup>7</sup>. (65)

This information goes in the same direction as that mentioned above, in “The two centimeters demon” where we have a very organized Hell, factories, and different types of media, entertainment industry and universities, ruled by Satan and functioning at its finest. Nevertheless, Azazel does not mention in any part of the narrative anything about hell being a place like a lake of fire (Luk. 16; 24 and Rev. 20; 14–15), nor a place of darkness (Mat. 8; 12), a prison of some sort (1 Pet. 3; 19) and even less a place for torment and suffering. Hell, in the book is the place where creatures like Azazel merely inhabit.

Another point about the construction of this character is his name, Azazel is not its actual name. According to George, its name is “unpronounceable by any earthly pair of lips” and means ““I am the King of Kings; look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair” (27), a reference to Percy Shelley’s *Ozymandias*. (1818)

In the short story “A Matter of Principles”, Azazel is called in the middle of an academic ceremony of some sort. George thinks Azazel is not very important in Hell but

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<sup>7</sup> Assim o Reino do Diabo aparecia para os homens, no final da Idade Média, como uma vasta e organizada monarquia presidida por Satã e secundada por príncipes, duques, marqueses, condes e prelados. Na mansão infernal existia, num arremedo dos Estados nacionais em formação na Europa, uma vasta rede de funcionários: embaixadores, secretários, tesoureiros, arquivistas, chefes de polícia, mestre de cerimônias, diretores de espetáculos, camareiros, cozinheiros, dispenseis e padeiros, toda essa organização existindo em função de eterno conflito entre o Bem e o Mal.

is only a student. Further in the texts, precisely in “The Eye of Beholder”, we find out that Azazel is probably a demon graduated in Biology; as when George persuades him to gradually change a woman’s appearance, he argues that the experience could serve as content to write an article on Biology in his world (151), what makes Azazel reconsider and consequently agreeing to grant the wish.

The Devil of the Bible has many names, and one of the most famous ones is “the father of lie’: “When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (1 Jhn 8; 44) Isaac Asimov’s Azazel does not have this malevolent personality, it is not a deceiver like the Devil of the Bible, instead, Asimov does the opposite by creating a naïve, trustful and good demon. Again, in the short story “More Things in Heaven and Earth”, Azazel mentions that he is not able to change some laws of nature, and recites a couplet written by a poet called Cheefpreest: "All nature is but art, unknown to thee; - All chance, direction, which thou canst not see." (162). However, this couplet belongs to Alexander Pope, an 18th-century English poet. Furthermore, ironically “chief priest”, according to the Scriptures, were all those who descended from Aaron, consequently, to be a “chief priest” meant to belong to a high position amongst the Israelites, but the point is that we cannot affirm that Azazel is lying on purpose or just being naive. In this case, Azazel appears confident about its resource and knowledge about its people, which becomes evident when it says that this poet would never lie.

Furthermore, regarding the issue of honesty, in “Dashing Through Snow”, Azazel talks briefly about its people’s ethics. In this short story, Azazel does not want to change the planet’s weather, so it speaks to George that it would be considered dishonesty and “against the ethics of my highly ethical people. I would not dream of being unethical” (112). Furthermore, Azazel does not grant multiple wishes for the same “subject”; in the

antepenultimate short story “Fights of Spring” George reveals that Azazel has a strong objection to operating on a particular individual twice. (189)

So far, Azazel can be described as an antagonist demon in relation to the Fallen Angel of the Scriptures. What brings them closer is mostly the physical characteristics based on popular and Christian tradition. Anyhow, there are still some examples of Azazel’s conduct that I intend to present ahead that may change what we observed so far. The next session is about Azazel’s powers since it is an entity that not only knows about the whole universe, the biology of the living beings, calculations, engineering, time and space, but can also alter, repair, adjust and transform things.

