

Panel 3 – Paratexts and Legacy

Volume 6, Number 1, June 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1101407ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1101407ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Montréal Monstrum Society

ISSN

2561-5629 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

(2023). Panel 3 – Paratexts and Legacy. *Monstrum*, 6(1), 280–301.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1101407ar>

©, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Horror Reverie 2:
An Online Symposium Celebrating 50 Years of *The Exorcist*

TRANSCRIPT

Panel 3 – Paratexts and Legacy

11 March 2023

(duration 57:16)

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

audience, *The Exorcist*, Catholicism, demon, Eileen Dietz, evil, faith, horror film, William Friedkin, Father Karras, *Leap of Faith*, Regan MacNeil, Alexandre O. Philippe, possession, sequels, “Tubular Bells”

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

All right, everyone, the time has come for our next panel on the sequels and sequelizations of *The Exorcist* and everything that came after. I'm Lorna Piatti-Farnell, I'll be chairing the session for you today. We're going to follow the more traditional structure, we will hear all three papers in succession. And then we will leave the Q&A session for the end. We've got three fantastic speakers lined up for this panel. I'm super excited, going to try to curb my enthusiasm does you know me know how excited I get. Ee're really looking forward to hearing them speak so without further ado, let's get started. Our first speaker today is Simon Brown. I'll give a little bit of an introduction for all three speakers. When the time comes. He is a horror scholar and Associate Professor of Film and Television at Kingston University in the UK is published really widely, and recent publications include *Screening Stephen King: Adaptation and the Horror Genre in Film and Television* that was published in 2018. And *Creepshow* in 2019, as part of the Devil's Advocate series. He's currently researching a monograph on British horror author, James Herbert. And his presentation today is entitled *The Exorcist Sequels: Navigating The Exorcist's Legacy across Cinematic Horror*. So Simon, over to you.

Simon Brown

Okay, first things first, share screen. Can everybody see that? Okay? Yes. Good. Okay, so, as I'm sure everybody knows, there are four official sequels to *The Exorcist*. They are in order of release: *The Exorcist 2: The Heretic*, directed by John Boorman in 1977, *The Exorcist III* written and directed by Blatty in 1990, *Exorcist: The Beginning* directed by Renny Harlin in 2004, and *Dominion*, directed by Paul Schrader and released in 2005. For those who haven't seen them, I've looked across the reviews and critical opinions. And, you know, if you're deciding which one to watch, basically they sort of break down like this. The bad one, the good one, the mainstream silly CGI one, and the serious, boring artsy one. And what I want to do here is to briefly, in 10 minutes, raise a series of hopefully interesting observations, which I think show how these films point to the importance and to the challenge of the idea of the legacy of *The Exorcist*. So, the first thing to note about these four films is the fact that each of them to a lesser and to a greater degree exist in different versions. John Boorman's original cut was 117 minutes, and immediately after the film's premiere, he cut it down to 110 minutes, and then cut it later down to 97 minutes. In comparison to the other versions, this is very much Boorman tinkering with the film, rearranging the deck chairs on his cinematic *Titanic*. In contrast, *Exorcist II* exists in two overlapping but very different versions, with Jason Miller unavailable to Blatty because of poor health, Blatty's idea of having the mysterious patient in isolation in the hospital be Father Karras and the Gemini killer was solved basically by pretending that Brad Dourif looked like Jason Miller. And Blatty even shot an opening scene in a morgue, which took place after the end of *The Exorcist*, in which Miller was replaced by Dourif. But when he delivered the final film, the head of Morgan Creek productions demanded it be reshot that an exorcism had to be added, and that Dourif be replaced by Jason Miller since A: Miller's faces Karis was too iconic and B: He brought with him that crucial brand recognition. As a compromise, Blatty shot new scenes with Miller and reshot Dourif's scenes, creating a hybrid creature who was part Gemini killer, Dourif, and part Karras, Jason Miller, which I think works very, very well, and he also involved Nicole Williamson in a rather perfunctory exorcism at the end. Then, you have the case of *Dominion*. Paul Schrader shot the entire film based on a script by William Wisher Jr. that was rewritten by Caleb Carr. Typical for

