Evil Carnate

A Validation of the Hidden Optimism of Horror

Submitted by Benjamin Arthur Abbott Winfield to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, September 2014

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

ABSTRACT

The Novel

Edith Blaine is a religious woman with a troubled past. A lonesome spirit who seems condemned to failure at everything she pursues in life. Although she yearns to believe in God without a shred of doubt, her faith is mocked time and time again by the brutish reality that surrounds her. But when a critical head trauma wrecks Edith's brain beyond repair, her once-benign personality is violently transformed into a psychotic killer's. Only Edith's hope in the human soul – manifested through her beloved basset hound, Barney – can sustain her along this dark existential journey blurring the line between good and evil.

Evil Carnate is an exploration of one woman's struggle between her spiritual faith, and the empirical reality that seeks to overwhelm her. Edith Blaine's only means of maintaining her sanity is her own belief in an existence beyond the one we know. *Evil Carnate* drew its inspiration from works such as Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon* (1958) (the shift of one radical perspective to another via first-person narrative), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) (Lucy Westenra's emotional plight and subsequent transformation into a vampire), and Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) (the possibly sociopathic protagonist).

Evil Carnate: A Validation of the Hidden Optimism of Horror

The academic framework accompanying my novel is an evaluative essay designed to illustrate the hidden optimism of the horror genre. Nowhere could optimism seem more impotent than horror, which features everything from flesh-eating ghouls to bloodthirsty serial killers, but the consistent presence of the *supernatural* in horror is an ironic undermining ingredient to horror's universe of supposed doom. Vampires, zombies, and other assorted creatures are themselves creatures from beyond the grave, which castrates the finality of death.

From a grounded research perspective, my evaluative piece incorporates the material of many theology-based texts, the most crucial being Joseph Cardinal

Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* (1968) and *Mere Christianity* (1952) by C.S. Lewis. I chose Roman Catholicism as the religion of my protagonist, as it reflects the pathos of her physical/spiritual crisis the most acutely. Edith Blaine's head injury also required the assimilation of textbooks on mental illness and neurological damage; the two most valuable sources were *The Spiritual Brain (2008)* by Mario Beauregard & Denyse O'Leary, and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (1998)* by Oliver Sacks.

CONTENTS

Introduction: Autism & the Plight of the Mad

Chapter 1: Assembling the Story

    1.1 Origins and Sources
    1.2 The Horror Genre and Its "Hidden Optimism"
    1.3 Secular Horror vs. Supernatural Horror
    1.4 Why a Novel?

Chapter 2: Literary Inspirations & Resources

    2.1 Edith's Soul and its Religious Implications
    2.2 Dracula
    2.3 The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
    2.4 The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar
    2.5 Philip K. Dick

Chapter 3: Metamorphosis

    3.1 Transformation and Transfiguration
    3.2 Fear of Becoming the Other
    3.3 Nihilism vs. Pop-Nihilism
    3.4 Rambo: From Monster to Avenger

Chapter 4: The Spiritual Value of Dogs and Other Animals

    4.1 The Holiness of Dogs
    4.2 Basset Hounds
    4.3 Edith & Barney
    4.4 The Voice of Madness

Chapter 5: The Human Brain vs. the Human Soul

    5.1 The Brain & the Spirit
    5.2 Cognitive Impairment
    5.3 Death (and the Need to Transcend It)

Chapter 6: Belief and the Church

    6.1 Belief & the Lack Thereof

Introduction: Autism and the Plight of the Mad

Several years ago, I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. It is a condition that has been described to me as a mild form of autism, the severity of which varies from person to person. More common symptoms include social awkwardness, oddly imbalanced strengths and weakness towards different subjects (English, Math, geography, etc.), heightened sensitivity to loud environments/noises, and eccentric behavior patterns.

I cannot confirm or deny these reports, as they were written down inside a medical journal by professional individuals who – for the most part – were not afflicted by any kind of autism. I am not a doctor. Nor can I hope to provide a thorough medical breakdown of the condition. All I can do is write of my own experiences with Asperger's, and how its influence on many aspects of my life influenced the conception of *Evil Carnate* and its principal "heroine", Edith Blaine. Like Edith, who finds herself afflicted with a physical injury, I often feel trapped by my condition, to the point where I am sometimes inclined to believe my fate has been biologically pre-ordained. Edith and I share one factor in common, and that is the yearning to be free of the physical constraints of the brain. As a race of cognizant creatures, our perception of reality is defined by what our brains make of it. However, spirituality provides an entirely different set of rules:

> "Of course, if the materialists are right, spirituality must necessarily be an illusion. But as noted earlier, the materialists have simply assumed they are right; they have not demonstrated it. They would have been wise to proceed with caution before writing off as an illusion the deepest beliefs that the majority of humankind have always had about themselves. We would not write off the horse's view of being a horse or the dog's view of being a dog. But materialist preconceptions require that we write off humans' view of being human." [1]

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[1] Beauregard, Mario & O'Leary, Denyse, *"The Spiritual Brain,"* Pg. 8 Ch. 1 HarperCollins 2007

Materialism is a mode of thought which can be used comfortably even by those afflicted with debilitating physical illnesses. Physicist Stephen Hawking's ability to think was not at all inhibited by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, nor to convey those thoughts, thanks in part to a speech-generating device. Individuals afflicted with a condition that can directly attack the very core of a person's identity, materialism only provides so much comfort – if any. Living with Asperger's has made my years in education, from high school all the way through to college, a difficult and lonely journey.

Human beings are a mystery to me, which is one reason why I am often wary of venturing outside into the world. My inability to completely understand the simple behavior patterns of other people has led to several embarrassing social miscommunications. These isolated incidents of social *faux pas* comprise the most humiliating moments of my life, all of which are too personal to elaborate upon within this essay. But they did lead me to identify, on a fictional level, with the rejected and the scorned; protagonists who, due to some fault within themselves or outside their control, become trapped in a grim emotional spiral. Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* (1956) is perhaps the most renowned literary example I can use. My lot was among the underdogs.

The possible link between autism and "madness" isn't to be underestimated. Both conditions bring about social alienation and judgement to varying extremes. In earlier periods of history, they were easily confused as one and the same. There is a stigma permanently branded to madness, a negative association that "is perceived (and further shaped into) a shameful and menacing disease, from whose spiteful and exhausting eloquence society must be protected."[2] The Victorian stereotype of the hysterical 'madwoman' is one title intentionally meant to evoke shame and menace. The topic of madness in women is one of the most pivotal themes of this essay.

I cannot say for sure if Edith Blaine, the character, has Asperger's. As the syndrome was not standardized as a medical diagnosis until the early 1990's, and Edith's story culminates in the late 1970's, such a question is irrelevant anyway. It is not

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[2] Chesler, Phyllis, *Women and Madness*, Pg. 95 Ch. 2, Palgrave Macmillan 2005

so much the medical reality of Edith's plight prior to her head injury that motivates the novel, but my own emotional identification with Edith…and hopefully, the reader's as well.

Edith is ultimately meant to be a tragic figure, albeit one with an uplifting optimism. As all sufferers of different disabilities and mental disorders across the world are in their own ways tragic, so the same applies to Edith…but not after the accident that makes her into a monster. Edith was already "out of synch" with the rest of the human race prior to her accident, and it is the cruelty she endured at the hands of both children and adults that she in turn revisits upon her own child victims after being forcibly transformed into a witch-like creature.

Chapter 1

1.1 Origins & Sources

There are two real life incidents that indirectly inspired the conception of *Evil Carnate,* at least from the perspective of emotional pathos. The first is the infamous terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, and the second is a transcript of an Emergency 911 recording. I actually saw the events of 9/11 unfold live on a television screen, and it is difficult to articulate the strange state of mind I was in at the time. I remember seeing tiny black dots plummeting downwards from the sides of the burning skyscrapers, and I initially thought they were pieces of debris. It was only later that I learned they were actually people, jumping out of windows to escape the inferno within.

I could not help wondering what must have been racing through the minds of these individuals as they fell to their doom. What does a person in that cosmic second of final, ultimate terror have? My second source of inspiration (if "inspiration" is the correct word) was a 9-1-1 call from a woman drowning inside a car during a flash flood. The operator's frustration with his own inability to help, as well as the woman's knowledge of her impending death, continues to haunt me to this day. I have chosen not to post the names of the people involved in that incident out of respect, but nonetheless, the same question of mortal hopelessness persists as it did with the tragedy of September 11.

The *experience* of traumatic events, and the *witnessing* of traumatic events, should be distinguished from one another. *Witnessing* trauma brings about apprehension of said trauma, and the fear of one day experiencing it for oneself. Death is arguably the most potent trauma of all, as it is also inevitable; we observe death in our lifetimes, among our friends and loved ones, and eventually partake in it ourselves. A unique connection exists between the supernatural subgenre of horror, and the reality of human trauma: The fear of becoming "one of them", i.e. a monster.

This topic will be explored in further detail in section 3.2, but to summarize, supernatural-based transformations in horror films play into our collective fear of another kind of transformation: The leap from being alive, to being dead…or in the case of horror movies featuring zombies and/or vampires, "undead." Human beings witness the transition of alive-to-dead in other individuals, and in turn, become anxious about the day when their own passage of transition finally arrives. This anxiety is echoed in horror literature as much as horror cinema, with a pivotal character undergoing a monstrous transformation that a loved one is powerless to halt.

Transformed monsters, in this sense, represent the "death barrier" in the genre of horror. Once a protagonist or supporting character has ceased to resemble his/her former self, they are effectively "dead" to the audience, the counterpart of real-life death. This is the death barrier in horror. My thesis – both the creative novel, and the critical work – seeks to breach this barrier. But first, we must take into account how we arrive at the death barrier, in our own reality as much as fiction.

September 11, 2001 was a mass psychic shock unlike the majority of the human race had experienced since the cumulative horrors of the early twentieth century. This act of pure, intentional carnage sent many individuals reeling into a state of philosophical existentialism, not dissimilar from Jean-Paul Sartre's musings while living within Nazi-occupied Paris. Sartre had no doubts regarding his stance on God, but neither did he have any doubts of the wickedness he saw first-hand:

> "I do not believe in God; his existence has been disproved by Science. But in the concentration camp, I learned to believe in men."[3]

How can deeds of unquestionable savagery be committed in a universe governed by a supposedly divine being? This is hardly a new question, and one that has already been pondered for centuries by every philosopher, but 9/11 brought the issue into even sharper focus than before. Atheists already have a direct, simple answer: There is no God. The next question is just as direct and simple: "So what then?" Even Sartre could not suppress his own trepidations:

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[3] Sartre, Jean-Paul *Nausea,* Penguin Books 1938

"That God does not exist, I cannot deny. That my whole being cries out for God, I cannot forget."[4]

All over the world one continuously hears reports of the most ghastly and unjust deaths imaginable. There is no predicting when an individual could cross the line from being a witness of death to a partaker in death. The man who burns alive inside a car wreck, or the woman who is raped and murdered in some dark alley. If there really is no such thing as an afterlife, could a man or a woman experience in their last moments anything besides the emotion of despair? My thoughts were motivated in part by Carl Jung's research into the human psyche. Indeed, in terms of how humans deal with death on a purely emotional scale, Jung provided an accurate breakdown:

"…death is indeed a fearful piece of brutality; there is no sense pretending otherwise. It is brutal not only as a physical event, but far more so psychically; a human being is torn away from us, and what remains is the icy stillness of death."[5]

Jung speaks from the perspective of those who grieve for the loss of a loved one, but the actual intimate moment of death is something that cannot be articulated or relayed by the victim himself, as he is beyond any means of earthly communication. The divide between the damage wrought by the "physical death" as opposed to the more intangible "psychic death", is the conceptual seed that eventually grew into my novel *Evil Carnate*. Of course, there were other sources that provided much-needed creative fuel, one of the most prominent being *Flowers for Algernon* (1958) by Daniel Keyes, a science fiction novel about a mentally handicapped man, Charlie Gordon, who undergoes a surgical procedure that gradually transforms him into a towering genius….a miraculous development that later unravels as the protagonist's new intellect begins to regress. Charlie Gordon's experiences are narrated from a first-person perspective through his various journal entries. The conflict of a human's mind struggling to comprehend and cope with a radical interior metamorphosis is, in many ways, the template for Edith's plight in *Evil Carnate.*

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[4] Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Essays in Aesthetics*, Open Road Media 2012
[5] Jung, Carl *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* Pg. 346 Chap. XI, Fontana Press 1995

Charlie Gordon is a tragic figure, in that he is given something which is unfairly taken from him. We witness two different "Charlies" conceived by the author in *Flowers for Algernon*, the first a gentle simpleton, the second an intellectual giant. One evolves into the other, and subsequently regresses back into the former by novel's conclusion. We accompany Charlie in his journey every step of the way, and it is to Mr. Keyes's credit that the novel continues to resonate today, even after its scientific plausibility has been denounced. It is the emotionalism at the heart of *Flowers for Algernon* that I sought to channel for *Evil Carnate,* an aching sadness that's difficult to pinpoint or articulate.

Another important text in terms of invaluable research was *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922) by Apsley Cherry-Garrard. The book details a disastrous Arctic expedition from 1910 to 1913, led by Robert Falcon Scott. The final records written by Scott before freezing to death with his men are reminiscent of the mortal terror – and lonesome sadness – of the other cases I have already described above. The protagonist of my story, Edith Blaine, experiences a terrifying moment of mortality when she very nearly dies during a murder attempt. Thereafter, she is reborn into someone – or something – else. The Edith we know is "dead". The beast that has emerged from her ashes is an entirely new creature.

The Worst Journey in the World is the closest literary (and real life) equivalent to the manner of lonesome death that I have obsessed over for almost three years now. If there is no afterlife, then the best we can hope for is to not die alone. But what of those who die alone? What comfort and solace can atheism offer under such circumstances? The harsh answer is, *none whatsoever.* This thesis, *Evil Carnate*, is my attempt to provide a direct solution to the challenge of lonesome death; a promise of transcendence.

I would also like to thank Professor Huw Williams, of Exeter University's neuropsychology department, for granting some time out of his heavily booked schedule to provide the background data I needed to further ground Edith Blaine's bizarre mental state into some semblance of reality, especially about the nature of peritraumatic appraisal, a term I would not have discovered by myself in any of the books on

neurological disorders that I already owned. The neurological aspect of my thesis has been, by far, the most difficult and most challenging, which is why I'm deeply grateful to Professor Williams for his assistance and advice.

While researching the theological aspects of my thesis, Reverend Barry Dunsmore of Christchurch Warwick, Bermuda provided the groundwork I needed to assemble Edith's story, especially in regards to her metaphorical kinship with Jesus Christ. It was Rev. Dunsmore who directed me to the mystery of Mark 16.8, which in turn triggered the ending which had eluded me for many agonizing months.

1.2 The Horror Genre and Its "Hidden Optimism"

I would now like to discuss the broader subject of horror novels, films, and their kinship to *Evil Carnate.* Director Stanley Kubrick once made a telephone call to author Stephen King while in the process of filming *The Shining* (1980). We only have King's account of the conversation to go on, and we should also keep in mind that it was seven a.m. at the time Kubrick called a hung-over and still shaving King in his part of the world…something Kubrick probably should have considered before ringing King all the way from England.

According to King, Kubrick asked him if he felt that supernatural stories were optimistic. Tales featuring zombies, ghosts, the undead, *et al* posited the basic suggestion that death can indeed be overcome. The core of any fatalistic discussion is that death is the most obvious constant. *Ergo*, by Kubrick's logic, if supernatural stories imply we can survive death, then stories of the supernatural are fundamentally optimistic, regardless of the otherwise "horrific" content that occurs within them. King's reply was, supposedly, "What about Hell?" To which Kubrick answered, "I don't believe in Hell."

Just exactly how much of this exchange was true or false will never be known for sure, but it illustrates the oddly contradictory nature of horror films. On the surface, they offer gore, mayhem, death, and monsters by the bucketful. But, as Stanley Kubrick

appears to have noticed, beneath all the carnage is a surprisingly hopeful subtext. Besides the typical "serial killer" or slasher-based film, horror movies more often than not delve into the realm of the supernatural. By doing so, horror finds itself locked into the mother of all Catch-22's; the various menaces of horror movies, the nebulous "Other", originates from the supernatural, but by emerging to threaten the normal human protagonists, the Other has inadvertently provided evidence for the existence of an afterlife, thus destroying the most potent boogeyman of all: Death.

In traditional cinematic/literary terms, the Other is the depiction of individuals deemed "outsiders" by mainstream society. There are protagonists in horror who can be identified as Other from the moment of birth (Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) comes to mind), while more than a few begin their respective narratives as normal people, only to subsequently transform into the Other (David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), George Waggner's *The Wolf Man* (1941).) Classic novels feature the Normal-turned-Other as well, in particular Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) both of which will be excavated to greater detail later in this thesis. It is the passage from Normal to Other, of death to rebirth, which preoccupies my research, and is manifested in Edith Blaine's struggle with her own evil self. The Normal/Other and Death/Rebirth equations become inseparable within the horror genre, and although concealed behind a curtain of gore and darkness, it continues to recur in almost all popular horror media.

It is this "hidden optimism" of horror films and literature, this bizarre contradictory message of immediate physical terror vs. intangible thematic hope, I have always found fascinating. Thomas Sipos puts it best: "Hollywood loves 'feel good'. Horror prefers fatalism."[6] Upon first glance, this statement may seem contradictory, but it only legitimizes the horror genre's success at camouflaging its secret themes of liberation. Some subgenres are more adept at this technique than others. Asian horror, rendered popular by the infamous image of the long, black-haired woman seen in *Ringu* (1998) and *Ju-On: The Grudge* (2002), appear to be innately fatalistic movies, and they make

[6] Sipos, Thomas M. *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear*, Pg. 9 Ch. 1, McFarland & Company Inc. 2010

their gloomy philosophies crystal-clear to the viewer with their conclusions: The evil ghost is often, if not always, triumphant. In the case of *Ringu*, the heroine is forced into a moral compromise in order to save her son from Sadako's hateful spirit by transferring her malevolent curse to another relative. Sadako is a force that cannot be quelled, "because she was not herself 'human' to begin with, and her ultimate motivation was never, therefore, humanly intelligible."[7]

In the 1990's and early 2000's, Asian horror carried a visceral impact unlike anything seen before by Western audiences. While the popular "slasher" genre of the 1980's carried a recognizable 'moral compass' of sorts – the unpleasant and sexually promiscuous individuals would be destroyed, with the more sympathetic lead (typically a woman) surviving long enough to walk away from the carnage – no character was 'safe' in the horror films of Japan, Korea, and China. In Asian horror, "ghosts are free to attack anybody at any time for no real reason. You can be minding your own business and find yourself targeted by some spectral grudge."[8] Western culture would become infatuated with the fatalistic perspective of Asian horror, to the point where its own genre output began to share Asian horror's gloomy sensibilities.

A new wave of cinematic nihilism would evolve further in the form of "torture porn" (the *Saw* and *Hostel* series), in addition to the "home invasion" subgenre (*The Strangers*, 2008, *Funny Games*, 1997) where the evil is made out to be unchallengeable and invincible. But these are simply defense mechanisms, a protective reflex of the horror genre to bury its hidden optimism into the recesses of its own subconscious. As audiences grow more desensitized, horror films are forced to adjust by becoming more visceral.. More importantly, one of the most pivotal horror films of all time, *The Exorcist* (1973), had an arguably happy ending, where Regan manages to escape her demonic affliction with the help of two Catholic priests. The fact *The Exorcist* is also more religious than any of the other horror entries already mentioned should also be noted.

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[7] McRoy, Jay, *Japanese Horror Cinema*, Pg. 40 Ch. 3,Edinburgh University Press 2005
[8] Kalat, David*, J-Horror: The Definitive Guide to the Ring, the Grudge, and Beyond*, Pg. 67, Ch. 3, Vertical, Inc. 2007

The Exorcist is perhaps the most accurate example of the horror/optimism contradiction I've described above. For all of the unimaginable torment Regan endures throughout the course of the film and novel, its conclusion has a genuine cathartic quality that few movies in the genre have attained before or since. Both movie and book chart the same final trajectory for Father Karras and Regan, so for the sake of simplicity and conciseness, this section of the thesis will encapsulate both works as one entity.