In this image we have Gustave Doré’s illustration of Dante Alighieri’s Inferno Devil, part of The Divine Comedy. Hell is described as a place with nine circles, each one containing different punishments for different types of sinners and the last circle is drawn as a frozen place where people who sinned are kept to suffer for all eternity. In the image below, we can see a giant Lucifer with horns, bat wings, chewing a sinner. Lucifer is portrayed as an infatuated creature, stucked in ice and acting like a punisher for Judas, Cassius and Brutus for their sin of betrayal.



**Figure 3.** Doré, Gustave. *Lucifer King Of Hell Frozen In Ice*. 1890, engraving. Cassel Publishing Company, New York.

#### **4.4 Supernatural Powers**

Beginning with the Devil's position towards humanity, as mentioned before, Azazel feels and acts like it was a superior being, however, it is important to mention that it also claims this hierarchical position among their people too. In the short story "Flight of Fancy", Azazel is accidentally stepped on in his planet when summoned. George, then asks Azazel if it could not have flown and arrogantly it affirms that it could if it noticed the presence of the "low-class" individual. With what regards the power of flying, in the famous temptation of Christ, which is detailed in the gospel of Mathews, Satan takes Jesus Christ to the peak of a high mountain and offers him the Earth (Satan's Kingdom).

Many interpretations are possible, perhaps Satan was creating illusions in Jesus' mind, however, it is possible that he could have flown, since the name Beelzebub is also

mentioned and identified as the Devil in the New Testament, and he is considered the Lord of the Flyers, and sometimes Lord of the Flies according to the demonology and “Lord of the High Places”, in the direct translation from the original name in Arabic *Ba‘lزابول*.

With what regards Satan’s hierarchical position, in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, we glance upon this issue and realize the place where the Devil actually belongs, which would be amongst the “sons of God”: “One day the Sons of God came to attend on Yahweh, and among them was Satan” (Job. 1;6). This passage reveals that Satan has the power to freely transit between Heaven and Earth. Satan answers to God by saying that he had been “around the earth” and “roaming about”. Furthermore, in the book of Ezekiel, the Devil is referred to as “the anointed cherub that covers; [...] you were on the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the middle of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you.” (Ezek. 28; 14-15). Even though the Devil had fallen according to the Scriptures, in parts, he keeps his hierarchical position, being able to transit between physical and spiritual realms. Those are important passages as they reveal the Devil’s place, and its influence to accuse Job in God’s presence. Notwithstanding, the Devil in the Old Testament is treated with respect by God and taken into consideration when it comes to its accusations.

In the book of Job, the Devil has the power (although acting only after God’s permission) to directly inflict catastrophes onto individuals, such as in Job’s case, killing his sheep and making his camels die, burning out Job’s house and oxen, and killing his sons and daughters (Job 1; 13-19). In the *Azazel* series, even though it is constantly summoned by George and many times ends up being persuaded to grant some wish,

differently from the Devil of the Bible, it can act more independently, without permissions of any sort.

Another of Azazel's major features that draws attention is its knowledge about human's structures (biologically speaking), how time and space work, and in some cases, how its powers greatly exceed the powers of the Devil in the Bible and even God's powers. As previously mentioned, in the short story "The Eye of Beholder", Azazel is portrayed more like a biology student or graduated in Biological sciences, and this characteristic is very recurrent in the subsequent short stories, not only due to its familiarity with scientific terms, but also due to the power to transform it as it pleases. In "To the Victor", Azazel reveals that it is easy to rearrange human's biochemical structures (39). Furthermore, in "The Evil Drink Does", George invokes Azazel in a friend's behalf, to ask if it could help her with an alcohol problem, since she gets sick and woozy every time she drinks but otherwise would not feel comfortable to approach men and ask them out. In the face of this, Azazel thus says:

It will only be necessary to adjust the enzymes appropriately in order to have her metabolize the alcohol swiftly and unerringly to the stage of the two-carbon fragment, which is the metabolic crossroads for fat, carbohydrate, and protein metabolism, and there will then be no evidence of intoxication at all. Alcohol will thus become a wholesome food for her.