Schrader, the film was a thoughtful examination of the nature of guilt, and utterly devoid of anything scary. So, Morgan Creek gave the entire project to Renny Harlin plus 40 odd million dollars, to recast, rescript, and do the film entirely again. This to me says a lot about the legacy of *The Exorcist* because all these sequels and their different versions are in a process of negotiation between the original and their own independent identity. What these films show is a branded product, *The Exorcist* franchise, trying to figure out exactly what its brand really is. The original film, for example is a careful negotiation between a serious examination of the nature of good and evil within a specifically Jesuit framework. At the same time, it's also a shocking, intensive special effects laden horror film. And what we see in the sequels is them trying to find their own identity and position themselves somewhere on this spectrum of serious theological musing, and terrifying balls-out horror spectacle. And as Alex said, in the earlier panel, the original is a masterpiece because it's a horror film, not in spite of that, and these films are negotiating that fundamental truth. So, for instance, both *The Heretic* and *Dominion* in very different ways, focus their attention primarily on religious considerations. While the original is about evil infecting Regan, *The Heretic* posits that she is in fact one of a number of people around the world who are positioned by God to be definite forces for good and so can't be repossessed by Pazuzu. *Dominion* on the other hand, deals with guilt, a crisis of faith and the notion of sin, an idea to which Schrader returns over and over again. Stellan Skarsgård's father Merrin is forced during World War II to point out 10 people in his village to be shot by Nazis, and as a result has lost his faith. Working as an archaeologist he uncovers a Christian church in Africa built over a temple to a pagan god. A young crippled boy, an outcast is gradually healed, presumably by force emanating from the church. But in the nice reversal of the original, his healing is the result of his possession. And at the end, he confronts Merrin, and shows him that if he had refused to select these 10 villagers, the entire village would have been shot by the Germans. So Merrin is previously convinced that there is no God because the Nazi commandant says, God is not here today, father, and he's convinced that evil lies in the hearts of men. But by the end he realizes that evil is a force and then good can find it. And he sort of walks off into the distance, like Ethan Edwards in *The Searcher*, a kind of lone warrior out of time. The same debate underscores *Exorcist III*, in

which George C. Scott also believes not in God but in human evil. “I believe in injustice,” he says, “inhumanity and torture and anger and hate. I believe in murder. I believe in pain and cruelty and infidelity.” You have to do it in the George C. Scott voice. As a cop investigating a religiously affiliated serial killer, his detective kingdom and is worn down by the horrors he sees around him every day and he too has lost his faith. In the original version, he simply shoots the Gemini killer saying pray for me, Damien. While in the more hopeful released version, Karras is able to assert himself over the demon enough to give Scott the opportunity to defeat the evil and shoot him. In the director’s version, Kinderman is only able to commit murder and hope for redemption at the end. But in the release version Karras, as he does in the first film, and as the demon does for Merrin, *Dominion* is able to show that good can triumph over evil and that the battle is worth fighting. In all these cases, horror takes a backseat to meditation. Only the beginning really sells itself as a horror film wearing its badge on its sleeve by marshalling as many tropes as horror as Harlin the director can think of. There’s body horror as Brick Top from *Snatch*, face erupts into boils and eventually melts into goo. Evil crows hark back to *The Birds*, a bait and switch over who’s actually possessed draws from the whodunit horrors of *Scream*. A dust storm wanders in from the set of *The Mummy*, and there’s even a *Psycho* shower scene followed by a full-on CGI exorcism at the end. The beginning is constructed as a horror film. Indeed, the beginning hits the heights of absurdity by suggesting that the church Merrin finds is not guarding a pagan temple, but rather is built on the actual spot where Lucifer landed when he fell from heaven, rendering the theological, literal. So, in the sequels, the balance of horror visuals and spiritual debate is largely separated out, whereas in the original, the two are linked.

1:57:05 (Approx. 9 minutes in)

The other key aspect is that unlike *The Exorcist*, these films must negotiate their relationship to the brand, but also to their own place in their own cinematic universes. So, *The Heretic* connects much more strongly to John Boorman’s mid to late 70s, hyperbolic fantasy visuals, and indeed to a period of Richard Burton’s career, where he focused on playing tortured individuals with a tendency to intone to the camera. I’m thinking of *Equus*, and *The Medusa Touch*