Regardless of the fact that Regan is terrorized by monsters of supernatural origin, the affirmation of the demon's existence, in turn, affirms the existence of God and Heaven. This is made evident when Father Karras attempts to persuade the demon Pazuzu into undoing the straps that bind him/her/it to Regan's bed, to which the demon taunts, "That's much too vulgar a display of power." Pazuzu seeks to shake Karras's faith, but not to the point where he/she/it inadvertently renews his faith by demonstrating an act that's fantastical.

Likewise, Edith Blaine undergoes a terrible journey of the soul and "comes out the other side." Although *Evil Carnate* involves no vampires or ghouls, no werewolves or demons, Edith's underlining plight can be traced back to the monsters of classic tragedy-horror, in that she often has no control over her own actions. But there is hope for Edith, even within the parameters of her destroyed mind. I aim to reveal this contradictory optimism within my own body of work.

I recently discovered (via conversing with Bishop R.J. Kurtz of St. Theresa's Cathedral) that a madwoman like Edith *could actually be saved*, from a Roman Catholic perspective. Edith's soul is a "human soul"; damaged, but human all the same. As such, salvation is not beyond Edith's grasp. Due to her neurological impairment, her actions could not be perceived as legitimately human actions by the Church. "We are judged by our human acts," Bishop Kurtz explained to me. "And Edith's acts would not be considered fully human."[9]

This answer surprised me, as I had previously harbored an admittedly unfair view that the Church's doctrines would have been merciless in regards to Edith's fate

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[9] Kurtz, Bishop Robert Joseph. Diocese of Hamilton in Bermuda

following death, namely damnation. But the contrary proved to be true; Edith's destiny would not be relegated to Hell because of her deeds following her brain injury, no matter how monstrous, as she had ceased to possess any real control over her physical body. The horror genre likewise operates along similar patterns. The non-spiritual perspective of the movie/book itself is one of despair (vampires drinking blood, zombies consuming flesh, etc.), but the *spiritual* element is one of hope, as Edith's mind still operates with a modicum of humanity, incarnated within the narrative as Barney. In stark contrast, the traditional monsters of horror operate on a purely physical plane, with no sign of divinity to be found in their behavior.

1.3 Secular Horror vs. Supernatural Horror

There are two important subcategories in the genre that are clearly defined by the presence or non-presence of the supernatural. Serial killer films, such as *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) or *Seven* (1995), are examples of secular horror. A "monster" film that features vampires, werewolves, ghosts, demons, *et al* is an example of supernatural horror. By comparing and contrasting the two, perhaps the hidden optimism of supernatural horror can be more precisely illuminated.

First, I will discuss the various outcomes of the genre. Noel Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* delineates between "moral" and "evil" outcomes, where the former (evil) is more "likely" than the latter (moral). This is a logical progression of the secular/supernatural disunion. Secular-based horror is more inclined to end on a "realistic" note *(Funny Games* (1997), *Seven, The Devil's Rejects* (2005), *The Strangers* (2008)) with the villain(s) either surviving or, in the case of *Seven*, forcing the hero to compromise his personal ideology and values.

> "Suspense in popular fiction is a) an effective or emotional concomitant of a narrative answering scene or event which b) has two logically opposed outcomes such that c) one is morally correct but unlikely and the other is evil and likely."[10]

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[10] Carroll, Noel *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart,* Pg. 138, Ch. 3Routledge 1990

Carroll's "realism = evil" equation is somewhat more complex than what I have cited here, but the basic notion remains: In a godless reality, evil – or at the very least, unhappy conclusions – is a recurring risk. Contrast the outcomes of secular horror to the outcomes of supernatural horror. With a few exceptions, among them Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), a positive/moral outcome is more likely than a negative/immoral one. This is because the existence of the supernatural affirms the existence of a *subjective reality,* where good and evil aren't merely abstract concepts but authentic opposing universal forces. The reality of vampires validates the reality of vampire hunters; the reality of demons validates the reality of exorcism; the reality of ghosts validates the reality of the afterlife, and so on.

Branching out from that assessment, good is also consistently successful over evil, even if there are a few sacrifices along the way, i.e. Lucy Westenra in Stoker's *Dracula*. The heroes of supernatural horror fiction reside in a universe where the road to victory can be paved with blood, tears and sweat, but victory is inevitable all the same. There can be exceptions to this rule, with "pure" evil holding dominion over "pure" good (most notably in the case of *The Omen* (1976), where a satanic child escapes his destruction and eventually becomes the President of the United States, supposedly to bring about a Biblical apocalypse via nuclear fire). Nonetheless, these remain *exceptions.* The prevalent outcome to most supernatural horror is good's ascension over evil.

There are several examples of supernatural-themed horror in literature and film. Freddy Krueger, the seemingly invincible serial killer of the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984-03) franchise, returns again and again, only to have his final strategy thwarted by the protagonist. In classic mythology, Beowulf successfully slays Grendel in addition to his demonic mother. In Stephen King's longer works, such as *The Shining* (1977) and *Salem's Lot* (1975), a period of great conflict between good and evil ultimately concludes with good winning out.

Interestingly, the endings of King's short stories have a tendency to end on a bleaker note, but this is not so much evidence of any innate pessimism on King's behalf, as the mandatory horror short-story requirement of giving the reader a memorable sting

before wrapping up. Occasionally narrative content can also work to destabilize a potentially optimistic resolution, one such example being *The Howling* (1981), wherein reporter Karen White succeeds in exposing the reality of werewolves, only to have that success deflated by audience cynicism. ("The things they can do with special effects these days," a bar patron quips after the television broadcast.)

But these are cases where the filmmaker is once again camouflaging the genre's inherent optimism with a supposedly pessimistic outcome. The "enemy" in this subtext isn't the werewolves themselves, but the bar patron's calloused attitude towards the possible existence of werewolves, which acts as a convenient cover for future lycanthropic activities. Secular-based horror is more inclined to negative/immoral outcomes, due in part to the respective view of the filmmaker, who perceives unhappy conclusions as being more believable than a final reel where the hero walks away into the sunset, the story's love interest by his side.

In *Seven* (1995), John Doe decapitates the wife of Detective Mills and delivers her head in a box by film's end. Prior to her murder, the wife had been portrayed as the one source of decency and humanity in a world rotting from the inside out from moral and physical decay. In *Funny Games* (1997), two malevolent sociopaths, Paul and Peter, torture and eventually murder a couple, George and Ann, before escaping justice. Near the finale, one of the home invaders even manipulates on-screen events through a "fourth wall" device (a television remote, no less) to assure a negative/immoral outcome. *The Devil's Rejects* has a trinity of deranged misfits brutalize and slaughter a hapless family.

Director Michael Haneke states in an interview with Katey Rich "all the rules that usually make the viewer go home happy and contented are broken in my film."[11] The couple's child and dog are the first to be slaughtered by the psychotic young men. By going out of his way to "break the illusions" associated with moral outcomes, Haneke provides what he feels is an entirely secular horror film where the triumph of human wickedness isn't only possible, it's practically guaranteed. Haneke believes he is

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[11] Haneke, Michael *Cinemablend.com* 2008

voluntarily depriving his audience of the "hope drug" described several sections above. Haneke appears either unaware, or intentionally oblivious to, the irony of utilizing a supernatural/metaphysical device (i.e. the remote control used by Paul to reverse the film) in order to bring about the victory of the villains.

Paul replays a scenario he dislikes, much like how any young person would replay a level in a video game when his character is killed. Paul and Peter cheat in *Funny Games* by breaking the rules of reality itself, yet they have the audacity to accuse Ann of breaking *their* rules when she attempts to turn the tables on them. Haneke refuses the audience its injection of hope drug, only to substitute it with a "despair drug". He enforces his own variety of illusions upon the film, except this kind is skewed toward the darkness as opposed to the light.

Where Michael Haneke's remote control was used to bring about a pessimistic conclusion, the polar opposite occurs in Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* (1982)Although not strictly a horror film, the use of the supernatural in Bergman's film relates to the topic of this thesis, i.e. how the supernatural element in cinema connotes an optimistic subtext. Uncle Isak endeavors to rescue the children Fanny and Alexander from the cold-hearted Bishop Vergerus by smuggling them out of the house in a crate. During a pivotal sequence, Vergerus discovers Isak's plan, and all seems lost.

But Isak is a man capable of performing divine miracles, and calls upon God to create a false image of Fanny and Alexander inside their bedroom. Although Bergman's film is far from being a legitimate horror movie, it is a more "respectable" example of the supernatural used in *defiance* of secular reality, rather than reinforcing its tyrannical hold on the characters, a la Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997)*.* Supernatural horror movies have already been practicing the technique Bergman applies in *Fanny and Alexander* for decades. Bergman simply strips away the props normally associated with horror (vampires, ghouls and werewolves) to convey his point.

In contrast, Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects* removes all supernatural components to tell a purely secular tale of horror. One particular scene encapsulates Zombie's personal philosophy in a nutshell. Serial killer Otis B. Driftwood forces two

men, Adam and Roy, to dig up a hidden cache of guns within the Texan desert. When Adam tries to fight back, Otis retaliates by dispatching both of his victims, but not before taunting Roy's faith in a God-governed universe:

> OTIS: I want you to pray to your god. I want you to pray that he comes and saves you. I want lightning to come and crash down upon my fucking head!
>
> ROY: I will pray... Jesus...
>
> OTIS: Louder!
>
> ROY: Bless the bunnies, bless the little birds, bless the...
>
> OTIS: I don't feel anything!
>
> ROY: Bless the springtime morning...
>
> OTIS: Aaah! I feel it! Oh great god almighty I repent, I repent! Oh I feel the love of the God, God, God almighty! Oh the holy spirit is in my body![12]

Otis's mockery of Roy is symptomatic of his own "faith" in a fundamentally godless reality, where evil goes unpunished and injustice is a daily occurrence. Much like the Dawkins-variety atheist, Otis perceives Roy's spirituality to be juvenile and naïve, articulating Roy's "rescue" as a blatant bolt of lightning that streaks down from Heaven and eradicates his vile existence from the earth. This is an example of a film character depending upon *secular-based* horror to carry him through to victory. If Otis and his victims existed within a universe where supernatural "good" was a reality as much as supernatural "evil", a bolt of lightning could well have incinerated him on the spot.

If *Evil Carnate* was an entirely secular novel of horror, Edith's descent into madness would have remained unchecked, slaughtering child after child until finally being put down like a mad dog. However, although the supernatural isn't a blatant component in *Evil Carnate*, the simple possibility of its existence alone serves to provide Edith with a rudimentary conscience, even as her body continues to wreak havoc outside her control.

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[12] Zombie, Rob, *The Devil's Rejects*, Lionsgate 2005

1.4 Why a Novel?

At this point, I should now explain the reasons as to why I chose to write my thesis in the format of a fictional novel, as opposed to a more traditional dissertation. Academic essays can be exchanged back and forth within closed professional circles, but among the general public, they are – for the most part – disengaging. Fiction, on the other hand, provides color to a black-and-white drawing. This is a method that dates all the way back to the era of the Neanderthal, primitive men and women who drew their own version of stories on the walls of darkened caves. Granted, these "narratives" never usually extended beyond depicting a scene of tribesmen attacking a woolly mammoth, but the concept of the narrative story had taken embryonic shape.

As a writer, I respond to images playing within my mind's eye. This is one reason why film plays a crucial aspect in this thesis. When I write a scene, whether for a novel or an actual screenplay, it plays out as an actual movie within my mind. But the average running time for a film does not allow for the extensive narrative development and interior characterization found in novels, and interior characterization is vital when understanding the nature of Edith's madness. It is also critical that the reader become *intimate* with Edith's madness, to become the "Other" beside her, and partake in her journey. The journal entries by Edith following her head injury are designed to be "un-adaptable" to film, in the sense they are simultaneously familiar and alien in ways that cannot be channeled through a camera. This is why I decided to manifest Edith's story as a book as opposed to a screenplay. .

Fictionalization, I would argue, is one of the better methods of imparting truth. But I should add I am fully aware a thesis of this nature must also appeal to academic circles. Therein is one of the greater challenges of my essay: Creating, and maintaining, that perfect balance between accessibility and intellectualism. Oliver Sacks was capable of sustaining that balance in his various studies on human mental illnesses. I hope to achieve a similar balance here.

Chapter 2

2.1 Edith's Soul and its Religious Implications

While I was interviewing Reverend Barry Dunsmore in Bermuda, he told me of presiding over the funeral of Thomas Hamilton, the man responsible for the infamous "Dunblane School Massacre" of 1996. Allowing a reverend to oversee Hamilton's cremation was a controversial decision on the Church of Scotland's part at the time, but Rev. Dunsmore saw the proceedings in a philosophical light. As he explained to me, Jesus Christ turned to the thieves who were crucified alongside him and uttered, "You shall be with me in paradise." The mystery behind these words is almost as elusive as the abrupt end of Mark 16:8. The thieves, despite all of their seemingly unforgivable sins, would in time be *forgiven.*

This section of the critical essay is designed to outline how the aforementioned "hidden optimism" can be applied to horror literature as much as horror film. I have already expressed the idea of the soul in horror cinema/literature. Various breeds of undead creature, among them the vampire and the zombie, are often characterized by their respective authors as being fundamentally "soulless". In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) the transformed Lucy Westenra is perceived as a shell that must be annihilated through Christian ritual if the spirit of Lucy is to gain access to God's Heaven. Although George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) is mostly bereft of any immediate religious implications, the zombies are deprived of humanity/soul (they frequently move in numbers like cattle, or more appropriately, like insects, without any sign of individuality beyond their physical appearance), and must be destroyed, if only so these gross imitations of our family and friends no longer walk the earth.

> "Within a biblical context, the corpse is also utterly abject. It signifies one of the most basic forms of pollution – the body without a soul. As a form of waste it represents the opposite of the spiritual, the religious symbolic. In relation to the horror film, it is relevant to note that several of the most horrific figures are 'bodies without souls' (the vampire) the 'living corpse' (the zombie), corpse-eater (the ghoul), and the robot or android. What is also interesting is that such ancient figures of abjection as the vampire, the ghoul, the zombie and the witch (one of

her many crimes was that she used corpses for her rites of magic) continue to provide some of the most compelling images of horror in modern cinema."[13]

Barbara Creed (who in turn refers to Julia Kristeva), is commenting upon another subtle technique employed by horror filmmakers to "camouflage" the contradictory optimism of supernatural horror: the body without a soul. Edith's horror movie counterpart, the witch, also fits into this category. And yet, Reverend Dunsmore's quote about the thieves crucified beside Christ underlines how the monsters of supernatural horror are not so different from the thieves. They are corrupted, but not entirely damned.

. There is little doubt that, if zombies and vampires actually existed, the Roman Catholic Church would not consider their actions even remotely human; they are shells that imitate life, but are not true life. Their behavior cannot be forgiven no more than the behavior of a machine can be forgiven. Edith is decidedly not a machine, but her body, responding to the demands of her broken mind, acts and reacts with the amoral nature of a machine. Jung articulates this divide between our machine-bodies and mind-souls the most succinctly:

> "The dehumanization of our world, the Luciferian development of science and technology, and the frightful material and moral destruction left behind by the second World War have been compared more than once with the eschatological events foretold in the New Testament." [14]

Jung evokes apocalyptic imagery here culled from the Bible itself, with the "Luciferian" advent of machine-bodies bringing about the erosion of our collective humanity. The devastation brought about by World War II, material, moral and otherwise, would take on a more personal and intimate scale in the 1970's, when a class of infamous serial killers would rise, among them Ted Bundy, Charles Manson, and John Wayne Gacy. This is another reason why I chose to set Edith's story within this particular zeitgeist of American history. Would Jung have echoed his statement above upon witnessing these newer evils? Perhaps this is merely a heightened struggle of the forces Jung has already identified.

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[13] Creed, Barbara *Kristeva, Feminity, Abjection, The Horror Reader* Pg. 65 Ch. 7, Routledge 2000
[14] Jung, C.G. *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self,* Pg. 37Ch. 5, Princeton University Press 1969

The "New Atheist" movement, comprised of such authors as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, are inclined to perceive the events of 9/11 as a byproduct of religious mania, as the attacks were orchestrated by members of Al-Qaeda, a militant Islamist organization. As articulated by Richard Dawkins: "My respect for the Abrahamic religions went up in the smoke and choking dust of September 11th. The last vestige of respect for the taboo disappeared as I watched the "Day of Prayer" in Washington Cathedral, where people of mutually incompatible faiths united in homage to the very force that caused the problem in the first place: religion. It is time for people of intellect, as opposed to people of faith, to stand up and say "Enough!"'[15]

These statements would be correct, in the sense of religion being used as a motivator for unquestioning fanaticism. But fanaticism can just as easily manifest within secular boundaries, as the medical crimes of Imperial Japan's notorious Unit 731 during World War II, or the wanton depravity of the Marquis de Sade, can attest. The prime ingredient here is not spirituality or science, the goals of which can be warped to provide an excuse for fanaticism, but the inner workings of the machine-body in direct opposition to the mind-soul. The Marquis de Sade and the medical staff of Unit 731 were disciples of the "machine-body."

Abraham Van Helsing of Stoker's *Dracula* is an example of a literary character fused with scientific and spiritual attributes to combat an entirely objective evil, which has taken shape as the King of the Vampires. Van Helsing has the best of both worlds; a scientist's need to ascertain a physical truth, before moving forward with a spiritualist's *metaphysical* quest to destroy the Other. Van Helsing does not state outright that Lucy is a victim of Dracula until he amasses sufficient evidence to convince his colleagues of the danger, evidence that is impossible from their empirical views of the world and its natural laws, but "real" all the same.

In similar fashion, Edith is divided between the empirical reality of her machine-body and the spiritual drive of her mind-soul. Whereas Van Helsing posits a beneficial hybrid of the two categories (harmony), Edith is being torn asunder by both (conflict).

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[15] Dawkins, Richard *Freedom from Religion Foundation*, Fall 2001

The innate optimism of *Evil Carnate* is not that Edith is struggling against her new identity, but the inexplicable fact *she's struggling at all,* experiencing Saint John's proverbial "dark night of the soul"[16], an impossible scenario if the extent of her brain damage were taken into account. The concept of the "mind-soul" is a recurring one within horror, whether the format is literature or film. A piece of dialogue that has become a cliché in horror is the loved one's attempts to discourage another character from being corrupted by a malignant force, i.e. "fight it!" In this way, the loved one is trying to strengthen the "mind-soul" against the ravages of the "machine-body". Whether the mind-soul is successful or not isn't the most pressing issue; it's that a war is being fought *at all.*

2.2 Dracula

In regards to the story's structure, unfolding from the perspectives of the people who knew Edith in addition to Edith herself, I turned to a classic of horror literature namely Bram Stoker's *Dracula.* There are very few texts that have been mined for so many interpretations from the theater to the cinema, with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the Holy Bible being among them. But *Dracula* is a story about monsters; or rather, people who forcibly *become* monsters. Out of the two female protagonists who are threatened by corruption, Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, it's Lucy who ultimately succumbs. Lucy's final diary entry left a particular impression on me:

> "What am I to do? God shield me from harm this night! I shall hide this paper in my breast, where they shall find it when they come to lay me out. My dear mother gone! It is time that I go too. Good-bye, dear Arthur, if I should not survive this night. God keep you, dear, and God help me!"[17]

We often see horror stories, be they told through the medium of books, films, or radio, from the perspective of those who escape the monster's curse. But what of the men and women who do not? No one likes to read about the people who succumb to a ghastly disease, after all. We should not go out of our way to find depression, when we

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[16] Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, Dover Publications 2003
[17] Stoker, Bram *Dracula*, Pg. 140 Ch. XI, 2001 Modern Library Classics

already have realist writers like Cormac McCarthy (author of *The Road* (2006), *No Country for Old Men* (2005)) and Russell Banks (*Affliction* (1989), *Continental Drift* (1985)) to help us. We would rather read the stories of the people who survived to fight another day. We cannot afford to linger with the victim too long, otherwise the narrative becomes less about the winner/survivor and more about the loser/casualty. Lucy is condemned to monsterhood by Dracula's bite, and thereafter "dead" to us, literally and emotionally. She has ceased to be a sympathetic character, now only functioning as another objective for Van Helsing and his comrades to overcome. When Lucy's vampiric self is finally slain, there's supposedly nothing left of Lucy to mourn.