(89)

The short story "More Things in Heaven and Earth" is about a great friend of George, Vissarion Johnson, who wanted to become the "economic adviser of the President" (157). Nonetheless, he was worried and hesitant about accepting the post. The reason would be that something mysterious was happening to the people who took the position: they ended up dying within systematic periods. The first chairman was in charge

for 32 years; the second one, 16 years; the next, 8; the other one 4 years; and the last one only 2 years. Thus, Vissarion was frightened thinking he could die within the next year. Then George offers to help and consequently summons Azazel once again. During their conversation, Azazel mentions that it:

can so alter the nature of your friend's [Vissarion] being as to ensure him against damage from anything on Earth. He won't be immune to the processes of physiological decay, of course. The workings of what I have in mind won't make him immortal, but it will at least make certain he won't die of infection or of accident, which I imagine he would find satisfactory.

(162)

Furthermore, in the short story “Galatea”, Isaac Asimov creates two parallels, or allusions to other two texts. The beginning of humanity according to the Scriptures, more specifically in Genesis when God creates Adam out of dust from the ground and breathes into his nose the “breath of life”, turning him into a living being, in some versions of the Bible, and mostly to the Ovid’s myth of Pygmalion<sup>8</sup>.

In “Galatea”, something very similar happens. The story is about Elderberry Muggs, a very successful sculptress, who is in love with her masterpiece, which is a silicate-based statue of a man she calls Hank. George decides to help her out by asking Azazel to turn the statue into warm and soft flesh (especially soft), once again Azazel gets mad about the idea: "Bring silicate-based material to carbon-and-water life? Why don't you ask me to build you a planet out of excrement and be done with it? How can I turn stone to flesh?" (198), he mentions that it would be much easier to make someone fall in

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<sup>8</sup> Pygmalion, according to Greek Mythology, was a Greek sculptor who carved a woman out of ivory (which he names Galatea) that was so beautiful and lifelike that he fell in love. Afterwards he wishes Aphrodite for a woman like his statue, and when he returns to his house, he kisses the statue and perceives it is warm. The statue turns into flesh and they marry and get a daughter.

love instead: “Love is easy. That's just a matter of adjusting hormones.” (199) Consequently, Azazel grants the wish and turn the statue into a human being with a lot of effort. Here Azazel is depicted as a very powerful being by the narrator, especially in relation to humans since it has acquired all the information required not only to modify all the living things but also create life from “nothing”, matching God’s power of creation.

Further to this, I suggest that those powers are not limited to this kind of creation, but also the destruction of time and space, corresponding to God’s omnipotence and omniscience and overcoming the biblical Devil’s powers. The Bible says that God knows the heart of people: “for you know every heart, you alone know the hearts of all mankind and so they may come to revere you as long as they live in the land you gave to our father” (1 Kgs. 8; 39). At the same time that Azazel does not know how to recognize human’s social behavior, patterns or overall conventions, on the other hand, it knows about human biological structure, and human minds, thoughts, wishes and dreams, and that is more than enough to overthrow God as the only one who has this great knowledge about mankind, as we will see more about “knowing every heart” ahead.

In the short story “The Dim Rumble”, Azazel is provided with a mind detector, which makes it able to track people by their minds in a sort of very strong telepathic power. The story revolves around Hannibal West, a professor of geology, specialized in Speleology, who randomly meets George in the lounge of a hotel and starts a conversation in which he reveals that he had discovered a sound amplifier in a cave that, if disturbed, could cause rumbles and violent earthquakes around the globe. This is an interesting story because George invokes Azazel to make a wish for himself and humanity, making Hannibal forget about his theory and the cave’s location. According to George, West wanted to use this “weapon” to destroy the planet and start all over, just like in Biblical great flood, so George beings:



"You are prepared to destroy billions of human beings?"