here. That's the context of that film. *Dominion*, I've said is a Paul Schrader films through and through and makes much more sense when considered alongside works like *First Reformed* and *Taxi Driver* than *The Exorcist*. While the beginning is inextricably tied to the prevailing trends of mainstream horror in 2004, where there was a reliance on CGI and a clear distinction between us and them, the monster. So films like *Resident Evil Apocalypse*, *The Grudge*, and *Alien vs. Predator*, there's no space for pontificating, or doubt. And so my primary observation is that these films exist in relation not to the original per se, but to the legacy of the original, to its public perception, its legend, and a judge as such by both audiences and by the studios, where in fact, they also circulate within another perhaps richer context, which is their own relationship to author and to genre. This is of course interesting, because it's precisely where the success of the original finds its nexus, in the focal point of Friedkin's auteur obsession, Blatty's theological preoccupation, and the horror genre as it existed in its early incarnation in the early 70s. In the sequels to the preoccupations of Blatty, Boorman, and Schrader, who see *The Exorcist* as an opportunity to explore their own themes, exist in opposition to the film genre status, and the genre expectations of *The Exorcist*'s legacy as horror. But Boorman didn't even like the original and set out to make something more hopeful, and he himself said he failed because it didn't give the audience what they wanted. Blatty's own sequel, *Legion*, was ordered into reshoots, because it had to have an exorcism. *Dominion* was way too dull and serious and was remade in its entirety as an action-horror hybrid. While the beginning does connect to the generic elements of the original, albeit muted by CGI 2004 context, but it doesn't connect to the serious themes of the original. So, to conclude, ultimately, what these films do in the light of the legacy of *The Exorcist*, is pose a very serious question: what is a horror film? They question the very nature of what a horror film is and what it's for. Is it about confronting evil, thinking seriously about what it is? Or is it about showing evil in a very kind of literal form? Schrader's film and even Boorman's flawed extravaganza deal with lofty important ideas of evil and good. Blatty's film is perhaps the most successful in feeling like a horror film and creating a horror mood, even if it's story line is wordy and ponderous, like *Dominion*, and also it's largely a supernatural police procedural. While Harlin's film ticks all the boxes stylistically, but feels featherlite in comparison. Due to its scale, its

intensity, and its reputation, *The Exorcist* is not only a horror film, but an undeniable classic, as Alex said. The sequels represent a snapshot of his shifting genre, popular and niche, serious and silly, authentic and inauthentic. It represents the genre exploring its own post-American nightmare identity. Thank you.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

That was perfectly timed, Simon. Thank you. Thank you for absolutely fascinating presentation. I'm sure it will generate a lot of discussion in a question time. We will now move on to our second speaker for the panel. Stella Marie Gaynor, who's a Senior Lecturer in media culture and communication at Liverpool John Moores University, and is author of *Rethinking Horror in the New Economies of Television*. Her research and publications explore horror, television, and digital media industries, true crime, and podcasting, and she is also—very exciting—cohost of a now the podcast starts which is absolutely, spectacularly made. Her presentation today is titled “The Exorcist TV Series: Demons and Demographics.” Stella, over to you.

2:01:48 (Approx. 14 minutes in)

Stella Marie Gaynor

Thank you. Alright, so my research into horror and TV horror in particular, takes the approach of looking at the industrial, the larger industrial forces and the political economies that work to produce this kind of content. So, as we've already heard, there's been lots of controversy about the original film and free to air channel Fox capitalized on this notoriety, and developed it for serialization on its network. So the 1973 film became a cultural reference point ensured by its controversies and urban legends. So therefore, a television property in the same vein, and with the same name, *The Exorcist* on Fox was a good strategic move at the time in the mid 2010s. So when this series was announced as greenlit the cultural reference points regarding the original film were used in the trade and entertainment press to promote this upcoming series. Now these reference points are terrible pawns. I do apologize, I didn't write them, these TV critics did. So. Hibbard Entertainment Weekly cried, “Here's some head turning news. One of the scariest tales of all time he's been made into a TV series at Fox,” and