But what if Stoker had written further entries from Lucy's perspective as a newly-minted vampire? Possibly, she would have been merciless and unrepentant about her actions. Or confused and lost, like a square peg hammered into a round hole. The concept of "vampire-as-protagonist" has been twisted into something of a joke by popular culture such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003)* and the *Twilight* series (2005-08)*,* but these examples make little effort to portray the pathos behind the trauma of transformation. Principal characters such as Angel from *Buffy* could be cited as an exception, but are still constrained by the creative conventions of modern television shows; beautiful actors, snarky dialogue, and "hip" attitudes towards the supernatural. All we have to go on is John Seward's account of the resurrected and corrupted Lucy, as seen in the graveyard, holding a helpless child not to nurture, but to consume:

> "…we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness."[18]

Lucy's metamorphosis is a literary predecessor to Edith's, who becomes a monster more grounded in our own reality without the trappings of the fantastic, but no less lethal. Like Lucy, she threatens the lives of children, and like Lucy, the future safety of children can only be guaranteed with her inevitable destruction. But unlike Lucy, *Edith remembers.* She remembers what she was before, and more importantly, a part of her still yearns to return to it. But she has no control of her body; it is almost a separate

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[18] Stoker, Bram *Dracula,* Pg. 203 Ch. XVI,, 2001 Modern Library Classics

creature of its own, disconnected from her will and conscience. Barney becomes the voice of Edith's soul, which I will discuss later in depth.

Lucy is the prototype for a prevalent mindset in horror literature; not just in relation to vampires, but any breed of monster. Stoker's narrative interprets anything beyond death – at least, anything beyond death that's outside the grace of God – as vile and profane. But Lucy's plight becomes considerably more urgent in our modern era, where the advent of scientific atheism has made contemporary storytellers play down the role of religion in vampire tales. Now *any* manner of existence beyond death, holy or unholy, is an unnatural thing. Lucy's annihilation at least promised Catholic salvation. But now, there is nothing for Lucy to escape to, except the inevitable rot of the grave. Edith's conflict is Lucy's, reborn in the 21st century.

2.3 Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story of psychological and physical transformation has proven to be one of the most influential horror tales of all time, with seemingly innumerable adaptations and retellings since its publication in 1886. The narrative ultimately ends on a tragic note, with Henry Jekyll, having become forever locked in the body of Edward Hyde, poisoning himself to elude capture[19]. Edith's story ends more ambiguously – she simply "disappears", incarcerated within an unnamed mental institution – but the pessimism of Stevenson's novel should nonetheless be compared and contrasted to the hidden optimism of *Evil Carnate*.

Like Henry Jekyll, Edith Blaine initially begins as "one of us", i.e. a recognizable, Normal human being who is not the Other. This is to change later on after Edith's head injury, wherein her personality is forcibly reshaped into that of a psychotic child killer, who – like Edward Hyde – murders and destroys without fear of reprimand or consequence. Stevenson's book is perhaps the quintessential "Normal > Other" saga, or at the very least, the most culturally renowned. The closest contender to the popularity of *Jekyll and Hyde* is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), about an

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[19] Stevenson, Robert Louis, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* Modern Library 2002

emotionally destitute salesman who is transformed into a giant insect. But Kafka's insect does not take lives; Hyde does. Thus, Jekyll and Hyde provides a more applicable "Normal > Other" equation for *Evil Carnate* than Gregor Samsa and his scuttling alter ego.

As a manifestation of the Other, Hyde is a perfect monster in every sense of the word. If there's any optimism to be found in Stevenson's fable, it is that the boogeyman was caught and executed before it could destroy any more lives. His comeuppance is a bygone conclusion for Stevenson's Victorian era, but Edith's Other, a modernized throwback to the classic witch of Grimm's fairy tales, confronts a different kind of retribution. At the end, she denies the demands of her "machine-body" and allows the two kidnapped Amish children to live. Unlike Hyde, who is executed before he can reach the pinnacle of his own sequential metamorphosis from man-to-monster-to-myth, Edith completes hers.

This is not to say Edith is entirely meant to become a bogeywoman designed to frighten children for every night afterwards, although that is an inevitable part of her legacy. Edith's escape into myth is also a triumph of the spiritual over the secular, as "fantastical horror" is a triumph of the spiritual over the secular, even if the fantastic is presented as something horrific. But why conceal transcendent figures in fearsome costumes? Because this is how horror must disguise its innate optimism in order to maintain a veneer acceptable to the genre.

2.4 The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar

I have talked at length about how the supernatural presence of the Other in many horror stories is an indication of a contrary optimism within the genre, in that its very existence trumps the permanence of death. There were few writers more infatuated with death than Edgar Allan Poe, whose talent of fusing morbidity with beauty remains unparalleled. Poe's most popular narratives often chronicled the plights of men who observed the mortality of various beautiful women with an unnerving, borderline neurotic

obsession. Many of his tales could be cited here, but for the sake of my thesis, I will only draw focus to one specific example, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* (1845)

A nameless narrator describes his hypnotic experiments on the titular Ernest Valdemar, an elderly gentleman withering away from tuberculosis. These experiments are intended to lock Mr. Valdemar within a mesmeric trance where he can continue to *verbally articulate himself* even from beyond the grave. Typical of Poe, the tale has a grim outcome, this one being especially grotesque. When the narrator breaks Valdemar out of his unnatural trance, he proceeds to disintegrate into *"a nearly liquid mass of loathsome – of detestable putridity."*[20]

Poe's wife, Virginia, had been inflicted with tuberculosis for over four years, and scholars are inclined to believe Virginia's terrible suffering could well have influenced the story. Poe always had a morbid fascination with the topic of death, and the fate of Mr. Valdemar is perhaps the most personal and intimate of all his tales regarding mortality. Whereas Poe's other fables often detailed the slow decline and passing of a beautiful woman, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* practically rubs the reader's face in the empirical reality of body decay.

Poe's description of Mr. Valdemar's dissolution is among the most primordial in all of horror literature, in that the entire sequence occurs within a time frame of ten seconds at most, but evokes a genuine sense of waking nightmare rarely matched in later fiction. Indeed, the sheer rapidity of Valdemar's rotting process only heightens the scene's abrupt violence, a singular case where visceral gore and cerebral fright are successfully merged into one gestalt beast. The narrator's attempt to break the inevitable passage of physical corruption only serves to exaggerate it to an almost cosmic level of pure *grotesquerie*. Many writers have approached the subject of death from different perspectives; from either an allegorical standpoint (much of supernatural horror fiction), or a literal one (crime/serial killer fiction, a la Thomas Harris's *Silence of the Lambs (1988)*). But Poe's story encompasses both formulas, where the passage of decay is realistic *and* hideously caricatured.

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[20] Poe, Edgar Allan *Complete Stories and Poems of,* Pg. 283 Doubleday

The specific emotions this scene evoked in me – a simultaneous collage of disgust, fear, panic and dread – left a profound impression, and years later, I sought to channel a similar vibe in *Evil Carnate*, when Edith undergoes her mental transformation from "Normal" to "Other" following the attack which inflicts neurological damage. It was the atmosphere of raw, transcendent *panic* I wanted to recapture. Edith has been forced to confront her previously privatized terror of death, and in those moments, we accompany her into the abyss. Among Edith's final words before blacking out completely – "barney barney barney" – represent the ultimate statement of horror *pathos,* where Edith calls upon Barney (the figurehead of Edith's yearning for transcendence) to save her from the pit. When Edith emerges from the other end, she is literally reborn; her mind drifting in a strange twilight world between life and death.

2.5 Philip K. Dick

It's curious that the literature of Philip K. Dick has not achieved quite the same level of recognition as some of the adaptations of said literature, among the most popular being *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Total Recall* (1990). Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale* (1966) are renowned within science fiction literary circles. However, his later work is something else entirely. In February 1974, Dick underwent what could only be described as a "religious experience" when a mysterious pink beam glinting from a delivery woman's golden necklace mesmerized him. "I experienced an invasion of my mind by a transcendentally rational mind, as if I had been insane all my life and suddenly I had become sane,"[21] he later told author/journalist Charles Pratt.

Subsequently, Dick would become fascinated (perhaps even borderline obsessed) with theology. Novels such as *Valis* (1981), *The Divine Invasion* (1981)*,* and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982) showcased this fascination, but never more so than in *Valis,* a book which frustrates any normal means of categorization. Somewhere between an autobiography, a science fiction thriller, and a religious text,

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[21] Platt, Charles *Dream Makers: The Uncommon People Who Write Science Fiction*, Berkley Publishing 1980

Valis is about an alter ego of Philip K. Dick's with the appropriately gonzo name "Horselover Fat", who is subjected to an epiphany not unlike Dick's own. A sample of Fat's thoughts during cosmic realization:

> "**The Empire never ended.** In a startling response to the crisis, the true God mimics the universe, the very region he has invaded; he takes on the likeness of sticks and trees and beer cans in the gutter – he presumes to be trash discarded, debris no longer noticed. Lurking, the true God ambushes reality and us as well. God, in very truth, attacks and injures us, in his role as antidote."[22]

Dick was a fiercely intellectual writer, who suddenly found himself face-to-face with a reality that simultaneously entranced and terrified him. Dick's *Valis* trilogy, as well as the *Exegesis*, represented his best attempts to comprehend the singular event with the delivery woman's golden necklace and all the "hallucinations" that were to come after. Two particular characters in *Valis* were conceived to manifest the separate extreme stances Dick's colleagues could well have taken in real life: Kevin, the sneering skeptic, and David, the sheep-like believer. Neither of these men provides Dick/Fat with any true understanding or consolation; he's left to puzzle out the mysteries of Creation on his own.

Horselover Fat's conflict is Edith's, albeit taken to a whole new level of existential terror better compared to something out of Franz Kafka than Philip K. Dick. Edith is a literary fusion of Dick's *Valis* and Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog* (1969)*,* in the sense she is a once-sane woman forcibly altered into a madwoman, and the voice of Barney (Blood's spiritual descendant) stays close to Edith even as her actions spiral violently out of control. Edith's understanding of her own reality is shattered, akin to how the reality of a typical K. Dick protagonist is shattered. It's only through Barney, her "spiritual anchor", that she is capable of finding some measure of sanity.

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[22] Dick, Philip K. *Valis,* Pg. 81 Ch. 5, Orion Publishing Group 2001

Chapter 3

3.1 Transformation & Transfiguration

For the purposes of this thesis, I will need to go into greater depth about Edith's relationship with "Christ the Divine" – meaning the Christ as spirituality has made of him, as oppose to whatever "reality" would make of him. More so than any other religious record, Jesus's emergence from the tomb remains an inscrutable mystery. At this point, I would like to recount the resurrection of Jesus according to the gospel of Mark, as found in the King James edition of the Holy Bible: "And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid."[23]

What did Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Jesus, witness on that day? Empirical reality would have only one answer: nothing at all. But the entire Catholic faith is built on the principle that something *did* happen that day, something singular and unprecedented. The reaction of the two Mary's is indicative of an uncanny event that could have been completely and utterly *alien*, so much so that neither woman was able to fully comprehend the extent of what she had just witnessed.

But if there's even the slightest truth to this possibility, why wasn't this singular phenomenon witnessed by the Romans? Or, if we are to carry the idea of the "alienness" of the phenomenon to its next level, the Romans could have flatly denied what they saw, going so far as to prevent any written record of such an event occurring. Reverend Hugh Montefiore states how the disciples could "comprehend" Jesus's new existence, where the Romans could not.

> "Today there is less certainty about exactly what the disciples saw, but at the same time the evidence is convincing that they knew he (Jesus) was alive, although he had died." [24]

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[23] *Holy Bible*, King James Edition, British and Foreign Bible Society, Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited
[24] Montefiore, Hugh *Credible Christianity*, Pg. 223Ch. 11, 1993 Mowbray

Such speculation without empirical evidence is difficult, but the premise of transformation/transfiguration, whether there is truth of it in Christ's life or not, is a mesmerizing one. It is here that we return to the topic of the horror genre, and the recurring motif of physical transformation; from human to vampire, human to werewolf, human to zombie, so on and so forth. Note that it's always the *human*, the "normal", who undergoes a transition into the Other, and never (or hardly ever) the other way around. This pattern, as distorted as it may be, can be traced through the ages back to Christ's passage from mortality to *im*mortality.

However, there is no denying that horror intentionally perverts Christ's journey towards divinity into something diabolical. Horror is meant to *horrify*, after all, and so "the Divine" instead becomes "the Monstrous". Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, Dr. Jekyll in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Bertrand Caillet in *The Werewolf of Paris* (1933)*…* each of these characters undergoes a transition from normality to Otherness, whereas Christ's transformation resulted in holy ascendance, the transformation of these tragic figures resulted in unholy descent. However, in both cases of the Divine and the Monstrous, there is a triumph over the permanency of death. It just so happens in the case of *Dracula,* Lucy's transformation into one of the immortal undead, as opposed to Jesus's divine resurrection, is blasphemous to the Christian God, hence her aversion to crucifixes.

Here I should make reference to the two thieves who were crucified beside Jesus at Calvary. The thieves believed themselves to be damned in the eyes of God, but Jesus answered: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke:23:43). [25] The optimism in Christ's statement is concealed by his brutal surroundings, just as the optimism of the horror genre is concealed by its blood-spattered presentation, but the fundamental idea of redemption transcending absolute physical/spiritual devastation remains the same. The message is hidden, but not denied. Although Lucy is ultimately "saved" via having a wooden stake driven directly

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[25] *Holy Bible*, King James Edition, British and Foreign Bible Society, Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited

through her heart, Lucy's rite of transformation is, in truth, identical to that of the thieves who died alongside Christ.

3.2 Fear of Becoming the Other

We come to another prevalent theme in many horror films, which heavily informs my novel *Evil Carnate*; the *apprehension* of becoming the Other. This apprehension is the character's terror, and so in turn, it becomes the audience's. Whether the character is the protagonist, or among the supporting cast, is irrelevant, as long as the *fear* of transformation is installed within the reader/viewer.

This "Other" could manifest in a variety of different incarnations. A human being can become a zombie (*Night of the Living Dead* (1968), a vampire (*Dracula* 1897, a werewolf (*The Wolf Man*),an alien (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers (*1956*)*), a demon (*The Exorcist* (1971, or even an insect (*The Fly* (1958), but the end result is almost always the same; the "Normal" has shifted its status to "Other". In all of the examples cited above, "the possessed or invaded being is a figure of abjection in that the boundary between self and other has been transgressed."[26] The element of 'abjection' is instrumental, as a sense of *pathos* is just as important an ingredient to a horror-themed transformation as a sense of fear. I will be delving into both factors for the purpose of this thesis.

The byproduct of a horror-centric metamorphosis can be twofold. In the case of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* a human is forced to *conform* into a community of emotionally/spiritually deprived pod people, thus evoking the phobia of identity absorption and "one of them-ness". However, the original 1958 version of *The Fly* depicts a human cursed with a fly's head and arm, becoming an *outcast* from society rather than a conformist, hiding within the basement of his own house, akin to how Gregor Samsa hid from his own family in Kafka's archetypal tale of human-to-insect passage. Instead of identity absorption, the phobia evoked here is one of *alienation* and

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[26] Creed, Barbara *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, Pg. 32 Ch. 3, Routledge 1993

identity dissolution, as the protagonist's brain slowly succumbs to insecthood, a degenerative condition not too dissimilar from Alzheimer's.

The fear of identity dissolution plays a key role in all forms of Normal-to-Otherness in horror films, none more so than in director Lamberto Bava's 1985 splatterfest *Demons.* Moviegoers at a West Berlin theater find themselves under attack by a virulent plague that transforms its victims into subhuman monsters. The barrier between one reality (the slasher film playing in the theater) and another dissolves, as the audience is forcefully mass-converted into the Other. It is appropriate the plot device used to bring about transformation and chaos in *Demons* is a disease, once again harkening back to Alzheimer's and other identity-stealing afflictions, with the movie itself acting as "patient zero." Carol Clover elaborates:

"Bava's point (to which I shall return) seems to be that the foul impulses of horror lie not in the movie but in the spectator. But in either case, his scenario admits the power and the aim of the movie is to excite such foul impulses, and in this sense, his movie-within-a-movie is indeed invasive and does indeed "hurt."[27]

The rite of transformation from Normal to Other has a recurring pattern. First, the victim of said transformation witnesses the Other, and responds accordingly with fear and panic. Then, they become the Other. Some time prior to her attack on the bridge by two unidentified assailants (an event intended to be the non-supernatural equivalent of a werewolf's bite in horror movies)Edith Blaine reads a newspaper article about an atrocious act committed by a pair of psychopaths. She finds their cruelty frightening and unknowable, part of a world she cannot comprehend. Edith's fear isn't very different from Barbara's first encounter with a walking corpse in *Night of the Living Dead,* or one of the fearful audience members in *Demons.* Psychopath, zombie or demon, all three beings are an inexplicable, utterly *alien* thing to Edith. In the case of Barbara, she is haunted by the repressed terror that she will in turn become *one of* the zombies. When Johnny, her own brother, returns as a ghoul, Barbara's privatized nightmare is fully revealed. Johnny drags Barbara off into the night, to be eaten alive and – presumably –

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[27] Clover, Carol J. *Men Women and Chainsaws,*1992 Princeton University Press

resurrected as a zombie herself, once again summoning the familiar horror movie dread of "one of them-ness."

Nonetheless, the zombies remain monsters *beyond the grave*, i.e. creatures who have bypassed the supposed finality of death. George A. Romero, director of *Night of the Living Dead*, makes them into mindless flesh-eating aberrations in order to appropriately repulse the audience, but the truth of their death-defying nature remains the same. Likewise, Lamberto Bava's demons are creatures spawned by the supernatural properties of a horror film that is able to "infect" its audience with Otherness. Edith Blaine's terror of the psychotic individuals she reads about is irrevocably connected to her fear of death. When she undergoes a near-death experience, the two fears – death and "one of them-ness" – are rolled into a gestalt whole. She comes back a radically changed person, *but she is alive.* She has shattered the "death barrier" described in section 1.1.

I should also go into some detail about the "femaleness" of the transition from Normal to Other, which I have made apparent in my comparison of my protagonist - Edith Blaine - to Romero's - Barbara. When we first meet Barbara, she exhibits an emotional vulnerability commonplace among female characters in '60's cinema, in this case brought about by the combined presence of the graveyard and her arrogant brother Johnny. Said vulnerability is exploited by Johnny, who goes about teasing Barbara's apprehension among the tombstones. *"They're coming to get you, Barbara*," he mocks, but the film never entirely explains who Johnny's faceless "they" are. He obviously wasn't referring to the zombies, as Barbara and Johnny's bickering occurs before the first actual zombie attack. So who exactly are "they?" Romero offers no clear answer, but on one level, "they" are meant to be any collective "Other" who threatens to induct the Normal into their ranks. "They" could be any kind of person, or any kind of *thing*, with great numbers on their side.

Barbara kneels in front of her father's grave in an attempt to be respectful, but her respect appears to stem more from fear than love, as if she secretly dreads the possibility of her parent emerging from his tomb in the style of a cover from an EC Comics magazine to drag Barbara down to an existence of rot and filth as punishment

for her impudence. In Barbara's mind, her father has become "one of them". Not a zombie, *per se* but something nonetheless unknown and terrifying. Johnny, on the other hand, sports a flippant attitude towards his father's remains. Tellingly, Barbara mentions how she has not seen Johnny "in church lately", indicating that Barbara is a pious believer, whereas her brother is an atheist. Johnny's youthful swagger is almost overwhelmingly masculine, while Barbara's doe-like fear of the dead stereotypically feminine.