"The Lord did it by means of the Flood" - comments West

Astonished, George mentions: "Surely you don't believe the biblical tale of the ... "

"I am a creationist geologist, sir." Interrupts West and finishes the conversation. (52)

When Azazel is spawned, it mentions:

"Where is this human being you speak of?".

"In the lounge. It is located" - answers George

"Don't bother. I shall follow the aura of moral decay. I think I have it.

How do I identify the human being?"

"Sandy hair, pale eyes" - mentions George

Azazel interrupts him - "No, no. His mind."

"A fanatic."

"Ah, you might have said so at once. I have him - and I see I shall require a thorough steam bath when I return home. He is worse than you are." (53)

Eventually Azazel mentions that Hannibal has been truthful regarding his theory of destruction, and it suggests to change "some of the molecules of his brain and he will then be dead" (54) instead of erasing his memory, what would be a much more complex work to do.

In "He travels the Fastest" Azazel is portrayed as a creature who masters mathematical formulas and mental engineering, but it is in "The Mind's Construction" that Asimov shows this in practice. Vandevanter Robinson, another of George's friends,

was a Police detective in New York and what he wanted was to be very successful, like the “keen-eyed, hawk-nosed gentlemen who are the terrors of evil-doers everywhere” (169). George summons Azazel to ask if it could give Vandevanter the power to detect lies, and Azazel answers by saying that it would be naturally very easy to do so, since he can rearrange human’s glandular functions and intelligence. Once more Azazel grants the wish, but curiously, it passes on his own ability to detect lies (as we saw in *The Dim Rumble*) to a mere human. (172)

Closer to the end, in the short story “Writing Time”, Azazel declares that he is able to control time and space, has knowledge of quantum mechanics and can interfere with the laws of probability. The short story is about Mordecai Sims, a friend of George who is an author that is exasperated by the amount of time he spends waiting everywhere he goes. Mordecai wishes to have more free time to write, so George calls for Azazel and in their private conversation Azazel mentions: “See here, you are asking me to interfere with the laws of probability.” (98) And elsewhere: “What I will have to do is introduce a few nodes in the interconnection of the continuum with your friend” (99). Here Azazel’s power is unveiled:

Of course there's nothing wrong with being orderly. It is just that you can't really defy the second law of thermodynamics. It means that things will be a little less orderly elsewhere in order to restore the balance [...]. I've spread the effect through the solar system, so that there will be a few more asteroid collisions than would ordinarily take place, a few more eruptions [...]. I estimate it will get hot enough to make life on Earth impossible about two and a half million years sooner than it would have before I nodded the continuum. (100)

Azazel seems apathetic in relation to the end of humanity and the planet by granting this wish, however, in other terms, it only wants to help out according to what George says is appropriate. Azazel not only shows that it by itself can devastate the world, eradicate the human race, but also the entire galaxy. It becomes evident that Azazel has an omniscient power of knowing what will happen in two million years in the future.

To conclude, the biblical Satan has been named as the “the prince of this world” in John; as “ruler” of this world in Ephesians; and he is the primordial enemy of God and virtues, the father of lies, the dragon, the serpent, the tempter according to Genesis. In sum, the Devil has the Earth in his hands, and this is established very clearly in the book of Matthew chapter 4, when the Devil offers all the lands of the world to Jesus in exchange for his submission. Issac Asimov’s devil, or Azazel, walks in different directions not only in relation to the Devil of the Bible, but also popular Christian traditions.

## **5. Final Remarks**

Legion is my name, for we are many (Mark 5; 9  
Jerusalem’s Bible)

Many are the examples and representations of the Devil in Literature, some of them carry the stigma of the opponent of God, and are closer to the Christian tradition, and other examples present more innocent, regretful and naive Devils, which would be Azazel’s case. The image of the Devil is literary and theological, and it belongs not only to the Bible, but also to the popular tradition and social constructions that constantly change through time. It also belongs to the oral tradition, the folk tales, bedtime stories and has undergone many re-significations, especially after Romanticism.