even the Fox CEO Gary Newman turned to the bad puns, and he told the potential advertisers that the up fronts in New York that “this show is going to turn heads.” Well done on the bad puns. But it had to be made clear what this serialized *Exorcist* was going to be, or more importantly, what it was not going to be. It was not going to be a remake. Fox pushed really hard with the phrase “modern reinvention,” after very early plans to retell the original story had been met with outrage from the intended series creator Jeremy Slater. Slater told variety that when Fox approached him regarding *The Exorcist*, being retold for television, he said, “I don't want to do that, and you shouldn't either. That sounds terrible. The idea of a remake is suicide. You're never going to tell the story better, you're only going to tell it longer.” Alfonso Herrera who plays his father Tomas in the series was also well aware of the perceived risk of daring to develop such a sacred horror artifact. Speaking to Deadline, Herrera said that the 1973 film sorry, was the Holy Grail of horror, and that developing it for TV was a huge responsibility. *The Exorcist* TV series, then was not to be a remake, it was not to be a reboot, it was to be an addition to the canon of *The Exorcist*. And this is made clear with the big reveal of season one. So, spoilers sorry. In episode 5, *Through my Most Grievous Faults*, Gina Davis's character, Angela Rance, reveals that she is in fact Regan, all grown up and facing once again, a demon possession this time as it inhabits one of her daughters. So this confirms to us then that this series is a direct follow on from the 1973 film and not really paying attention to any of the other sequels that Simon was just talking about. So as the series was not harming the film, critics declared *The Exorcist* on Fox as safe for the film fans. *The Exorcist* for TV had a lot of expectations to live up to give them the almost mythic status of the 1973 film. When the series premiered on Fox in 2016, on the whole internet with a positive reaction in the trade press, and critics generally agree that it has the potential to live up to the legacy. We've such a reputation to uphold, though, *The Exorcist* TV show had to walk a very thin line between being clearly linked to the 1972 film and being canon, but also that being his own text that's developed for and to work on television. So there are many clear links and markers and motifs throughout the series that reminders of the film and reminders that we are definitely in Friedkin's universe. In episode one, *And Let my Cry Come Unto Thee*, Father Marcus prepares to go and help with the Rance family, he does a little bit of research and we see

newspaper clippings that cover the events in Georgetown in the 70s, and the MacNeil family and its appointed moved by their series creator Jeremy Slater. So he told variety that it was important to let everyone know that this is a continuation of an existing story and not intended to replace it. So again, this constant hammering home that this is not a remake, you can all calm down, we're not remaking the original film. So speaking about remakes, I need to point to Dr. Laura Mee's work on remakes, where fans and critics have this really strong power to decide what is culturally devalued, and *The Exorcist* series could have very easily been shunned entirely by simply just even daring to go near this sacred classic. So with *The Exorcist* property, the 1973 film holds such a position in horror. It's controversial, it's iconic, and for some, perhaps untouchable, and there was a real risk that fans and critics would be, as Laura Mee says, entirely intolerant to further sequels, particularly after *Exorcist III*. However, *The Exorcist* pilot firmly positions itself as canon, notably with the title card, and the strangely reassuring and comforting use of Tubular Bells. As the pilot comes to a close, we know we're in the same universe as the 1973 film when Casey Rance reveals to be possessed and Tomas is walking away to the tune of Tubular Bells. Together with the parallel montage of Farther Marcus as you can see here, readying his exorcism kit, both men are shocked with an unstable sort of documentary feeling this moment, and it gives the sequence a sense of urgency and importantly for television, a sense of realness. Speaking Variety again, series creator Jeremy Slater said that they didn't intend to use Tubular Bells, it wasn't really on the cards for them when they were developing the series, but Fox really pushed for it, and the team tried it over the end of the pilot, and then in the sequence just described, and they realized that it worked. However, we're only treated to 43 seconds of Tubular Bells due to the expense of the license, and so the iconic score is used sparingly throughout the series. In fact, after this sequence in episode one, we don't hear Tubular Bells again until the closing moments of the first episode of season two, where the slow zoom in on Andy's house, where it appears the second series central possession, will take place.

So there's plenty of homages to the 1973 film throughout both seasons, most notable in season one. Chris MacNeil again she you know, she turns up, she rocks up at the Rance family home and as she emerges from the taxi, she stands