The prospect of becoming "one of them" as a kind of cruel reprimand for insolent behavior haunts the back of Edith's subconscious. This is made more evident when Johnny recounts how a childhood prank played on Barbara resulted in his grandfather accusing him of being "damned to hell." This immediately causes Barbara to stand and flee from the gravesite. Johnny, realizing he has a struck a nerve, continues to taunt Barbara.

If Johnny and Barbara's roles were switched in this particular scene, it's unlikely that Barbara's derision of Johnny's mysterious "they" would carry the same emotional discomfort. Johnny is the brutish big brother bullying his impressionable little sister. Barbara can evoke sympathy in the audience in ways Johnny cannot, suggesting "the possibility that male viewers are quite prepared to identify not just with screen females, but with screen females in the horror film world, screen females in fear and pain."[28]

Later, when Barbara recounts the day's events to Ben, her monologue becomes increasingly hysterical as she describes the first zombie encounter. "He held me and he ripped at my clothes!" she cries, drawing uncomfortable similarities to the experience of a rape victim. Barbara's terror of being "corrupted" via forceful penetration harkens back to her apprehension within the cemetery of being taken by the Other. The fear of rape and the fear of conversion become one and the same, giving Barbara's phobia its distinctly feminine filter.

Following Johnny's death and the subsequent zombie attack, Barbara sinks into a semi-vegetative state, becoming essentially useless while the other characters take

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[28] Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Introduction, Pg. 5, Princeton University Press 1992

center stage, "a parody of female passivity and helplessness."[29] It is only when the farmhouse is under assault by the zombie horde near the film's conclusion that Barbara is finally roused to action, only to be dragged into the night by her newly zombified brother. Barbara's private dread of death and the Other has reached its climax. The border between life and death, Normal and Other, is breached. Romero, having reached the "death/Other barrier" of the genre with nowhere else to go, brings Barbara's story to its tragic end. But where Barbara's tale ends, Edith's begins.

Like Barbara, Edith finds herself becoming the Other, but the resulting amalgamated persona of Edith and Barney acts as a means of supplying her "Other" with a degree of cognizance, thus bringing about a schism. *Evil Carnate*, in this sense, transcends the barrier separating "Normal" from "Other", and a deliberate violation of the "one of them-ness" archetype that is commonplace in the horror genre. Edith is "one of them", but enough of her original personality remains to be recognizable as "one of us". The protagonist of my novel is female for the same reason Romero's protagonist is female. Her feminine "openness" allows for audience identification in ways that a "closed" male cannot.

3.3 Nihilism vs. Pop-Nihilism

The first two decades of the 21st century would see the advent of a cultural nihilism in cinema and television not seen since the heyday of the 1970's. "I don't have to tell you things are bad. Everybody knows things are bad," anchorman Howard Beale declares in 1976's *Network*. Patterns invariably repeat themselves, and this couldn't be more evident with the cinematic zeitgeists of the 1970's, the 2000's, and the 2010's. David Simon, creator of the critically renowned television series *The Wire* (2002), once said during an interview, "We are not selling hope,"[30] equating the human element of hope to a physical commodity, or a drug. This analogy is borne out in the study of Janis Schonfeld, a patient diagnosed with severe depression:

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[29] Wood, Robin *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan…and Beyond*, Pg/ 292 Ch. 14, Columbia University Press 2003
[30] Simon, David *David Simon Answers Fans' Questions*, HBO Dec. 4, 2003

"On Schonfeld's last visit, one of the doctors took her and her nurse aside and told them both the truth: Schonfeld had been in the control group. She was taking a sugar pill – in the research lingo, a placebo. Her recovery, the doctor hastened to assure her, was entirely genuine. But the only drug she had received was an immaterial and immortal substance – hope." [31]

But how can hope be considered a drug, if it's "immaterial"? Perhaps David Simon, in his own indirect way, perceives hope in the same light as more literal, *physical* substances such as cocaine or alcohol. They are fundamentally detrimental to the human brain, and for the sake of its recovery, the brain must be deprived of these substances. It is possible to argue that David Simon's television series does not view hope itself as being detrimental, but rather a dramatic element to be downplayed. On the other hand, the show's inherent problem of inducing ennui in its audience as opposed to the more helpful urge towards defiance and/or revolution has been noted elsewhere.

'David Simon thinks he's constructed a critique of capitalism, but in fact he's prepared an elaborate, moving brief for despair and (ultimately) indifference.'[32]

Other television shows with similarly nihilistic sensibilities, such as *The Walking Dead* (2010) and *Game of Thrones* (2011), appear to follow in *The Wire*'s footsteps of willfully denying their respective audiences the "hope drug". But if Janis Schonfeld had been forcefully deprived of her imaginary drug, wouldn't her mental health have simply continued to deteriorate?

Once again, we arrive full circle to the genre of horror. A traditional fantastic horror structure, seen in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1975) could be perceived as a deliberate withholding of the hope drug in the first two acts of their narratives, as a supernatural evil grows in power and malfeasance like a fungus. The hope drug is finally applied by the author at novel's conclusion when said evil is confronted and vanquished, maximizing its cathartic effect on the reader.

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[31] - Beauregard, Mario & O'Leary, Denyse, *"The Spiritual Brain,"* Pg. 141 Ch. 6, HarperCollins 2007
[32] Salam, Reihan *The Bleakness of the Wire*, The American Scene, 2008

It was only later that the conceit of having evil victorious over good gained traction, most notably in '70's fare such as *Chinatown* (1974) and *The Omen* (1976). We have now arrived at the same junction in our pop culture where evil is consistently triumphant over good. As a decade of doubt and recrimination was set in motion by the Watergate scandal of 1972, so was a similar zeitgeist of gloom triggered by the events of 9/11. Modern horror movies, particularly the "home invasion" genre, exemplified by Bryan Bertino's *The Strangers* and Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, now deny the hope drug to their audiences entirely. But this is not an insightful, intellectual brand of nihilism that philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche would find approvable; it is *pop-nihilism,* misery purely for the sake of misery, with no other profound statement to make than a weary shrug of the shoulders. Even more dramatic, grounded fare like *No Country for Old Men* (2007) – both the novel and the film – seems inclined to believe in a universe where evil and chaos are the only dependable variables.

The filmmakers behind *Funny Games* and *The Strangers* no doubt view their own movies as authentic horror. After all, should horror be meant to do anything else besides horrify? It is telling that both films are grounded in (comparatively) secular worlds, where the only true evil to be found is among ordinary human beings. But by denying the hope drug to their audiences, the filmmakers have failed to understand another key component to horror, namely *catharsis.* If Haneke and Bertino view their productions as a kind of detox session, depriving their audiences of a drug that they believe provides only delusion and false comfort, they are unable to fully perceive the difference between a *literal* drug and a *metaphysical* drug. If an audience is deprived of the latter, the result is not the common empirical symptoms of drug withdrawal, but a profound *ennui* that brings about spiritual lethargy..

But we should turn back the clock from more contemporary films, to the cinematic output from 1970-79.There are several reasons why I chose to set the majority of Edith's story in America during the 1970's. One of the most important is *atmosphere.* Horror films from this particular decade excelled in a curious aura of *pathos* that has been rarely matched before or since. *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* (1971) is the story of an institutionalized woman, Jessica (Zohra Lampert), who

experiences a string of supernatural events that could be real, or imagined. Besides taking a cue from Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* (1898) of a female protagonist whose sanity undergoes a terrifying emotional gauntlet, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* also delves into the "lonesomeness" of one afflicted with an unidentified mental illness. The film concludes on a not-so-encouraging note, with Jessica left adrift on a tiny rowboat between an island and the mainland, abandoned by society. Whether the cause is madness or genuine supernatural occurrence remains undetermined, but the outcome – social exile – remains the same.

The melancholic despair of the film's ending was just a precursor to the cinematic gloom and doom that would follow. The stately desolation of *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* would soon degenerate into the deranged frenzy of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and the resigned defeatism of *Invasion of the Boy Snatchers* (1978). The "double whammy" of the Vietnam War (1955-75) and the Watergate scandal (1972) would nurture a climate of disillusion, disappointment, and disgust, subsequently reflected in the art of the period.

I chose to set Edith's narrative in the 1970's decade because her idealistic outlook would be more easily ridiculed by her peers in a period of history when cynicism was the prevailing "trend." Coupled with this cynicism is an overwhelming sense of insulation and alienation. *Carrie* (1976) is another movie featuring a female outcast as protagonist, evokes identification for its tragic central character as much as fear, and *Bad Ronald* (1974) stars Carrie's male counterpart: A lonesome teenage boy who accidentally murders a taunting girl, and hides within the crawlspaces of his mother's house. In both films, the audience is left reeling between sympathy and horror, and this is the same reaction my character, Edith Blaine, would hopefully summon. It's no coincidence the original novel of *Bad Ronald* by John Holbrook Vance makes a cameo during Edith's visit to a gas station.

As with *Let's Scare Jessica to Death, Carrie* and *Bad Ronald* end in a tragic fashion, with Carrie ultimately being destroyed by her own uncontrollable powers, and Ronald taken away by the police to be incarcerated. But it is Carrie's fate that bears the most relation to Edith's. In the next-to-last scene of the film, Carrie's former classmate,

Sue, visits the site of Carrie's destroyed home. This is revealed to be a dream, as Carrie's hand shoots out of the ground and jolts Sue from her sleep. Carrie has completed her journey from "Normal" to "Other"; she has transcended the supposed permanency of death, and is now a monster who lurks in Sue's private nightmares.

But Edith's path takes a somewhat different direction. It is crucial to mention how the "gritty" 1970's would give way to the almost euphoric optimism of 1980's cinema at this point, as Edith's story, in turn, is meant to end with a hint of redemption on the horizon, subliminally implied by Joshua Hawkmeyer's strange reference to Barney's immortality. *"He's still alive,"* the final three words of the novel, act as the bridge between an era of descent (the '70's) and an era of ascension (the '80's). Bizarrely, Edith's character has more in common with the Vietnam veteran John Rambo than Carrie or Bad Ronald at this juncture, which I will contextualize in greater detail in the next section.

3.4 Rambo: From Monster to Avenger

A filmmaker could have other reasons for depriving the audience of a hope drug. Polish director Roman Polanski justified the bleak ending of *Chinatown* (1974), one of the prime cinematic examples of the cynical 1970', thusly: "I knew that if *Chinatown* was to be special, not just another thriller where the good guys triumph in the final reel, Evelyn had to die. Its dramatic impact would be lost unless audiences left their seats with a sense of outrage at the injustice of it all."[33]

But when Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) and his companions walk away from the scene of Evelyn's death, the viewer isn't left with a sense of outrage so much as defeatism. The capitalistic evil of Noah Cross (Walter Huston) is left unchallenged, figuratively *and* literally, leaving nothing for the viewer to feel except complete despondence. Polanski doesn't incite his audience to anger, but to resignation at the state of the world, which seems somewhat contradictory to his statement above.

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[33] Polanksi, Roman *Roman by Polanski,* Pg. 348 Ch. 241984 Eurexpart B.V.

Perhaps the one film that inadvertently became a spiritual bridge over the great divide between '70's pessimism and '80's optimism is *First Blood* (1982). In the original conclusion of David Morrell's 1972 novel, Vietnam veteran John Rambo dies at the hands of his superior officer, Colonel Trautman. By this point in the narrative, Rambo has rampaged through the small town of Hope, Washington, killing several police officers and National guardsmen in the process. In the context of the book, Rambo has to be destroyed, a Frankenstein-like monster needing to be put out of its misery by its creator.

However, this ending was altered by star Sylvester Stallone in the finished film. Actor Kirk Douglas, who was first to be cast as Trautman before the role was taken over by Richard Crenna, had a creative disagreement with Stallone over the nature of the ending: "I just don't think it should be done. It sends out the wrong message. Every Vietnam vet who sees it (the movie) will go, 'Oh, death is the only thing that awaits us at the end of the tunnel,' and I don't think that's the right way to do it.' However (Kirk Douglas) responds, 'Yes, but it's artistic!'[34]

This argument between Stallone and Douglas is a tiny encapsulation of one ideology giving way to another, of Kirk Douglas's '70's-friendly "artistry" inevitability giving way to Sylvester Stallone's '80's-friendly ideal of ascension through great struggle. 'But it's artistic!' is the prevailing motivation for many downer endings in cinema, the finale of Polanski's *Chinatown* among them. But just as the Watergate scandal sufficiently soured the mood of the nation to allow the mainstream success of *Chinatown*, Douglas's nihilistic "artistry" would find its way back to popular culture through the assault on the World Trade Centre in 2001.

Appropriately enough, the subsequent sequel, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), would become an iconic product of its own era, where the anti-hero of the previous film is reincarnated as an avenging angel who embarks on a cathartic crusade ("cathartic" to American audiences of 1985, at least) to right the wrongs of the Vietnam War. There is a streak of irony to be found here, considering Rambo was originally preordained to die

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[34] Stallone, Sylvester *Drawing First Blood,* Orion Pictures 2002

by his author David Morrell. Rambo has broken free from his "fixed" literary death in the novel *First Blood* to be reborn as a figure of redemption/rehabilitation. He has undergone his own unique "transformation" from monster to champion. The fact Rambo is a Vietnam veteran – a survivor of the same war that helped to bring about '70's-era cynicism – should also be heeded. Edith Blaine, like Rambo, is a survivor of the '70's. What shape her fate will take in the landscape of the '80's is meant to be ambiguous, but there is a similar ideology of rehabilitation and renewal at work.

Upon first glance, *First Blood* may seem disconnected from the overall objective of this thesis, as *First Blood* – the novel and the film`– have not been categorized as a legitimate "horror story" before. But the events and environments of *First Blood* are recognizable components of a horror story; the Vietnam vet struggling against post-traumatic stress disorder, the violence, the deaths, the backdrop of a vast forest – the archetypal setting for many a horror film - where terrible things can (and do) occur. Also noteworthy is how the "Vietnam veteran" genre can easily become a contributor to horror cinema, in the case of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) or, more appropriately, *Deathdream* (1974), which features a supernatural narrative about a young man, Andy Brooks, returning home from the Vietnam war as a mysterious zombie/vampire hybrid. Like *First Blood*, the protagonist undergoes a metamorphosis from Normal to Other, but unlike Stallone's Rambo, Andy does not continue his evolution from Other to symbolic Hero. In the film *First Blood,* Rambo walks alongside his superior officer, Colonel Trautman, to an uncertain future. In *Deathdream,* Andy's path ends in the grave.

It is worth noting that Stallone's conclusion to *First Blood* is the secondary inspiration for the conclusion of my own novel, the first being my conference with Bishop Kurtz of the Roman Catholic Church of Bermuda. It is no coincidence that I set *Evil Carnate* in the 1970's. The bulk of the novel constitutes the philosophical mindset of the darker films from that period, while the final pages represent a thematic lead-in to the more euphoric quality of the films which were to follow in the next decade. This is not to say that Edith Blaine is Rambo, but the open-endedness of her fate is meant to carry the same ideal of possible rebirth/redemption.

Chapter 4

4.1 The Holiness of Dogs

      I would now like to return to the topic of dogs in relation to Edith's saga. I interviewed Reverend Barry Dunsmore and broached the question of "animals with souls"[35], and he confided that particular animals do have a sense of self-awareness and recognition indicating what we would term as a "soul," although how much of this would transcend the scientific template set by Pavlov's dogs remains up for debate. Nevertheless, there is a concept to be found within Catholicism of *the holy animal*, among the most recurring being the humble figure of the donkey:

> "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
> Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
> Behold, your king is coming to you;
> righteous and having salvation is he,
> humble and mounted on a donkey,
> on a colt, the foal of a donkey." - Zechariah 9:9

      The connotation between Jesus and donkeys seems to have become inseparable, thanks in part to the classic image of Mary, Joseph, and their child huddled away inside a manger amidst several of the timid beasts. The tenet of the donkey as a kind of unsung saint can also be found in *Au Hasard Balthazar*, a French production from 1966 about an ass who, acting as a representation of Christ's passion, takes all the sins of the world upon his back. The director, Robert Bresson, has a recurring motif within all his films of realism combined with such Catholic doctrines as redemption and salvation. But Bresson was also an auteur inclined towards cruelty, on a *literal* as well as a *thematic* scale, which often threatens to derail his cinema into what's commonly referred to as "misery porn".

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[35] Dunsmore, Revered Barry, Church of Scotland in Bermuda

Nevertheless, the basic premise of donkey as sacred beast is a potent one: An innocent, hapless creature burdened to take on all the weight of the world until it finally expires. Edith's dog, Barney, follows a similar pattern of Christ-like proportions, except in Barney's case, he has to carry the burden of witnessing every crime his deranged owner perpetuates. Barney's voice is the testament of Edith's descent into madness, and her subsequent *ascent* into spirituality. In the narrative of *Evil Carnate,* basset hounds become the unsuspecting heirs of the Biblical legacy left behind by donkeys.

I should also note the relevance of Christ's birth, and its significance among other animals. Although Roman Catholic tradition holds that only human souls can be singularly unique, I held a discussion with Bishop Robert Joseph Kurtz of St. Theresa's Cathedral who indicated there can be such a thing as "animal" souls[36], although one is meant to be clearly disassociated from the other. The concept of animal spirits may have merit, but it does not belong in the same category as the human spirit. Nonetheless, Guy Endore's *The Werewolf of Paris* speaks of this connection between religion and animal in detail:

> "'Do you believe that the animal world is conscious of the coming of Christmas?'
>
> In spite of himself, Aymer smiled. 'Are you going to tell me the cattle kneel in their stalls on Christmas night?'
>
> 'That is precisely what I am going to tell you. And more, that I have seen it with my own eyes.'
>
> 'Of course you have seen it. Anyone going into a stable any night of the year can see some or, if he is lucky, all of the cattle kneeling.'
>
> 'I knew you were going to say that. But it isn't true. And what is more I went one night, as the birth of our Savior was approaching, and heard the bees sing in their hives.'[37]

Once again, horror and religion intertwine, but in this context, theology is projected upon the animal world. The conversation unfolds between the superstitious Madame Didier and the skeptical Aymar. Didier fears that a child, Bertrand, will be born

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[36] Kurtz, Bishop Robert Joseph, Roman Catholic Diocese of Bermuda
[37] Endore, Guy *The Werewolf of Paris,* Pg. 62 Ch. 4, Pegasus Crime 2012

on Christmas Eve, an affront to the coming of Christ. This fear will ultimately bear fruit when Bertrand himself is revealed as a werewolf. Much like how animals can sense an impending storm or hurricane, animals are among the first to experience a premonition of supernatural doom.

I would like to once again reference *A Boy and His Dog* for this section of my essay. Although Harlan Ellison is himself an atheist, the role of Blood as Vic's "savior" amidst a post-apocalyptic nightmare world should not be undervalued. Relentlessly dark and grim, *A Boy and His Dog* is nonetheless a parable of the bond between man and animal. But whereas *A Boy and His Dog* exhibits a literal apocalypse of the world, *Evil Carnate* exhibits an apocalypse of the mind. Blood is a sarcastic creature born from a sarcastic writer; Barney is an innocent caught in a world of the mad.

But outside of Catholicism and atheism, I should also reference the importance of the dog figure in myth. In ancient Egypt, the god of mummification and embalming was Anubis, a deity often depicted in hieroglyphics with the head of a jackal atop a human body. Anubis presided over the ritual of mummification, guiding the dead in the underworld to the residence of Osiris. Although a god symbolical of the grave, the canine attributes of Anubis should also be emphasized.

According to "many mythologies a dog is the companion of the dead man to the underworld. Its remains are found in prehistoric graves; in both Mexico and Peru dogs were sacrificed at burial, and, indeed, the custom is a very widespread one."[38] The deep-seated mythological power of the dog accompanying its owner beyond the grave feeds into *Evil Carnate*, with Barney (an intentional parody of the ancient dogs of legend) acting as Edith's companion through the madness following her near-death experience.