Azazel’s figure is closer to what Nogueira mentions at the end of his book, that, perhaps, after Romanticism, Satan became “the symbol of the free spirit [...] not against

the religious moral, but in favor of the natural law, an adverse figure to the world preached by the Church. Satan comes to represent freedom, progress, science and life.” (my translation, 80)<sup>9</sup>

This stated, I will now refer back to the research questions suggested earlier:

I) How is the Devil portrayed and represented *Azazel* and in the Bible?

The Devil in the Bible appears as the tempter, the accuser, as in Job, as the opponent and enemy of God and the ‘harbinger’ of morality. It was used and bestialized by the Catholic Church, portrayed with the most creative and diverse zoomorphic archetypes such as the Dragon, the Serpent, goats, lions and so on. *Azazel*, on the other hand, is not depicted as the enemy, neither moralistic because he does not understand human values and social codes. Although powerful, *Azazel* despises humanity and does not want them to perish in Hell.

II) What are the differences and similarities between the Devil of the Bible and *Azazel*?

*Azazel* shares similar physical characteristics with those depicted in popular and Catholic traditions, such as horns, scales, cloven hoofs. Nonetheless, in terms of behavior, *Azazel* is harmless and does not desire human’s souls. Neither does it judge, accuse or destroy humans at its own will, or provoke the wrath of some god. The short stories mention that *Azazel* belongs to the upper-class society in his “country”; likewise, Satan belongs to the chosen sons of God, as mentioned in the book of Job, it can freely transit between Earth and the spiritual realms. It was interesting to bring

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<sup>9</sup> “O Romantismo transformará Satã no símbolo do espírito livre [...] não contra uma lei moral, mas segundo uma lei natural, contrária à aversão por este mundo pregada pela Igreja. Satanás significa liberdade, progresso, ciência, vida.”

the discussion of Hell as a place along with its depiction in the Bible. Just like it is a place in the short stories, in other words, Azazel's 'Hell' as is his homeland or planet.

III) Which features bring them together or drive them apart?

Some of the features that bring them together are mostly the physical ones, as aforementioned. However, since I suggest that these two characters, the biblical Devil and Azazel, walk on parallel paths and are gradually driven apart from each other when it comes to power. The Devil of the Bible has limitations; it needs God's permission to act on others. It is always inferior to God's powers and it also belongs to God's plans for humanity. Even though they both seem to have similar knowledge about the Earth, as the Biblical Devil in Ephesians 2:2 is called the "*ruler of this world*". Azazel, on the other hand, is capable of doing more than the biblical Devil. It has an inherent power and does not need anyone's permission to use it. The main point here is that Azazel does not have any particular principle to act upon; it does not belong to the divine providence neither does it have the responsibility to maintain the natural order of things. In fact, we could see that in many short stories, its powers have broken the laws of nature/universe.

In *Azazel's* short stories, the human in touch with the devil has no fear of it, Azazel does not carry the features of the Middle Ages Devil, it has no influence on anyone's daily lives since it is not omnipresent, nor is an imminent threat of any kind. The fact that there is no deal or "pact" with the Devil also takes Azazel further away from the representations brought forth in popular tradition.

To conclude, Christianity is responsible for the empowerment of the Devil in many cultures throughout the years. There is no Christianity without the archenemy of God, Satan. Its figure has been used as a scapegoat for humanity's faults and 'sins' throughout history; however, mostly because of the different faces of the Devil created in Literature, the evil now belongs to humanity too. This is the case in *Azazel*, since we

realize that all immorality, sin, prejudice and corruption that occur in the short stories come from humans themselves; all adverse conditions and side effects take place because of a person's deep desire of something that they do not really need. Depending on their choices and actions, humans can bring their own chaos to their lives and live in their own individual "Hell".

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