outside the house in the hat and the long coat, as you can see on the image on the right, and she's caught in the spotlight from the window above. Clearly in a direct nod to the film poster. Later when Chris MacNeil meets her death, it's just as Burke met his death in the film, and Angela/Regan, the grownup version, she snaps him with his neck and leaves it to fall down the stairs, and Chris lays at the bottom of the stairs with a head turn backwards. So I've done lots of work on TV horror, and how it's developed its visuals, its violence, its gore, you know, getting more gory, more violent as the years have gone on. But despite *The Exorcist* arriving on Fox at the height of the TV horror surge in the 2010s, the show didn't really lean into delivering all of this gory violence every week. Like other TV shows, at the time, were just all about the violence and the gore and this kind of arms race of violence on TV at the time, and neither did it succumb to their traditions of network television drama doing an off the week structure. So for instance, in *Hannibal*, there was a murder tableau of the week. In *The Exorcist* TV show, they didn't do that. Instead, the series makes use of the narrative space afforded by two seasons with 10 episodes each and explores the powers of the demons and the space that they inhabit, in the possessed minds of those unfortunate to be dealing with them. So this occurs in a hallucinogenic visions and almost dreamlike sequences throughout the series that possess the transport into another plane of reality. And father Tomas pictured here he is blessed, or cursed because it really doesn't look like fun, with the ability to join the possessed in the disturbing demonic world. So young Casey is the focus of the demon in season one, and we switch between the real world and the world constructed by the demon in her mind. While in reality, she has been strapped to a bed in a psych ward, in her head, she's coming down to breakfast in her family home, and she watches her mother break eggs into a bowl, eggs that contain dead, bloodied baby birds. Later, Father Tomas engages with the demons in Casey's possessed dreamscape and encounters taunts from the demons as it shows Tomas, his own mother, who teases Tomas telling him that he was unwanted. And as the camera pans around the cruel mother, we see the back of her head blown off from a self-inflicted gunshot. So these examples show that the detailed gory shots expected of contemporary TV horror are there, and of course, echo back to the bloody, harrowing, visceral shocks of the 1973 film. But when these moments appear, the camera does not linger on them.

The glimpses of gore are fleeting and the TV series. Now this might appear as part of the limitations of being on network. But in *The Exorcist* TV series, the flashes of bloody wounds or monstrous visions burst out of the rest of the atmospheric texture in really sharp jolts. So because this series is not a bloodbath, when these images do appear, they do so with a startling flourish. Series creator Slater said that he wanted to be careful with these scare scenes and that the series would not be *Waterworld*, horror, and cats jumping out of closets because this would be as you said, numbing for the audience. So Fox scheduled the access for 9pm on Friday nights and the pilot delivered 2.9 million. For a Friday night, that's okay for the relatively low bar set for Friday night figures. With each episode however, the numbers steadily dropped. questions were asked as to why would you put the show on at nine o'clock on a Friday, a slot that for other channels and other shows has been regarded as quite the death knell, Fox CEO Gary Newman said they hoped to tap into a movie going crowd who didn't want to go to the movies. But the season two finale was down 33% from the finale of season one. So despite the warm reviews and the notoriety around the property, the series, I don't think, ever really got the traction that it really definitely deserved. My explanation for this would be with Fox as the network pitch to a younger demographic, *The Exorcist* with all of its baggage, the younger edgier branding of Fox, I think might sort of deterred legions of potential *Exorcist* viewers, who themselves were old enough perhaps to remember the 1973 film when it was part of the national conversation. So in short, the fact that it was on Fox might have been a little bit off-putting. The series was canceled after two seasons, but larger forces were at work that led to the axing of the show. It wasn't just the low ratings. Journalists later knew that the writing was on the wall for *The Exorcist* when Disney came in and acquired 21st Century Fox. Speaking to Deadline about possible season three of *The Exorcist*, he was unsure if the merger meant good things for the show or bad. So *The Exorcist*, is not really on brand for Disney, Fox CEOs Dana Walden and Gary Newman were busy prepping this new Fox, which after the Disney merger was built on a roster of broad screen procedurals and multicam sitcoms. So this prep intimacy saw a wave of cancellations, which included *the Exorcist*, the final episodes of season two saw Father Bennett fully integrated with the demon and had gone completely wild by this point, and the story into

an all-out war between Father Marcus, Father Tomas, and a highly corrupt Catholic Church. The end of season two has an incredibly dark ending, in which Father Marcus shoots that season's good guy hero in the head. And that good guy hero was a beautifully warm and loving character, and this priest has just shot him in the face, not really fitting with Disney. So where *The Exorcist* TV series was heading was some way outside the now Disney-owned TV network. So sadly, *The Exorcist* was canceled. And like other *Exorcist* properties, it's left to become the stuff of legend. Thank you. And if you want more about *The Exorcist*, and TV horror, read my book!