There is also a critical difference between wild dogs and domesticated dogs in Egyptian mythology. Barney is a domesticated dog, and although Anubis is often characterized as a jackal, his faithful qualities, especially in the embalming of Osiris, "imply that whereas the semi-savage, half-domesticated dog was originally nocturnal

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[38] Spence, Lewis *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, Pg. 103-4, Ch. I, Ballantyne & Co. Ltd 1915

and of doubtful value, under domestication its virtues became apparent."[39] Barney is a basset hound, arguably one of the most "domesticated" canine breeds in the world, and the importance of his faithfulness in the novel cannot be overstated. He is Anubis's clownish descendant. The topic of Barney's breed is fully addressed within the following section.

4. 2 Basset Hounds

I include one rogue element to the proceedings, a sort of wild card, and that is Edith's dog, Barney. I had multiple reasons for making Barney a basset hound (one of which I have already cited above), but for the sake of this essay, I will exclude more personal motivations, and remain focused on how Barney's breed is significant to the novel. As Edith's behavior becomes increasingly sociopathic, it was vital for her dog to represent her humanity. There are few dog breeds more comical or physically regarded as "clownish" as the basset, and allowing Edith such a pet would grant much-needed warmth and empathy amidst the bloodshed and scenes of murder.

I dimly remembered black and white footage of Elvis Presley singing on stage to a basset hound named Sherlock (or "Sherman", according to other accounts; no one seems to be entirely positive about this mystery dog's true title) to the tunes of "Hound Dog". This turned out to be an old broadcast from *The Steve Allen Show*, dated July 1, 1956. I did not know until later that the broadcast had caused some mild controversy. Supposedly, Presley had ranted about the performance once backstage, and would eventually refer to it as "the most embarrassing moment" of his career. Steve Allen himself insisted that Presley was in on the gag from the very beginning, and had thought it hilarious.

Whatever really happened, the broadcast would serve to enshrine the basset as a comical, humbling breed that even a musical legend like Presley couldn't upstage. The loving, bumbling figure of the basset hound would surface in other literature and media, in particular *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977) and *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-1985) featuring the bassets "Fred" and "Flash," respectively. In the case of *Evil Carnate*,

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[39] Spence, Lewis *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, Pg. 104 Ch. IV, Ballantyne & Co. Ltd 1915

Barney acts as a somewhat hapless angel, not quite giving, nor taking away, but always "there" simply to comfort, whether the scenario is dark or light, heavy-hearted or joyous.

Mamoru Oshii is a Japanese film director whose most renowned work is the anime *Ghost in the Shell* (1995)*.* A common recurring motif in his movies is the figure of a basset hound. Oshii's films often exhibit vast, mechanical imagery of robots, computers, and virtual worlds. The characters that feature in these films are seemingly machines themselves, cold and barren of emotion. Only the basset hound displays any genuine warmth or tenderness; he is Oshii's soul, the organic heart within Oshii's gigantic, dispassionate machine-movies. Oshii's bassets are cast within a sterile landscape of metal, iron and binary numbers. In contrast, Barney the basset hound lives in a world where monsters are real…and continues to exist *despite* the monsters.

I should note there is much more to Barney besides his status as a basset. His other counterparts can be traced back to the Grinch's sidekick, Max, from Dr. Suess's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957), and Jiminy Cricket from the Disney production of *Pinocchio* (1940)*.* In both works, the character (whether dog or insect) acted as the protagonist's conscience. As far as Seuss's Christmas tale goes, Max was the physical incarnation of the humanity the Grinch himself sorely lacked; he provided enough empathy so the reader would become invested in the Grinch's adventures, if not his dubious motivation. Edith and Barney are my own intentionally twisted variation of the Max/Grinch relationship. Where the Grinch was a monster bent on stealing the holidays, Edith is a monster on stealing human *lives.* Barney's role in the narrative remains the same as Max. By traveling with Edith on every step of her journey, the reader is made to bear witness to Edith's murderous rampages even as they become unforgivable.

Barney represents liberation from the reality of Edith's broken brain, a means for her to talk directly with something separate from the material truth. Edith experiences a kind of schizophrenic breakdown as her memories of a moral life contrasts against her current mental landscape, a breakdown she can only keep in check through Barney's aid. Edith cannot simply be Jekyll and Hyde; she needs a bridge between the two extremes if she is to prevent herself from imploding entirely. Barney is that bridge.

4.3 Edith & Barney

Edith Blaine is a woman who can be most acutely described as "permanently inexperienced." She is not mentally deficient, but rather out of synch with the world around her, a world built on competitive principles that are often harsh and uncompromising. Much like Barney, her pet basset hound, Edith is a slow and emotionally vulnerable individual. It could be said that she is somewhat basset-like in her characteristics.

However, following her near-death experience which inflicts critical damage to her brain, Edith becomes a completely different creature. Edith's conscience and capacity to inhibit the monsters of her id are obliterated. The result is a primordial female boogeyman, a "witch", who hunts and kills children. The only merciful action that could be done with Edith now would be to feed her into a furnace, as Hansel and Gretel did in the classic Grimm fairy tale, or impaled through the heart by a stake, as was Lucy's fate in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. According to convention, the monster must be extinguished. No other option is made available.

Witches are a unique breed of "monster", in that they have the potential to unnerve masters of *scientific* as much as spiritual thought, and both seek their destruction. "Isolation, social ostracism, hydrotherapy, physical beatings, shock therapy – all psychiatric techniques –were first practiced by witch-hunters. Although the straightjacket, solitary confinement, brain surgery, and systematic physical violence were traditionally psychiatric 'treatments', they are now replaced by tranquilizers, anti-depressants, and shock therapy."[40]

Edith's freakish injury is brought about by damage to the orbitofrontal cortex, and becomes the kind of "witch" who is persecuted by medical doctors as much as inquisitors. Her spiritual crisis is set in motion by a scientific cause, and yet it's exactly

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[40] Chesler, Phyllis, *Women and Madness*, Ch. 3 Pg. 163, Palgrave Macmillan 2005

this cause that simultaneously terrifies and enrages Edith. If she cannot escape the reality of her brain, what hope does Edith have? The only answer is, of course, her soul. Edith cannot even be certain she still has a soul, when all of her actions indicate she has been turned to evil? Edith's persona fractures into a semi-cognizant voice that speaks as Barney, albeit filtered through her psychotic behavior.

Barney's voice has more than one layer to it. This comes into sharp focus when Edith is murdering her first child victim, Sarah Channard. Upon first glance, the amalgamated personality created by Edith's head trauma doesn't seem to warrant the act of skinning Sarah. But at this point, Edith has become a twisted pseudo-witch, and she seeks to channel her witch-like tendencies by killing children in the most monstrous manner conceivable. Barney's voice doesn't so much partake in Edith's evil, as act as a safeguard for Edith's own soul, when she finds herself committing wicked deeds she's unable to stop.

Evil Carnate is about contrasting philosophies; optimism vs. pessimism, tenderness vs. cruelty, spirituality vs. physicality. Edith's primary conflict is with her own brain, perhaps the most irrefutably "physical" thing of all. According to all tenets of science, we are our brain, and our brain is us. Damage the brain, and you damage the person. We cannot "escape" our brains any more than we can escape the need to breathe. Oliver Sacks, one of the world's most renowned neurologists, would often encounter this troubling existential quandary in his writings, especially in the case of Jimmie, a patient who suffered from Korsakov's syndrome.

> "I had wondered, when I first met him, if he was not condemned to a sort of 'Humean' froth, a meaningless fluttering on the surface of life, and whether there was any way of transcending the incoherence of his Humean disease. Empirical science told me there was not – but empirical science, empiricism, takes no account of the soul, no account of what constitutes and determines personal being."[41]

I have my own dilemmas with empirical science, much as Sacks had dilemmas with the interior conflicts of his patients. As I have already mentioned about empirical

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[41] Sacks, Oliver *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,* Pg.. 39 Ch. 2, Touchstone 1998

reality, science is not meant to give us "comfort". It is only meant to allow us the facts, which we can accept or deny. It is indifferent to either extreme of the emotion human spectrum, hope or despair. But within the confines of science, we have no leeway, no leverage. We are, for lack of a better word, *incarcerated* by reality. I do not believe this to be a personal interpretation of "the truth". Although we could choose how we arrive at death, we have no option of bypassing death entirely.

I am old enough to be aware of my own mortality, in addition to the mortality of my loved ones. To prevent myself from becoming a brooding neurotic, I try to focus on the common variety of advice in these matters: Make the most of the time I'm given. Perhaps for many this is enough. Maybe it speaks of a vast insecurity or selfishness on my part, but I need more. The reason that the majority of humanity can cope with goodbyes is the hope *there is no such thing* as a final goodbye.

But how should this make any sense? We can't recall anything before we came to exist, so it seems we logically cannot hope for a state of consciousness *after* existence. Edith is a woman who lives in mortal fear of this idea since her childhood. An incident during the narrative when she encounters the dead body of a baby bird brings her terror into sharp focus. Edith seeks transcendence past the confines of decay and entropy even before she's even aware of such a concept.

This thesis has been my most challenging academic assignment to date. Every piece of fiction I've written beforehand allowed me to indulge my love for the offbeat and the fantastic. "Normal life," so to speak, has always bored the living daylights out of me, at least as far as creative inspiration goes. Many writers can put out short stories or books about realistic things happening to realistic people; growing up, moving out, divorce, mortgage, so on and so forth. But I am, on a very fundamental level, *not* a "grown-up." I have the sensibilities of a child, or rather, the passion of a child for beautiful, impossible things. Do not misunderstand me on this point; I lack the *mind* of a child, which can be a dangerous flaw in an often cynical world, but I always strive to possess the *heart* of a child.

4.4 The Voice of Madness

At a late stage in the development of my thesis, there was one element of my novel that was not working out; namely, the articulation of Edith's insanity following her head injury. It was difficult to channel a distinctly unnerving persona without devolving the narrative into something trite and clichéd. The first version, which had Edith speaking in more of a stream-of-consciousness style of thought, was a little too "on the nose". A second version, which featured Edith *talking as* Barney *talking to* Edith, was deemed too ineffectual. Barney's "voice" was also considered to be too abrasive. A tone more appropriate for the trademark warmth of a basset hound was suggested.

Ultimately, I invented a voice which I felt was simultaneously unique, and disturbing. Edith does not speak as Barney talking to Edith, but rather, as Edith transmogrified into a basset hound. Edith is unable to comprehend her new demonic mental rewiring, and the only way she can cope is to channel her behavior through the characteristic loyalty and affection of a dog. As her body commits acts of evil, her mind finds a means of escape by devising a new gestalt persona between Edith and Barney.

Edith's voice pre-head trauma was easy enough to create. However, Edith's voice following the trauma was another challenge entirely. How exactly does one get inside a "broken brain", as Edith would put it? Daniel Keyes possibly faced the same conflict when assembling Charlie Gordon's post-genius persona in *Flowers for Algernon*. Conceiving a way to make the identity of a super-intellectual accessible and intimate to the reader would be a monumental literary task; in my situation, I had to do the same, except with the mind of a deranged lunatic. Barney was always the key to Edith's madness, but it took more than a few months of extensive rewriting to find an appropriate combination.

By creating a mutant voice that is an even mix of human and dog, Edith's madness has a means of transcending the physical reality of her damaged brain. The lack of self-cognizance in mentally ill people is an aspect of insanity that haunted Edith well before her head injury, as seen on page 82 of the creative novel:

"What's wrong with these people? What's going through their minds when they do these things? Can they see themselves doing what they're doing? Could they be made to care?"[42]

After Edith's head trauma, she is also unable to be fully aware of the evil actions she's committing. The "Barney" who is manifested within Edith's mind is a purified version of the literal "Barney": Compassionate, warm, tender, and vulnerable, this Barney is an abstract incarnation of the endearing qualities human's project onto dogs. The subtle irony of an animal's voice becoming the voice of morality and human conscience is intentional. Edith is a female monster, but a recognizably human monster. Barney evolves into a more positive variation of the "Other" that also ties into the novel's Roman Catholic themes; he has metamorphosed into an angel.

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[42] Winfield, Benjamin *Evil Carnate*, Pg. 82, Exeter University 2014

Chapter 5

5.1 The Brain & the Spirit

There are four primary texts that I have utilized as research on neuropsychology which I will list here. The first is *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985)*,* by Dr. Oliver Sacks. This was among the most accessible, from a layman's perspective, of all the material I was required to study. Sacks has the unique ability of speaking to a reader's humanity as much as their scientific interest. *A Brief Tour of the Human Consciousness* (2004)*,* by V.S. Ramachandran, provided further insight into the nature of mental disorders; *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Morality* (2012) by Patricia S. Churchland, gave more specific knowledge regarding the fine line between human morality and the human brain; while *The Tell-Tale Brain* (2012)*,* another work by V.S. Ramachandran, delved more extensively into the phenomenon of various brain illnesses.

If there was any real-life medical condition that approximated Edith's symptoms, it would be Cotard's syndrome. This rare mental disorder, first identified by French neurologist Jules Cotard in 1880, enforces a belief among particular individuals that A) they are dead, B) in varying stages of decay, or C) do not exist at all. It has been known for brain injury to bring about this disorder. Cotard's is an example of a forced change in a person's perspective, akin to what Edith endures in my narrative. Among Cotard's symptoms is the inability to visually recognize a loved one, believing them to be some manner of "imposter". Edith's sense of self is likewise threatened:

> "The delusion of Cotard's is notoriously resistant to intellectual correction. For example, a man will agree that dead people cannot bleed; then, if pricked with a needle, he will express amazement and conclude that the dead do bleed after all, instead of giving up his delusion and inferring that he is alive. Once a delusional fixation develops, all contrary evidence is warped to accommodate it." [43]

Cotard's syndrome is a terrifying affliction, all the more because it removes perhaps the most critical of all traits that is unique to humans, the trait of *self-scrutiny.* The perspective of a Cotard's patient cannot be altered, no matter the amount of proof

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[43] Ramachandran, V.S. *A Brief Tour of the Human Consciousness,* Pg. 91 Ch. 5, Pearson Education Inc. 2004

offered to undermine it; there appears to be no room for doubt or introspection, only a locked downward spiral. If a person lacks the ability to reflect upon him or herself, if could they also be deprived of what we would normally call a "soul?" Oliver Sacks often surprised himself by contemplating a question so much against his personal profession, especially in his treatment of "Jimmie G.", a patient afflicted with Korsakov's syndrome:

> "One tended to speak of him, instinctively, as a spiritual casualty – a 'lost soul'; was it possible that he had really been 'de-souled' by a disease? 'Do you think he **has** a soul'? I once asked the Sisters. They were outraged by my question, but could see why I asked it. 'Watch Jimmie in chapel', they said, 'and judge for yourself'. I did, and I was moved, profoundly moved and impressed…"

> "…I watched him kneel and take the Sacrament on his tongue, and could not doubt the fullness and totality of Communion, the perfect alignment of his spirit with the spirit of the Mass."[44]

A place of religious faith provided Jimmie G. with a consistent "identity" he couldn't find elsewhere. Neurological science can only offer so many answers, but I am inclined to believe the human consciousness has a basic *need* for a reality beyond the confines of our corporeal bodies which materialism cannot absolve. Considering the divisive gap between believers and atheists, it seems appropriate to say this need exists more acutely in some people than it does others.

The divide between belief and non-belief in the human brain is more extensive, and more profound, than we can even begin to suspect. In his study of split-brain patients (individuals whose corpus callosum has been cut, effectively creating two human beings in one body), neurologist V.S. Ramachandran noted a unique phenomenon occurring with theological implications.

Simple, objective questions were initially asked of the patients, and they were tasked to point at boxes marked "yes", "no," or "I don't know." The questions varied from "Are you in California?", (yes), to "Are you on the moon?" (no). A more subjective question, "Do you believe in God?", was then posed to the patients. The right

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[44] Sacks, Oliver *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,* Pg. 37, Ch. 2, Touchstone 1998

hemisphere of the brain pointed directly at "yes." When the same question was asked of the left hemisphere, it pointed towards "no."[45]

Ramachandran's research suggests our brains have an inborn inclination towards non-materialistic belief. If spirituality is not a "taught" mode of thought, but one that is hardwired into our minds, then perhaps we have an answer as to why Jimmie G. can be "at peace" within a house of God in a way he cannot elsewhere. Even occupying a spiritual location such as a church lightens the burden of Jimmie G's neurological affliction. Likewise, with Edith Blaine, the character finds solace and redemption within the implications of a divine existence freed from empirical fact.

What then would happen if the whole of Mankind was given a definite answer as to where God existed or not? There are many individuals in the world who operate just fine with the asserted knowledge that there is no God, no afterlife, no heaven or hell. (I realize that I am not accounting for the beliefs of other religions, but as Catholicism is the one religion that occupies *Evil Carnate*, so too does it occupy this essay.) But if the question of God was answered in the negative, there is no way of knowing for certain if we would not ultimately become "de-souled" as Jimmie G.

5.2 Cognitive Impairment

Another theme that often haunted Philip K. Dick's work was the uncertainty of *identity*. If we could not trust who we were ourselves, how could we trust the environment around us? While I was interviewing Dr. Chantelle Simmons, director at the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute of Bermuda, she described the condition of "cognitive impairment" to me, wherein the patient's neurological damage is so extensive, they remain oblivious to the fact they are damaged. More infamous examples include Alzheimer's, dementia, and schizophrenia, various mental illnesses that erode a human being's personality as opposed to his/her physical person.

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[45] Ramachandran, V.S., *Beyond Belief Conference,* 2006

This lack of self-awareness regarding one's mental state is a frightening concept, especially when a character like Edith is taken into consideration, a woman who experiences a head injury so severe her entire personality undergoes a radical shift. This term had considerable impact on me, as I have always been haunted by the premise of being oblivious to one's own "identity crisis", something I share with Philip K. Dick. But Edith has one advantage over a normal head injury victim: her dog Barney, who also happens to be a basset hound.

Barney is the voice of cognizance needed for Edith's self-realization of her own psychosis. Again, Barney has become the articulation of Edith's non-physical spirit, in direct opposition to the physical reality of Edith's mangled brain. But there is a second objective at work here. Inmates incarcerated within different prisons across the world have a tendency towards devising long interior monologues with "God", as a means of maintaining their sanity. Likewise, Edith is a prisoner of her own mind, akin to the plights of individuals with schizophrenia or Alzheimer's, and her only method of undermining her condition is Barney, the "impossible dog". Perhaps the ultimate horror isn't death, but the dissolution of identity. Barney is the cure to that horror.

Identity dissolution is a recurring motif of the horror genre, most often manifested as a transformative process from the "Normal" to the "Other": Human into vampire, human into werewolf, and so forth. It is curious that, among all of horror's recycled themes, an omniscient threat to one's identity (be it literal or psychological) is perhaps the most potent. David Cronenberg's remake of *The Fly* (1986) is a study of one man's gradual identity annihilation/rebirth, just as John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) is a modern-day parable of a tragic man afflicted with an untreatable psychosis that forces him to kill. *Evil Carnate* avoids the supernatural trappings of "metamorphic horror", but nonetheless Edith's journey into herself has its mythical counterparts in horror literature and cinema.

5.3 Death (And the Need to Transcend It)

What happens after death? Some believe they know the answer for certain; nothing at all. Or rather, all that happens is the slow deterioration of flesh and bone. Whether we choose to be buried in the ground or cremated to have our ashes blown far away by the winds, all we have left of ourselves is the memories we've left behind in others. Perhaps for most pragmatists and atheists, this is enough. But the fact remains that not all of us can innately cope with the concept of death's unfailing invincibility. Sometimes we need more, even if – and here I'd like to stress the *if* – there is nothing more. As Dr. Ramachandran noted:

> "Darwin's theory of evolution is one of the most important scientific discoveries of all time. Unfortunately, however, the theory makes no provision for an afterlife."[46]

Atheists would argue this is the compulsion that led to religion's invention, but even if this were true, the denial of such a compulsion would only result in the starkest of terror and nihilism. Although *Evil Carnate* involves nihilism, I should note it does not *endorse* nihilism. Maybe there was a time when a nihilistic outlook was perceived as rebellious, even revolutionary. But if anything, we now live in an age where nihilism has become just as trendy as Justin Bieber or Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series.

We have been beaten and battered by terrorist attacks, pandemics, economic recessions, natural disasters. Our collective mood is more in line with Eeyore the donkey than Winnie the Pooh. On the surface, *Evil Carnate* doesn't seem to be bucking this mood. Awful things happen, evil remains a consistent threat, and the tone of our pop culture is relentlessly dark. But despite outward appearances, nihilism is not triumphant. In fact, *Evil Carnate* is, first and foremost, a *refutation* of nihilism. This is demonstrated in the final passage of my thesis, which I will discuss later in this essay.

As with any major thesis, the more I researched and wrote, the more I gradually discovered about myself. I'm not lying when I say this work has been the most arduous process of my entire academic life; it has challenged me in ways no other assignment has before, precisely because I had to write under a whole new kind of scrutiny. I'm

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[46]Ramachandran, V.S. *The Tell-Tale Brain*, g. 118,W.W. Norton & Company 2011

much like a turtle being forced from its creative shell. I've already made reference to my infatuation with the fantastic and pulpish, but *Evil Carnate* went far beyond what others would label "my comfort zone". I've had to write outside my "comfort zone" on numerous occasions, but *Evil Carnate* anchored my imagination on a hitherto unprecedented level.

For a previous essay, I conceived an elaborate radio play about a supernatural menace seizing the island of Bermuda. Time and again, I was instructed to slow down, to keep my imagination from flying off into dozens of different directions. While I am a quiet, somewhat shy person by temperament, this is compensated for by the colorful chaos within my own mind. But now, like a cowboy having to take control of a bucking bull, I needed to rein my imagination in to an extent I had never been required to do before. By doing so, I learned more about myself than I could have ever anticipated. I learned that I needed God almost as much as I needed creativity.

Chapter 6

6.1 Belief & the Lack Thereof

Evil Carnate began as an exploration into our increasingly atheistic cultural landscape, both within the fictional realm and amidst our own day-to-day lives, in addition to the crisis of religious faith in literature. But the further I went along, the more I learned this novel was less about writing a thesis that would earn me accolades, but more about my own search for God. The past decade has been an eye-opener in terms of my place in the world. I had to say goodbye to places and people that have been dear to me since childhood. Loved ones were lost to old age. Failures, disappointments, and personal regrets gnawed at me, sometimes interfering with my ability to sleep.

It is not uncommon for individuals to seek out religion in trying times. Occasionally it supplies genuine comfort, and just as often it can be perverted into a weapon to justify all manner of inexcusable atrocities. The "New Atheist" movement, spearheaded by figures such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, have already attacked and verbally decimated religion from almost every possible angle by this point. I can't hope to outmatch their knowledge or their wits. Nevertheless, I'll always be inclined to *disagree* with their views on a level which transgresses the atheist's tolerance threshold. Theirs is a universe of stark, empirical reality. Whether that perspective is right or wrong isn't the issue here. The issue is how humanity, as a whole, is expected to deal with "the truth".

> 'But, don't you see', said I, 'that science could never prove anything of the sort?'
>
> 'Why on earth not?'
>
> 'Because science studies nature. And the question is whether besides nature exists – anything "outside". How could you find that out by simply studying nature?'[47]

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[47] Lewis, C.S. Faith, *Christianity and the Church,* Pg. 144Ch. 18, HarperCollins 2000

If God's existence was proven false tomorrow, how would we react as a species? We could either accommodate ourselves with the facts, as atheists expect us to do…or, more we could go stark raving mad. Empirical reality, after all, is not about comfort. It's about learning to cope with the way things are. But for Edith Blaine, learning to cope is not an option. If empirical reality is all she has, then she has no hope whatsoever.

As a strongly introverted individual, I am often alone with my own thoughts. My bedroom sometimes feel more like a cocoon than part of a household, protecting me from the loud savagery and bullying demands of the world beyond. A knock on my door often sounds like a sledgehammer. Much of my social isolation has to do with my case of Asperger's syndrome, but that is not the topic of my thesis, although it indirectly relates to the protagonist of said thesis, Edith Blaine.

We live in a society of set categories, preconceived character tropes, and stereotypes. Even if I'm not so much *antisocial* as *non-social,* the common perception others would hold of me would probably be along the lines of a typical shut-in, a nerd, a "loser". The conceit of winners and losers is a curious one. "Winners" are arguably individuals who have achieved some measure of fame or recognition; Steven Spielberg, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Barack Obama, etc. "Losers", in stark contrast, are the driftwood left behind, those who will never be remembered by anyone outside their family circle. This can be due to circumstances outside their control, within their control, or both. Nevertheless, the endgame remains the same: obscurity and, in time, oblivion. In our capitalistic world, you either make it or you don't, and civilization has little pity for those who don't.

Edith Blaine is a "loser". As such, she has grown to detest the material things associated with success, the most obvious among these being money. Just how responsible is money for the state of our happiness or misery? No one can offer a consistent answer, but in my case, it has been an ogre, brought into sharp focus of late thanks to the 2008 recession. Likewise, Edith abhors the need for money. There comes a time when this abhorrence is born less from envy, and more from genuine fear. A boyfriend in Edith's teenage years, Terry, becomes a Wall Street broker in his adult life. He is handsome, powerful, and completely unscrupulous. Thanks in part to Terry's

bullying ways, Edith becomes terrified of secular materialism, thus paving the road to her obsession with the spiritual.

There is also a deep connection between religion and horror that should be expounded upon. By a general rule of thumb, the horror genre deals with fantastical, impossible things. Vampires, werewolves, demons, and their kin are common sights and sounds, whether on the movie screen or classic literature. Likewise, religion is as the *ground zero* of innumerable mythological beasts, from the Minotaur of Greek legend to the golem of Hebrew folktale. The common ground that horror and religion share goes beyond merely being a collective "boogeyman" to frighten children (and adults) into doing what they're told. The emotion that resurfaces, again and again, is one of *transcendence,* be it induced by awe or horror:

> "If horror fans were divided into theists and atheists, between those who believe in a supernatural realm, and those who believe 'this is all there is', would we find that these two camps, broadly speaking, fear different things? Are theists more affected by (and more likely to 'enjoy') horror films about unnatural threats, whereas materialists find that naturalistic psycho gorefests strike the deeper chord? Do theists find Samara frightening yet fascinating, but Jigsaw merely sordid and vicious? Are atheists more likely unnerved by Jigsaw, but merely annoyed by Samara?"[48]

Here can be found perhaps the greatest irony of all. Although the horror genre carries an exterior fear of death, with its common trappings of zombies, vampires, and other associated undead, digging deeper beneath the surface reveals a fundamental need for <u>something beyond the confines of the material realm</u>. The same irony can be applied to religion, specifically Catholicism. More so than any other mode of belief, Catholicism has arguably been among the most Conservative in pop culture. Horror movies, with their seemingly relentless display of nudity, violence and bloodshed, would be viewed as nothing less than products of Satan himself. Thus, horror becomes the "Shadow" (to use a Jungian term) that religion casts upon the collective human

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[48] Sipos, Thomas M. *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear*, Pg. 251 Ch. 9, McFarland & Company Inc. 2010

consciousness, regardless if one refuses to acknowledge its ancestry to the other. I feel my thesis is among the first to explore this dichotomy.

6.2 Jesus of Nazareth

This essay does not concern itself with the historical understanding of Jesus Christ, but rather his spiritual legacy, and how it relates to the case of Edith Blaine. Whatever actually occurred all those centuries ago is likely to never be proven or disproven, but the reality of Christ's impact upon civilization cannot be denied. Even the most academic of scholars, C.G. Jung among them, acknowledges the importance of Christ upon the human zeitgeist:

> "Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self. He represents a totality of a divine or heavenly kind, a glorified man, a son of *God sine macula peccati*, unspotted by sin."[49]

Being alone with oneself is, admittedly, a dangerous business. A person could fall into the trap of narcissistic navel-gazing if care isn't taken to remedy existential neurosis with genuine optimism. But the only means through which I could find this optimism was the belief in the metaphysical, of something beyond the confines and unbending rules of harsh reality. Enter God, and his holy son, Jesus of Nazareth. Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, could not have put it more succinctly: "The Christian faith stands or falls with the truth of the testimony that Christ has risen from the dead."[50]

Jesus of Nazareth, the man who turned water to wine, who taught us to love our enemies, who miraculously returned to life one monumental Sunday morning. It is this particular event -   Christ's resurrection - that is perhaps the most pivotal, regardless of whether one believes in Christ's divinity or not. On that morning, Christ broke the greatest seal on Mankind; the seal of mortality. He promised us all something beyond

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[49] Jung, C.G. *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Pg. 37 Ch. 5, Princeton University Press 1969
[50] Ratzinger, Joseph *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Pg. 241 Ch. 9, 2011 Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City

the mortal coil, that the word "goodbye" was no longer a permanent utterance, but a temporary parting of the ways.

Death's hold over the peoples of Earth had been unshackled with Christ's example. He had provided us with the quintessential Hope, with a capital "H"; transcendence over our mortal forms. Although this concept has been pursued in other major religions, such as the cycle of reincarnation in Buddhism, Christ's resurrection goes one step beyond. While other religions work within nature's pattern of life and death, Christ made the unprecedented move of breaking free from that pattern *entirely.* When I was reading *Faith, Christianity and the Church* (2002), a series of articles and essays written by theologian C.S. Lewis, the following passage caught my eye:

> "There is no halfway house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, 'Are you the son of Bramah?', he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'Are you Zeus?', he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?', he would have first rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you asked Confucious, 'Are you Heaven?', I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not accordance with nature are in bad taste'. The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man…"[51]

Lewis is arguably biased in the sense he is debating the "truthfulness" of Christianity over other religions, but in relation to my thesis, his singular interpretation of Jesus Christ plays heavily into the tragic tale of Edith Blaine. Edith, like Christ, is a singular creature who undergoes a transformative process, but whereas Christ ascends into divinity, Edith *descends* into madness. She is singular because she has been forced from one radical perspective to another; from sane to insane. Normally, when one is born to oneself, they can only *know* themselves for the rest of their time on Earth. Paul and his fellow disciples claimed that Jesus *appeared* the same after his return, and yet something was intangibly *different*; something unearthly and unprecedented.

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[51] Lewis, C.S. *Faith, Christianity and the Church*, Pg. 39Ch. 5,HarperCollins 2002

There have already been numerous Christ metaphors in popular culture. Perhaps one of the more famous is Superman, an alien being who "descended" to Earth from another world. He even underwent his own death/resurrection process in a story arc that took place in the early '90's, when Superman's life was taken by a monster called Doomsday. This tale was written at a time when the theme of death and resurrection among comic book superheroes wasn't the overused joke it is seen as today. But Edith's linkage to Christ is unique, and separate from any previous iteration. Christ's return from his tomb is already popular knowledge, but the idea of his physical/spiritual *appearance* following said resurrection isn't as widespread. Some manner of miraculous transformation had taken place that Jesus's disciples were not fully able to comprehend, "a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence."[52]

6.3 Sacrament of the Eucharist

Bread to flesh, wine to blood; these are the defining attributes of transubstantiation, a rite belonging entirely to the Roman Catholic Church. The concept of transformation can be found in practically any world religion, from the reincarnation cycle of Hinduism to the classic tricksters and shapeshifters of Native American mysticism, but transubstantiation is an authentically *unique* premise within religion, in that a participant in the ritual is considered neither a cannibal or a vampire when he eats and drinks the "flesh and blood" of Christ. Joseph Ratzinger articulated the process as follows:

> "In his certainty that his prayer would be heard, the Lord gave his body and blood to the disciples during the Last Supper in anticipation of the Resurrection: both Cross and Resurrection are intrinsic to the Eucharist – without them there would be no Eucharist."[53]

Bread and wine "becomes" Christ's flesh and blood upon consumption, but not in the sense of one human being eating another. Again, it is the *concept* of

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[52] Ratzinger, Joseph *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Pg. 244Ch. 9, 2011 Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City

[53] Ratzinger, Joseph *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, Pg. 142Ch. 5, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2011

transfiguration/transformation here that should be taken into account. The Eucharist is perhaps the most universally recognized of the rituals of Roman Catholicism, and its influence can be seen even within the parameters of the horror genre. Horror, after all, is meant to be a deliberate *perversion* of the familiar and recognizable into something fearsome. The Italian zombie films of the 1980's – chiefly the films of Lucio Fulci (*The Beyond,* 1981) and Andrea Bianchi (*Burial Ground*, 1981) - represent a stylistic corruption of the Eucharist; the living dead (twisted parodies of the resurrected image of Christ) are now *literally* consuming human flesh and drinking human blood.

This particular "Italian zombie" subgenre attempts to invert the spiritual optimism of Christ's resurrection into the secular nihilism of death's inevitability. Such films are rare examples of a filmmaker indirectly denouncing the "hidden optimism" of the undead and similar supernatural kindred in favor of all-encompassing gloom. It's crucial to note the actual films that inspired Italy's zombie craze, George Romero's *"…of the Dead"* (1968-09) saga, are deeply cynical, but not authentically *nihilistic*. Each film either allows for the protagonists to escape death's absoluteness, or at the very least offer the possibility of their escape. Italian filmmakers subliminally unsettled by the concept of monsters *like* and yet *unlike* Christ, then proceeded to drag zombie cinema down into an ideological darkness that even George Romero would not have accepted.

The willful perversion of the Eucharist in Italian horror cinema is a testament to its mythic impact on pop culture. More importantly, by attempting to corrupt the ritual of the Eucharist, the filmmakers have inadvertently showcased its profundity. The Eucharist flip-flops the fatalist conclusion of death's permanence; here, life moves to death, and back to life. In response, Lucio Fulci and his fellow Italian filmmakers strive to flip the equation *back* to death in the form of rotting zombies. There is a secret war at work in these films, a battle between spiritual transcendence and secular entropy. Whichever side wins depends on the perspective of the director. But the Eucharist itself exhibits another process of "transformation", which harkens back again to the trials of Edith Blaine.

6.4 The Other and God

"In my view, ethical advancements are the outcome of contact with a transcendental reality behind the universe and not simply the outcome of the multiplication of neurons in the prefrontal cortex of the human brain."[54]

Empirical reality can only provide us with so much. Our innate desire for "something Other" can be manifested in a variety of different scenarios, from all the world's religions to our yearning to move beyond the Earth and into the vastness of outer space. But the horror genre remains among the most unique and offbeat of all said manifestations. Horror offers a peculiar paradox; the viewer/reader can be alternately terrified or relieved, depending on the final outcome chosen by its author. We have already seen examples of *secular* horror and *supernatural* horror.

David Fincher's *Seven* is secular horror, and being secular horror, there is no "Other" to be found, except perhaps in the abominable behavior of the human race, or at least the humans living within the confines of *Seven*'s nightmare city. There is no mystery to any of the monsters seen on display (quite literally in the case of John Doe's victims); not even John Doe himself, who is ultimately revealed to be a man just as disgusted by the world's spiritual rot as Morgan Freeman's emotionally exhausted detective. The closest approximation to religion that can be found in *Seven* is the mythical seven deadly sins, but these are simply used as a diabolical metaphor by John Doe. When our private yearning for God is denied, the only alternative is *Seven*'s pessimistic dystopia.

Compare the godlessness of *Seven* to the "Godness" of *The Exorcist.* Father Karras begins the film as a broken man with a broken faith. He is locked in a state not dissimilar from the world-weary protagonists of *Seven*. He has tried to find the Other, i.e. God, to no avail. But then the Other's satanic counterpart violently intrudes upon the life of a little girl called Regan. Pazuzu is an evil of supernatural origin, whereas John Doe is an evil of secular origin. John Doe is triumphant. Pazuzu is not. John Doe exists in a universe where a negative outcome isn't only possible, it's almost assured. Pazuzu

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[54] Beauregard, Mario & O'Leary, Denyse, *"The Spiritual Brain,"* Pg. 152 Ch. 6, HarperCollins 2007

exists in a universe where a *positive* outcome is assured, because God is just as real as the Devil.

6.5 Linus's Blanket

What about the rest of humanity? We could come to accept the non-existence of God over time, but the possibility remains of those who would go hopelessly mad when deprived of the potential of a transcendent realm. Men and women would have to abandon any sense of *divine* law in favor of *empirical* law. This is a welcome change for those who are already non-believers, but the question remains of how many others would follow suit. If the idea of an afterlife is completely denied once and for all from us, how could psychology or medical therapy circumvent the inconceivable despair that would result? "de-souled", as Dr. Sacks once described of William Thompson, a patient who suffered from a case of Korsakov's twice as severe as Jimmie G's.:

> "It was this which convinced me, above everything, that there was some ultimate and total loss of inner reality, of feeling and meaning, of soul, in William – and led me to ask the Sisters, as I had asked them of Jimmie G. 'Do you think William **has** a soul? Or has he been pithed, scooped out, de-souled by disease?"[55]

Has Edith likewise been "de-souled" by her head trauma? I do not have a direct answer to that question. Neurology cannot take the possibility of a soul into account any more than a priest can take the possibility of the non-existence of God into account. But regardless of the question, Edith has found a unique "coping mechanism" in the form of Barney. Edith projects her "soul" onto Barney, no matter if it's real or not, so she in turn can partly calm the chaos raging within her damaged brain. Similarly, Mankind must have a "coping mechanism" of its own if God, and all the connotations that come with God, are denounced by science's unforgiving scrutiny once and for all. Richard Dawkins has addressed humanity's need for religion numerous times before (a need he believes is outdated and redundant), but here is one sample:

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[55] Sacks, Oliver *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,* Pg. 113 Ch. 12, Touchstone 1998

"Humanity's need for comfort is, of course, real. But isn't there something childish, something infantile in the belief that the universe 'owes' us comfort, in the sense that if something is comforting, that must kind of make it true?

"…it is astonishing how many people are unable to understand that 'X is comforting' does not imply that 'X is true'."[56]

Dawkins takes his statement on the false comfort of religion one step further by including a quote from science fiction author and biochemistry professor, Isaac Asimov: "Inspect every piece of pseudoscience and you will find a security blanket, a thumb to suck, a skirt to hold. What have we to offer in exchange? Uncertainty! Insecurity!"[57] The need for religion, in Asimov's (and in turn Dawkins's) eyes is reduced to the equivalent of Linus van Pelt from Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts* forever holding on to his beloved blue blanket while sucking his thumb.[58]

But if Linus's blanket was forcefully removed from him, would he inevitably "grow up", as Dawkins, Asimov, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and all the public atheist figures of our day believe would happen? Such an incident has occurred before in Schulz's comic strip when Linus's sister Lucy stole the blanket, and as a direct result, he became dizzy and nauseous before finally passing out. Rather cruelly, Lucy documents Linus's symptoms for a science fair project, for which she wins first prize. It is interesting to note that it's the dog of the comic strip, Snoopy, who digs the blanket up from where Lucy buried it, and restores it to Linus.

The iconography of the dog as a kind of 'savior', or at the very least a provider of warmth and humanity, is echoed in *Evil Carnate.* Where the rationalistic and brutish character of Terry Denton, Edith's boyfriend, seeks to torment her with the stark nature of reality (or 'reality' as he perceives it,) Barney is the sanctuary for Edith to retreat and recompose herself. Long before Barney even surfaces in the narrative, Edith has been harboring a fondness for basset hounds that can be traced back to her childhood. In this

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[56] Dawkins, Richard, excerpt from UC Berkeley speech, March 8 2008
[57] Asimov, Isaac, *Isaac Asimov's Book of Science and Nature Questions,* Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1988
[58] Schulz, Charles M., Peanuts, *United Feature Syndicate*, 1950-2000,

sense, Barney has acted as a nebulous emotional guardian for Edith throughout almost the entirety of her life.

Chapter 7

7.1 Internalization/Insulation and Private Realities

I have already named *Flowers for Algernon* and *Dracula* among my inspirations for *Evil Carnate.* But there is another unique factor in these novels that I sought to carry over to my own book – a kind of insularity, a phantasmagoric atmosphere where nothing, and no one, else exists in the world besides the characters caught within this twilight dream. The reader is offered perspectives on Edith's predicament by different people, some of whom never even knew her, but many of these could easily have been written by Edith herself in the grip of her psychosis. Point of view is called into question; when is Edith speaking in her own voice, and when is she speaking as a stranger?

This is best exemplified by Edith's conversations with Barney throughout the narrative. Although we, the reader, know for certain that Barney's replies are all concocted inside Edith's own head due to the stark fact that *dogs do not talk,* Edith's internalized reality makes such a fact completely irrelevant. Barney functions as Edith's "soul", which remains in constant conflict with her broken, insane "body", imparting moral and ethical advice even as Edith plummets ever downwards into the desolation of pure evil. Rudyard Kipling's *Thy Servant, a Dog,* (1930 a short story told entirely from the perspective of a hapless canine named Boot, was an invaluable model that aided me in sketching Barney's unique voice.

However, I should also go into some detail about Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog,* a post-apocalyptic cycle of narratives about Vic, a young man who happens to own a telepathic dog, Blood. (Although Blood would probably insist he's the one with ownership of Vic.) Vic, being raised in a decidedly brutal environment, is ignorant of such pre-nuclear war concepts such as ethics and morality, and has only two primal interests: Food, and mating. He is a dumb, cruel creature in a dumb, cruel world, and there's little doubt that, without Blood, he would have fallen prey to the bigger, dumber, crueler creatures occupying this desolate landscape. Ironically, Blood becomes the lone voice of intelligence on this savage earth, and as an inevitable result has become

something of a misanthrope. But nor does Blood hesitate to admit owing his life to Vic in return:

> "Vic, we've been together almost three years. Good and bad. But this can be the worst. I'm scared, man. Scared you won't come back And I'm hungry, and I'll have to go find some dude who'll take me on…and you know most solos are in packs now, I'll be low mutt. I'm not that young anymore. And I'm hurt pretty bad."[59]

For all of Blood's snark, he is still, in essence, a dog; vulnerable and ultimately dependent on his master, regardless of how much of a rape-happy brute Vic may be. In such situations, Blood becomes Vic's humanity, even as Vic continues his descent into nihilistic savagery. In this one crucial moment, Blood reveals not only his vulnerability, but his *humility,* an almost religious demeanor that's completely lost in this horrible world where there's nothing left besides pragmatic survival.

Barney's initial personality wasn't too different from Blood's; sarcastic, sardonic, even aloof. But as Edith's atrocities grew ever more severe, I realized I needed a counterpoint to the darkness surrounding Edith, and my original conception of Barney wasn't doing the trick. So, I had to reinvent Barney almost from scratch. This time, Barney's voice would have a clueless, innocuous tone to contrast against Edith's deranged ramblings; arguably much like how an actual dog would probably speak. In this way, Barney slowly began to share more characteristics with Boot of Kipling's *Thy Servant,* than Blood of Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog.*

The warmth that can exist between an owner and his/her dog is curious. *Evil Carnate,* among other things, is meant to be a testament to that warmth. Even in the darkest situations, Barney acts as a bizarre, dwarfish guardian angel for Edith, providing a candle of flame amidst the grim horrors Edith's corrupted brain inflicts upon the people around her. *Evil Carnate* is an insular story about insular realities, in particular the one Edith shares with Barney.

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[59] Ellison, Harlan *A Boy and His Dog*, Pg. 972Ch. 6, *The Essential Ellison,* 2001 The Kilimanjaro Corporation

There is another, older tale that I'd like to cite; a fairy tale, to be specific. *The Little Match Girl* (1845) *by* Hans Christian Anderson, depicts the final hours of a poverty-stricken little girl on a freezing New Year's Eve, attempting to sell matches to passers-by. When she is unsuccessful, the girl seeks shelter in a small nook instead of returning home, where her brutish father is waiting. She lights her matches in rapid succession, summoning different visions of food, love, and warmth, before finally dying. Afterwards, the ghost of the girl's grandmother arrives to carry the girl away to Heaven.

Huddled deep within that little nook, the match girl created her own insulated spiritual reality, separate and safe from the unforgiving environment that surrounded her. The match girl's withdrawal from the harshness of "real life" is emblematic of every man and woman's interior desire for an escape, primarily on a metaphysical level. The reality that Edith concocts following her head trauma in which she is able to converse with her dog Barney is in the same thematic vein. Whereas the match girl is trapped by the snow and the apathy of the people around her, Edith is trapped by her "broken brain", which has been forcibly rewired into something monstrous.

I should note the match girl's belief in Heaven is ultimately rewarded by story's end, when the grandmother arrives to carry her off to a better existence. Edith, in turn, prevents her own mind ("mind" being a separate, more psychic-based entity from "brain") plummeting into the darkest abyss, even while her body commits the most atrocious deeds, by believing in the promise of a life beyond the one she already knows. Nor is Edith's belief in transcendence something to be ridiculed. The possibility of spiritual renewal has been recognized by other texts that persist "ethical advancements are the outcome of contact with a transcendental reality behind the universe and not simply the outcome of the multiplication of neurons in the prefrontal cortex of the human brain." [60]

But if Edith had been an atheist before her head trauma, how differently would she have responded to her newfound "condition"? Would she have simply killed herself outright, thus stopping herself from inflicting pain and horror on other innocent lives?

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[60] Beauregard, Mario & O'Leary, Denyse, *"The Spiritual Brain,"* Pg. 152 Ch. 6 pg.HarperCollins 2007

This is a question that ties into the myth of the werewolf, where the victim condemned to become a murderous beast by night has to relinquish any hope of redemption for himself and take his own life, so as to save the lives of those he would have slaughtered in his lupine form. But although the werewolf myth does not believe in redemption, Edith Blaine *does.*

Let us suppose for a moment that Edith, faced with the stark reality of her forced insanity, took her own life. Perhaps this would bypass the grim fates of her immediate victims, but how would it supply any hope or salvation for men and women in the future who undergo similar or identical brain damage as Edith? In this way, Edith grows to see herself as a quasi-messianic figure; not the fanatical variant that we read about in the newspaper, or see on the television every day, but just as Jesus provided life after death with his resurrection, Edith provides redemption in neurologically-induced madness by *choosing* to deny the only materialistic solution to her conflict.

The sequence of Edith's "death", and subsequent rebirth, is the single most emotionally exhausting scene I've ever had to write. In one moment, Edith's brain is damaged beyond repair, and she literally *becomes someone else.* Attempting to articulate an experience that is, for all intents and purposes, indescribable, posed a considerable challenge. It was almost too easy to fall into the trap of "stream-of-consciousness"; I had to make Edith's ravings simultaneously disturbing *and* stirring for the reader, while somehow still coherent. How do you describe a near-death trauma? As I haven't undergone one myself (yet), I could only simulate it to the best of my knowledge and ability. This is another reason why I fell back on the tale of the little match girl; I had to unearth the all-important *pathos* of Edith's transformation, and Hans Christian Anderson's story provided me with such.

7.2 21st Century Pro-Satanism

As I've demonstrated before in this essay, the presence of Catholicism in supernatural horror shouldn't be undervalued. More so than any other religion, Catholicism and Christianity are a *recurring* spiritual belief system in popular horror, one

that offers an optimistic ideology even amidst the blood and carnage. But the creative approach to said presence can differ from filmmaker to filmmaker, often drastically. I have selected two films that share similar themes, William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) and Rob Zombie's *The Lords of Salem* (2012), as classic and contemporary attitudes towards Catholicism within horror cinema. Whereas one is an affirmation of Catholicism's values, the other is a distinct and undeniable *refutation.*

Whereas *The Exorcist* is a testimony to the stealth optimism of the horror genre, *The Lords of Salem* is a 21st century black-metal nightmare that is in favor of Satanic ideology, in stark contrast to *The Exorcist*, a film (and novel) directly opposed to it. Rob Zombie, himself a black metal artist, depicts a reality where Satan's uprising is not only inevitable, it's actually *preferable* to the previous reign of God. For Rob Zombie, Satan is the ever-alluring, ever-attractive "Other", while God is the boring, antiseptic authoritarian. William Friedkin, on the other hand, shares no such infatuation with the unholy. Satan remains the eternal Other, the enemy. It is no coincidence that witches play an integral part in Zombie's film, the feminine channel through which Satan's uprising comes to pass. The topic of witches, and their importance to the narrative of *Evil Carnate*, will be explored in the next section.

Zombie's film attempts to offer the Hollywood "happy ending" spun on its head. The Devil is triumphant by movie's end, but unlike similar Satanic-themed fare such as *Rosemary's Baby*, Zombie suggests the victory of Satan is actually a good thing, or at the very least a welcome change from God's stagnant dominion. But in reversing the good/evil equation of God and Satan, Zombie still negates the concealed optimism found in Friedkin's *The Exorcist.* Supernatural horror is an objective genre that isn't given to shades of grey. Good is good, and evil is evil. *The Lords of Salem* is an uncommon example of a director seeking to undermine our perception of God and the Devil, but fails precisely because the Catholic God is irrevocably tied to positives – life, love, kindness – while the Devil is a creature of eternal negatives – death, hate, cruelty. When Zombie tries to undermine this paradigm, his film disintegrates into a fascinating ideological mess.

It is interesting to observe that Zombie's nihilistic sentiments are better articulated within *The Devil's Rejects* as opposed to *The Lords of Salem.* Secular horror serves his personal philosophy better than supernatural horror, exactly because secular horror is better equipped to dismiss the religious conceit of good and evil. Spiritual horror is not. *Evil Carnate* is designed to be an unprecedented hybrid between the two, shifting from one side to the other without any certainty where its allegiances lie…until the very end, wherein an event occurs that can only be called an "act of God." A Catholic priest by the name of Matthew Hooper arrives at Edith's proverbial "end of the road", and helps to break her out of the fatalistic loop:

> "If you don't want her to kill the children, reverend, give her an answer! Give her an answer she can believe in! An answer that makes sense, that no one can sneer at! Give it to her NOW!"
> "You're not damned, Edith."
> EDITH BLAINE YOU HAVE TWENTY SECONDS TO COME OUT
> "…what?"
> NINETEEN EIGHTEEN
> "You have a damaged brain, Edith. That means your actions were not those of a human. We are judged on our human acts. You are not damned."[61]

Prior to this juncture in the narrative, Edith has been locked in an apparently hopeless cycle between belief and un-belief. If she chooses to accept the atheistic mode of thought and view her condition as inescapable, she will simply die and rot in the ground. If she sides with a spiritualistic belief system, in this case Catholicism, her soul would be condemned to Hell for her abominable deeds. It's only Reverend Hooper's revelation that Edith is, in fact, *not* damned due to the nature of her injury which allows Edith to break out of her mental loop. Edith is liberated from her nihilism, just as her soul is liberated from the realities of her diseased brain.

7. 3 Witches & Female Serial Killers

Another critical "sub-reality" of Edith's story, and the one that propels the narrative of my novel, is the myth of the witch, manifested in *Evil Carnate* as the female

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[61] Winfield, Benjamin *Evil Carnate*, Pg. 219, Exeter University 2014

serial killer. Long before her head injury, Edith harbored an intense fear of witches, implanted by a frightening incident during her teenage years when her schoolmates pulled a nasty Halloween prank involving a witch mask. The mask touches on Edith's own internalized dread of becoming "one of them," a theme already explored in an earlier section of this essay, but also evokes Edith's apprehension of her inner darkness and capacity for evil.

The archetype of the witch lurks behind every page of *Evil Carnate.* It is no coincidence that the majority of Edith's victims are children, a creative choice meant to play into the old legends of young ones being consumed by evil crones, popularized by the tale of Hansel and Gretel as recorded by the Brothers Grimm. But the myth of the witch transcends even fairy tales, to the point where she becomes more than a victimizer; she is also *the victim*, as made evident by the Salem witch trials of colonial Massachusetts, from February 1692 to May 1693.

It is this strange, almost schizophrenic dichotomy of the witch that informs *Evil Carnate.* As suggested earlier in this thesis, Edith is forcibly metamorphosed from the prey to the predator, from "Normal" to "Other," yet she retains the vulnerable characteristics of the prey, as manifested within Barney's amalgamation with her own voice. The impact of the witch in popular culture is indicative of society's fascination-cum-revulsion with her figure. The witch is more than an agent of chaos, as "a central reason for the persecution of witches was morbid interest in the witch as 'other' and the fear of witch/woman as an agent of castration."[62]

In this sense, the witch evolves into a direct threat to the patriarchal order. The long-standing antagonism between witchcraft practices and the Catholic Church only supplies further evidence. She becomes less *Other,* and more *rebel,* two different paradigms that nonetheless secretly complement each other in more ways than one. *Evil Carnate* is a hybrid of two separate "boogeyman" myths: The wicked cannibalism of the witch, fused with the transformative rite of the werewolf. And yet, the closest non-fictional approximation of the witch has never carried the same gravitas; "no female

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[62] Creed, Barbara, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* Pg. 74 Ch. 6, Routledge 1993

serial killer has the mythic force of the classic predator. We find it impossible to perceive them as frightening creatures. There is no Jane the Ripper."[63]

The lack of a mythic female equivalent for Jack the Ripper is telling of a society that often slots the role of the Other into the male category. In terms of purely "female" monsters, the witch has few competitors in her field, but a real-life counterpart is hard to come by. Such individuals as Elisabeth Bathory (aka "The Blood Countess"), Dorothea Puente, Mary Mallon (aka "Typhoid Mary"), Jane Toppan, and Aileen Wuornos have become infamous in their own right, but none have quite reached the same level of mainstream "popularity" as Charles Manson or Ed Gein.

Lady Bathory's case is particularly noteworthy, in that her deeds carry the same quasi-mythic proportions as Jack the Ripper's, and yet she isn't nearly as universally recognized as the London stalker. The most "fantastical" aspect of Bathory's murders, namely bathing in the blood of virgins to assure her own immortality, has often been considered historically debatable at best, and yet it is the one element that warrants her "mythic" status. It goes without saying that "Bram Stoker's Dracula was, to a significant extent, based not on a male but a female figure – the Transylvanian Countess, Elisabeth Bathory. Not only do Stoker's unpublished papers contain copious notes about the Elisabeth Bathory case; he also incorporated aspects of her story into the published novel."[64]

The line between reality and fantastical horror becomes blurred with Elisabeth Bathory, and the same could be said of Edith Blaine, who subconsciously seeks to shatter the wall between her finite and *in*finite selves. As a teenager, Edith reads a copy of Stoker's *Dracula* inside a library, and soon becomes fearful, but not so much of Dracula himself; rather, it is Dracula's victim, Lucy, who unnerves Edith. The fictional character of Lucy threatens Edith with the same dread of "one of them-ness" brought about by the witch mask. But what Edith doesn't fully realize is that her aversion of

[63] Pearson, Patricia *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, pg. 153 Viking Penguin 1997
[64] Creed, Barbara *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Pg. 63 Ch. 5, Routledge 1993

becoming the Other, and her yearning for a spiritual world beyond the confines of a physical universe, are irrevocably connected.

Edith Blaine is a female killer who takes the lives of children. She becomes this "monster" through a non-supernatural incident. Her body transforms into a "machine-body," a personification of the female boogeyman, and her "one-of-them" nightmare comes true. However, she also gains a twisted form of liberation through her metamorphosis; unbound by conscience, like her serial killer compatriots, she is no longer beholden to society's rules. She experiences freedom as much as damnation. But Edith remains a *sympathetic* figure precisely because of her "mind-soul," as voiced by Barney.

The "machine-body" and "mind-soul" conflict cannot be overstated, and is prevalent even among non-fictional murderers. Social worker Beth Valentine once remarked about Dorothea Puente: "She was good and evil at the same time. She took care of them at *the same time*."[65] This is the core enigma of Edith Blaine's character, and how she is ultimately frightening and relatable in the same moment. Her machine-body belongs to the likes of Elisabeth Bathory and Dorothea Puente, but her mind-soul remains recognizably "one of us" as opposed to "one of them."

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[65] Pearson, Patricia, *When She was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, Pg. 169, Ch. 6, Viking Penguin 1997

Chapter 8

Now, I wish to contrast *The Exorcist* against its primary "adversary" within this thesis, David Fincher's morbid thriller *Seven* (or, as the title is seen on-screen, *Se7en).* Certainly numerous other examples of secular and supernatural horror exist, but the two cited above are perhaps the most popular, and the most culturally recognized, of them all. *Seven* is the epitome of the serial killer genre, a gruesome fictional account of wickedness being triumphant over human virtue.

8.1 Catholic Subtexts

Edith Blaine is a spiritual woman with a very secular problem. A severe blow to her head has caused critical brain damage, leaving her personality drastically altered. Where Edith was once meek and compassionate, she is now savage and homicidal. Edith's only connection to her previous identity is her dog Barney, a basset hound who gradually takes on a voice of his own within Edith's fractured mind. The inversion of good/evil is intentional; in William Friedkin's film, Pazazu is a demon influencing the innocent Regan MacNeil for the worse, whereas Barney is an "angel" influencing the corrupted Edith Blaine for the better.

It should be noted at this juncture that Friedkin never desired *The Exorcist* to appeal solely to the spiritual crowd. If anything, Friedkin desired the finished film to be as accessible to a secular audience as a Roman Catholic one. Original author William Peter Blatty and director Friedkin had a creative disagreement regarding a "mid-exorcism" conversation between Father Karras and Father Merrin, wherein the two reverends debate and puzzle over why the demon Pazazu chose to bedevil a little girl:

> "I was adamant that it be in the film, but Billy refused, saying 'I'm not making a commercial for the Catholic Church,' and he even added, 'And if you shoot it without me, I'll cut it later.' But the scene was hardly a commercial; it's the moment in the film when you realize that everything's really about Karras. It's not

about the little girl. It's about the struggle for Karras's soul. He's the 'exorcist' of the title, not Father Merrin.'"[66]

William Blatty's insistence on incorporating this particular sequence into the movie affirms his own view that *The Exorcist*, although a fundamentally Catholic tale, is also universal; as far as Blatty is concerned, the two are inseparable. The story's religion should not be muted solely for the sake of political correctness. *Evil Carnate* is a Catholic fable about a woman struggling between cosmic forces of good and evil, but her struggles are deliberately masked with secular trappings. Regan's affliction was ultimately diagnosable, in the sense she was possessed by an authentic demon. In contrast, Edith must cope with the more "real-life" terror of brain trauma. As *The Exorcist* was not truly about the degeneration of an innocent girl but the redemption of Father Karras, so *Evil Carnate* is not truly about the disintegration of a woman's mind. It is about Edith's salvation through the "angelic" presence of her dog, the holy fool, Barney the basset hound. Both targets of Satan's influence are finally rescued from oblivion, thus both tales impart optimism, as opposed to stark pessimism.

Another comparison should be drawn between *Seven* and *The Exorcist,* one more subtle but nonetheless all-pervasive in both films; the looming atmosphere of metropolitan nightmare. The nameless city of David Fincher's *Seven* is a character in and of itself, a genuine "Hell" of eternal rain and misery. While the city of *The Exorcist* isn't as abstract or metaphorical (we are firmly planted in Washington, D.C. rather than an unidentified urban zone), the concept of environment as external manifestation of a narrative's spiritual horrors remains identical.

8.2 Victims as Monsters

Among other things, *Evil Carnate* is a story of transformation. Edith Blaine transitions from a shy, introspective woman to a highly extroverted, child-murdering psychopath through the trauma of a head injury. She is a "victim" who becomes the "monster", albeit one that remains tragic and identifiable. Regan MacNeil of *The*

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[66] Baer, William *A Conversation with William Peter Blatty*, excerpted from *The Exorcist: Studies in the Horror Film,* edited by Danel Olson Centipede Press 2011

Exorcist shares Edith's journey into darkness, as does Detective David Mills of *Seven*, each becoming a "monster" who finds itself dominated by forces outside its control. This section of the essay will scrutinize the similar themes of Catholic metamorphosis between Regan and Detective Mills, while also unveiling the spiritual/secular split that defines and separates both.

Let us begin with the basic theme of the corruption of the innocent. This subtext is hardly a recent invention, as anyone even remotely familiar with the Biblical myth of Adam and Eve should know. The "trickster" archetype of the serpent is used to tempt Eve into eating the forbidden apple. Eve in turn tempts Adam into eating the same fruit, eventually resulting in their expulsion from Eden by God. Among God's curses was the introduction of mortality to the human race.

> 19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.[67]

Adam and Eve are ostracized from Eden, and in the process, "original sin" is created; the Catholic doctrine that puts forward each of us born with the hereditary stain brought about by the Biblical pair's transgression against God. In turn, humanity's only means of salvation is through Christ's grace, hence the long-standing ritual of baptizing infants to cleanse the newborn individual of his/her inherited sinfulness. In this sense, each of us are simultaneously brought into the world "innocent" and "tainted", the latter of which can only be cured via Christ's intervention. This dimly echoes another defining Catholic rite, the Eucharist, a similar process of transfiguration detailed earlier in the essay.

Likewise, Regan MacNeil and David Mills are innocent/tainted; Regan, a picture of childhood purity, soon degrades into a monstrous caricature of her former self. Mills is a naïve hothead, his "innocence" implicit in his optimism and idealistic values contrasted against an innately sinful world. Although often short-tempered and foul-mouthed, Mills disagrees with his partner's gloomy assessment of humanity. This

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[67] *The Holy Bible*, Genesis Ch. 3 Verse 22, The British Foreign Bible Society, Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited

comes back to haunt him, as John Doe's devilish manipulation forcibly molds David Mills into Wrath Itself, the final and most devastating sin.

Both Regan and Mills are innately "good" people who are corrupted by exterior forces. By this point, the concept of salvation kicks in, and who is ultimately redeemed (and who is not) tells us precisely what we have to know about the two subgenres. Detective Mills, goaded on by John Doe, becomes Wrath and murders the man who killed his wife; the last we see of Mills is him being driven away in a police car, the expression on his face that of a broken man. Salvation is withheld from Mills by the filmmakers because *Seven* is a secular horror film, and favors the irreversible dissolution of chaos and death.

Contrasting against *Seven*'s ideology is Regan's rescue from Pazazu's defilement in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist.* Father Karras fulfills the Christian ideal of the martyr by taking the demon within himself, and then leaping out of the window to his demise. Although Regan's absolution came about through Karras's sacrifice, we are given the impression that Karras's life had been far from happy prior to his confrontation with Pazazu. Both the novel and film portray Karras a deeply flawed human being. "Whereas Regan-as-devil is powerful, Father Damien as a representative of God is weak and impotent. Not only has he lost his faith, he is thinking of leaving the Church."[68] Karras is lost in a world that seems entirely dominated by Pazazu's cruelty.

When we see Karras in the film, he is often portrayed as a hunched, withdrawn individual. He is a cowed man beaten and battered by a secular reality, but more crucially, his personal faith has been pushed to its breaking point by his mother's rejection. Karras represents an American decade wrought with recrimination, neurosis, and self-doubt. Karras's final fate is a moment of catharsis within an otherwise oppressive film. Karras dies, and like Regan, is subsequently transformed, albeit through a divine process as opposed to a decidedly unholy one:

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[68] Creed, Barbara, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Pg. 37 Ch. 3, ;Routledge 1993

"The conviction that 'life is changed, not taken away' characterizes this attitude towards death. Catholics (and other Christians) face death with a hope centred on the risen and living Christ."[69]

"Life is changed, not taken away." The demon Pazazu intentionally perverts this ideal in the form of Regan in order to decimate Merrin and Karras's faith in God, but ultimately, the positive aspect wins out over the negative, and Regan is freed. Here, the victim-become-monster equation comes into play once again. When Karras liberates Regan of Pazazu, the Other then moves into Karras's body, and for a fraction of a moment, *he* becomes the monster, and briefly threatens the liberated Regan. But then Karras becomes cognizant of his own corruption, and flings himself through a window to his death, thus saving Regan from a gruesome demise.

The case can be argued that Pazazu is the victorious party here, as indirect hints through dialogue and action in Blatty's story suggest *Karras* is the soul Pazazu truly desires, and Karras's suicide ultimately confines the priest to the torments of Hell. (The act of self-destruction is considered one of the most devastating mortal sins in Catholic doctrine.) But this reading still does not refute the innate selflessness of Karras's actions by throwing himself out the window and denying Regan to Pazazu.

The pattern of spiritual metamorphosis in *The Exorcist* is concealed by the lurid, explicit details of a physical metamorphosis, not unlike the ghastly degeneration of Jeff Goldblum's scientist in David Cronenberg's remake of *The Fly* But Regan's *de*generative transformation is overtaken by a *re*generative one, where Father Karras is finally absolved of his sins by a fellow colleague, Father Dyer. Again, the common interpretation of Karras's suicide bringing about his damnation is refuted, as Dyer, himself an ordained priest, forgives and "saves" Karras. Salvation is thus offered to Karras, where it was denied to Detective Mills. Actor Jason Miller once remarked in regards to Karras's character: "You are dealing here with a mythical guilt, a guilt that forces transcendence by some kind of sacrificial act." [70] The concept of 'transcendence' is brought about by the intrusion of the supernatural into the mundane. Without that

[69] O'Collins, Gerald *Catholicism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press 2008
[70] Olson, Daniel *The Exorcist: Studies in the Horror Film, Interview With Jason Miller,* Winogura, Dale

intrusion, the 'real world' is left to its own devices, and, in the case of *Seven*, results in the protagonist's secular-based destruction.

8.3 Environment as Metaphor

The nameless city of *Seven* and the Washington, D.C. seen in *The Exorcist* are thematic kindred, in the sense of their surroundings being an extension of the internal plight of the principal characters. *Seven*'s rotting metropolis is more overt in its presentation; as human values decay, so does the city. But this is not to say Washington is free from Pazazu's influence. In fact, the city is *already* a place of corruption long before Pazazu's arrival, even if its degraded state isn't as plain to see as the one seen in David Fincher's film. Rather, this is an urban zone of spiritual ennui:

> "The city in which the characters live is introduced as an emotional desert: the camera first cuts to Georgetown from the prologue amid desert ruins in Iraq, as sounds of dogs fighting and an evil screeching blend into what is clearly meant to be their modern equivalent, the traffic noise of a contemporary American city."[71]

Being a contemporary American city, Washington is also a distinctly capitalistic one, an inhospitable environment that favors raw materialism over spirituality. This is made evident by Karras's uncle, who states during a visit to one of Washington's poorly maintained public hospitals: "If you wasn't a priest, you'd be a famous psychiatrist on Park Avenue. Your mother, she'd be in a penthouse instead of here."[72]

The uncle's not-so-subtle method of inflicting further guilt upon his nephew isn't dissimilar from Dr. Adler's psychological torture of his son Wilky in Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* (1956), a short novel about a recently unemployed salesman struggling to keep his sanity intact in 1950's era New York. This is a society that favors status over ethics, and Karras's position as a "man of God" only warrants mockery in his uncle's eyes. This being a materialistic society, the populace of Washington in turn becomes a soulless society. It is fitting that psychiatrists prove to be completely impotent at curing Regan's

[71] Olson, Daniel *The Exorcist: Studies in the Horror Film, The Exorcist,* by Cull, Nicholas J.
[72] Blatty, William Peter *The Exorcist*, Warner Bros. 1973

supernatural affliction. This world is just as much to blame for Regan's possession as Pazazu the demon. The metropolis of *Seven* is one of decay; the urban sprawl of *The Exorcist* is one of stagnation. Both cities act as a metaphorical hell for the protagonists, but the potential of escape only exists for *The Exorcist* due to the spiritual presence within its narrative*.*

At this juncture, I should note the theme of a character bedeviled by capitalistic surroundings is also present in my fictional novel *Evil Carnate,* which constitutes the creative aspect of my thesis. Edith Blaine is a woman who has grown to despise money, in addition to those who place its value above everything else in life. As a child growing up during the Great Depression, Edith was exposed to the neurotic craving for money within all humans, personified by her father, who deserted the family due to unspecified financial issues. Of money itself, Edith states:

> "God, I don't want to grow up. The world is made on money, money, money, and I can't stand people who think without money you're nothing. All I want is a basset hound, a basset hound named Barney, and I'd live alone with him out in the woods away from everyone."[73]

If Edith and Karras share any common characteristic, it's the social isolation that has developed from their decision to opt for spirituality over materialism. Their seemingly endless abuse at the hands of a brutishly unsympathetic zeitgeist results in a metamorphosis, a kind of cathartic epiphany, where they become "pure evil"; Edith through her head injury, Karras through demonic possession. But both protagonists are ultimately redeemed before the final blow is struck.

Detective David Mills is a somewhat different beast. Whereas Edith and Karras's environments may have brought about demonic changes, their individual transformations still reach a redemptive conclusion. Detective Mills undergoes his own Catholic transformation due to the combined machinations of John Doe and the decaying urban city, but Mills does not experience any last-minute moment of

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[73] Winfield, Benjamin *Evil Carnate,* g. 35, Exeter University 2014

enlightenment. Rather, he is transmuted into the monster Wrath, and is condemned to remain that way. This is made evident by John Doe's own attitude towards Mills:

> "…Doe observes that he knows that Mills would 'enjoy a time alone with me in a room without windows…it's in those eyes of yours' and as the journey proceeds Mills gets more and more angry, shouting, jabbing his fnger at him, insulting him ('Sit back, you fuckin' freak! Shut your fuckin' mouth!'), in short, corroborating Doe's perception that he has found the right embodiment of Wrath."[74]

It is critical to note that although *Seven* is a metaphorical perception of Catholic tenets, the film is by no means a literal one, unlike *The Exorcist.* Thus, we only meet Mills's cycle of damnation/redemption halfway. The critical difference is the individual outlook of each filmmaker, and how that outlook shapes their respective realities. David Fincher's *Seven* belongs within a strictly atheistic universe, which invariably leads to nihilism. It is this progression from atheism to nihilism that the next section of this thesis aims to uncover.

8.4 Atheism unto Nihilism

Prominent atheist spokesmen, such as Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens, often make a point of how religion has allegedly been detrimental to basic human decency and morality. Yet, it is curious to note how creative works conceived by atheistic authors seem to frequently conclude in a bleak fashion…in some cases, even in a way that can only be described as "satanic", with pure evil ultimately ascending over good. Novels ranging from Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1957) to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) are depictions of fundamentally godless worlds. There is an irony within this. A truly atheistic universe would supposedly gravitate itself towards chaos as opposed to favoring "evil" over "good", and yet negative outcomes are consistently a bygone conclusion in horror films intentionally deprived of a spiritual element.

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[74] Dyer, Richard *Seven: BFI Modern Classics*, Pg. 26 Ch. 3 1999 Palgrave Macmillan

Why should nihilism be an outcome of atheism? Upon first glance, the choice of an atheistic mode of thought hasn't impacted the majority of atheists in any negative fashion; indeed, most would insist they have merely been enlightened. But we are not speaking so much of social interaction, as the creative output of atheistic-minded artists and writers. Creativity is the focus of this section, and how much spirituality (or the lack thereof) influences an artist's mind towards an idealistic or cynical frame.

Perhaps the best contemporary example that can be cited is Soviet Russia. Journalist Peter Hitchens, a former atheist who voluntarily became a Christian again, noted during his stay in Russia how the secularization of the state had left a visible impact on common civility as well as courtesy. While entering the Metro (Moscow's vast underground railway system), Hitchens noted the cynical suspicion of other passengers when he attempted to hold the doors open for them.

> "I came to the conclusion, and nothing has since shifted it, that enormous and intrusive totalitarian state power, especially combined with militant egalitarianism, is an enemy of civility, consideration and even of enlightened self-interest. I also concluded that a high moral standard cannot be reached or maintained unless it is generally accepted and understood by an overwhelming number of people."[75]

Hitchens articulates this point further in his book:

> "Soviet power was, as it was intended to be, the opposite of faith in God. It was faith in the greatness of humanity and in the perfectibility of human society. The atheists cannot honestly disown it."[76]

In the absence of religious faith, nihilism flourishes. Faith itself is a pivotal element that encourages an individual to "defy the odds", as it were. For many, placing one's trust in an empirical world leads to a metaphysical dead end. If reality is the massive boulder in the river, faith is the water that bypasses it. We have seen how faith factors into *The Exorcist* as an alleviating influence, providing a hopeful conclusion where none can normally be found. It could be argued that Pazazu, the demon that desecrates Regan's body, is a product of faith as well, but as demonstrated earlier in

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[75] Hitchens, Peter *The Rage Against God,* Pg. 66 Ch. 5, Continuum Books 2010
[76] Hitchens, Peter *The Rage Against God,* Pg. 121 Ch. 12, Continuum Books 2010

this section, Pazazu is not so much an offspring of faith, as an inevitable outgrowth of the corruptive (and corrupted) urban environment where Regan resides.

Charlie Chaplin, a famous comedian whose early childhood was wrought with poverty and hardship, offered his own two cents on the subject: "I believe that faith is an extension of the mind. It is the key that negates the impossible. To deny faith is to refute oneself and the spirit that generates all our creative forces."[77] It's the word 'impossible' in particular we should note. Faith undermines reality's grip on storytelling, thus allowing for a 'happy ending' where one would seem unlikely. John Doe's evil is victorious in *Seven* exactly because he lives in a secular, faith-deprived universe. In contrast, Regan is ultimately freed from Pazazu's imprisonment, and Father Karras finds the redemption in death he could not in life. The *dramatis personae* of William Peter Blatty's tale exist in a cosmos where faith is an element no less real than fire or water.

8.5 Contextual Demons

John Doe and Pazazu make for an indelible pair of cinematic adversaries. One is a metaphysical creature of supernatural origin, while the other is a calculating villain of an atheistic reality. The key difference between the two is the supernatural factor, and how it complements the presence of optimism within a film's structure. John Doe is a metaphorical monster living in a literal world. Pazazu is a literal monster living in an *unnatural* world. John Doe is victorious in *Seven* because there is no elemental "good" force to defy his ideology. Pazazu is defeated in *The Exorcist* because he is an abstract evil equally opposed by an abstract good. Father Merrin offers his own perspective on the intentions of Pazazu later in the novel:

> "I think the demon's target is not the possessed; it is us…the observers…every person in this house. And I think – I think the point is to make us despair, to reject our own humanity, Damien: to see ourselves as ultimately bestial; as ultimately vile and putrescent; without dignity, ugly, unworthy. And there lies the heart of it, perhaps: in unworthiness. For I think belief in God is not a matter of reason at all;

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[77] Chaplin, Charlie *My Autobiography*, Simon & Schuster 1964

I think it finally is a matter of love; of accepting the possibility that God could love us…"[78]

Pazazu is the chief antagonist within the novel, but in many ways, the film *Seven is* Pazazu himself; or more appropriately, a film where Pazazu's objective of forcing the human race to lose faith is victorious. The anonymous city of *Seven* is rife with every conceivable form of sin and depravity. Director David Fincher and screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker's goal is none too dissimilar from Pazazu's, in the sense that the collective mood of the audience is completely decimated by the time the end credits are rolling. We are nothing *but* unworthy, and therein lies the factor that defines *The Exorcist* as a work of horror-based optimism, and *Seven* a work of horror-based pessimism. The film's personal statement on humanity agrees with Pazazu. *The Exorcist* does not.

John Doe's invincibility within the context of *Seven* (or rather, the invincibility of his personal ideology), is buoyed by his status as a "common man". Where Pazazu is an entirely unnatural beast, John Doe is all *too* natural, although both villains "hide" in their own ways. Pazazu remains concealed throughout the majority of *The Exorcist* within little Regan's body, while John Doe stashes himself away in a "drab, characterless corridor in a drab, characterless apartment block."[79]

John Doe initially appears to be a man of faith himself, as suggested by his adherence to the Christian classification of the seven human vices, in addition to the red-tainted cross found in his lair. However, as played by Kevin Spacey, an actor famous for his often sardonic delivery of dialogue, John Doe's "faith" is communicated to Somerset and Mills with a vaguely sneering detachment. John Doe utilizes the seven deadly sins as his modus operandi and a means to prove a point about Mankind's desensitization to its own depravity, but not once does he exhibit any hope for Mankind's salvation beyond the reality of his surroundings. He is infatuated with the more fatalistic aspects of Catholicism (namely the concept of original sin), but neglects to take into account the more positive underpinnings, as they are incompatible with his personal philosophy.

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[78] Blatty, William Peter, *The Exorcist*, Pg. 345, Part IV, 1971 HarperCollins Publishers
[79] Dyer, Richard *Seven: BFI Modern Classics*, Pg. 41, Ch. 4, 1999 Palgrave Macmillan

The subtext of evil lurking within shadows (whether they are literal or metaphorical shadows) extends to the principal cast of both films. Pazazu and John Doe are creatures of the "interior". Pazazu resides deep inside Regan, while John Doe conceals himself among the faceless masses. When he first appears in *Seven*, Doe is disguised as an anonymous tabloid reporter. We don't realize he's the culprit, and neither does Detective Mills, until it's too late. Pazazu strikes from a similar place of camouflage; in the case of *The Exorcist*, a little girl. The notion of "hidden evil" is nothing new in Roman Catholicism, but it's the way hidden evil is applied in both films that offers each movie its visceral impact.

Conclusions

Optimism and pessimism are dual forces that seem locked in an eternal struggle. Horror remains unique in this regard; never has there been any other genre that encompasses both philosophies, with one effectively acting as camouflage for the other. Even amidst the most blood-spattered of horror films, the underlining notion of life after death, even if it's in the form of a sole survivor who's endured a nightmarish experience, remains consistent. Upon first glance, these films seem to offer only two viable options. What kind of universe would you prefer to live in: One where there's nothing to be found after death except oblivion, or one where an afterlife does indeed exist, albeit at the cost of hateful ghosts bullying and terrorizing you with impunity?

But this is precisely the illusion of extremes. Cases of supernatural horror, such as *The Exorcist* (1971) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) attempt to veil the inevitable optimism that outgrows from a world where the supernatural is a reality by portraying the negative consequences of aforementioned world. The secular horror of *Seven* (1995) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), indicates a subtler existential apprehension of the soul, wherein good can be punished, cruelty rewarded, and nothing awaits in the grave except the rot of worms. Removing spirituality from the horror genre's equation would equal "horror" in its purest, most unmitigated form. Some writers and filmmakers choose to pursue this path to its bitter end, while others, however unknowingly, opt for a metaphysical reality within horror's boundaries to subvert the innate gloom of secular horror.

As I hope to have illustrated via comparisons between *Seven* and *The Exorcist*, horror can only retain its optimistic subtext when filtered through the lens of spiritual horror. The horror of *Seven* is impenetrable and colder than stone; the presence of Catholicism within its narrative meant as sneering irony instead of an active force opposed against the elemental evil witnessed in the story. Filmmakers may occasionally try to subvert this innate optimism by portraying the afterlife as a realm filled with its own uncertainty and apprehension, i.e. Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Kairo* (2001), but this willful subversion is born out of a culture beset by natural disasters and civil war. Ultimately,

any premise that posits the existence of life after death is a hopeful one, in spite of an individual filmmaker's best attempts to undermine it.

Edith Blaine's story is one of darkness and claustrophobia, but with a cathartic finale meant to imply spiritual vindication. Reality can be a trying experience for many of us, but it can also be a nightmarish one for many more. Some find themselves unable to cope with the darkness, and seek self-annihilation, while others attempt to discover their own methods to rise above the abyss. One of those methods is transcendence. Through all her trauma and torment, Edith achieves that transcendence. Through the ultimate pessimism of her brain trauma, we attain the ultimate optimism of life beyond.

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