2:14:18 (Approx. 26 minutes in)

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

Looking forward to doing that, Stella! Oh, absolutely. Fantastic. Thank you for a stimulating paper. And we will now move on to our third and final presenter for this panel. Michael Lee is a professor of musicology at the University of Oklahoma. His most recent book *Music and the Horror Films of Val Lewton* with Edinburgh University Press. He is a lifelong horror fan and researcher on horror film music. He's also founding editor of *Horror Studies and Interdisciplinary Journal*, which I'm sure we all know. And Mike, I'm just going to hand over to you to fully introduce your paper and take it away. Thank you.

Michael Lee

Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to get to share some thoughts on the music in this film, since there is very little of it. And that makes this a sort of surprising topic. The reason there is a little of it is complicated and I'll get into, but it nevertheless managed to sell a considerable number of soundtrack albums. In fact, it was among horror films, the best-selling out soundtrack album, and to the best of my knowledge still is. The reason for this as the effectiveness of the choices that were made, and I'm going to focus at the end of my talk primarily on the choice, Tubular Bells. But first, just a little bit about the music, because quite a lot of it was planned. Originally, film composer Bernard Herrmann was contacted by Friedkin to discuss the possibility of his supplying the score. He watched the film, declared it "shit" according to Friedkin, and an acrimonious exchange followed, which ended in no collaboration. I imagine that there's

another side of the story, but I didn't delve into it. Suffice to say that Hermann used to working under the studio system, but as an independent and prestigious composer was ill-suited to the sort of new Hollywood vision in which a protean young director had a vision and he expected to be listened to. Herman was not always a good listener. Next, Lalo Schifrin a very distinguished composer was contracted to write a score for the film, and he did so. The entire film exists, and Warner Brothers has released it on CD. This score also was heard by audiences in a pre-release trailer that did not run very many times because, according to legend, it nauseated audiences. Lalo Schifrin was disappointed when the entire score was rejected, film music historians love to view this as second only to Alex North's is rejected score for *2001* in that kind of world of holy grail scores that we don't get to hear with their films. Friedkin chose after throwing Lalo Schifrin's reels of music outside the window, much like poor Father Karras must throw himself outside the window. It was the decision that a temp track would be used. For the temp track, Friedkin selected primarily avantgarde music, mostly by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki. Some of it can still be heard in the film. For example, the first time you'll hear some Penderecki is when Max von Sydow's character finds the small demonic figurine in Iraq. You can hear just a few seconds of Penderecki at that point. Why so few seconds when many, many minutes of music had been rerecorded by an orchestra contracted by Warner Brothers? The reason for this is that the temp track itself got rejected. Friedkin felt there was simply too much music and that it was competing with the dialogue but worse with the beautifully imagined and realized sound effects created for the film. As most of the music was cut in the name partly of realism, but partly of competing with the rest of the sound of the sound world of the film, I turn now to some of the music that didn't make it into the film. First David Borden, a very early life synthesizer performance practitioner was contracted by Friedkin and he produced music for the film, three minutes of which can actually be heard mostly as back strike ground music for taxi rides taken by Chris MacNeil. The part of the music that everybody remembers and that I'll focus on now is *Tubular Bells*. Prog rock specialist Mike Oldfield's solo album in which he plays all the instruments and compose the two tracks, each one filling in the entire side of an LP. That album, the first release by Virgin Records, and maybe you could say the foundation upon which

the entire Virgin empire was built, was already available and had been picked up at a record store by the sound department to look for what Friedkin hoped to be a lullaby.

Why a lullaby? There are no infants in this film. And here's where I start to get to my analysis of *Tubular Bells* and it's placed within *The Exorcist*. Regan enjoys a kind of liminal status between childhood and adolescence at age 12. We see her for example, frequently tucked into bed and kissed goodnight by her doting mother, activities that seem a little unusual to still be unfolding at the age of 12. But we also find Regan later proposing a love interest for her mother. And so showing a kind of precocious sense of human relations and human sexuality. That sense of Regan, though as childlike is crucial to Friedkin's choice of music. He wants a lullaby because part of *The Exorcist's* wonder is that it's a film about childhood corrupted. And now I want to turn my attention briefly to prog rock. Prog rock is defined, I feel by primarily two important elements. One is the use of asymmetrical meters. Most music in the Western world is in some subdivision of two, we call this duple meter, or three, triple meter. But in the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, a topic very much relevant to this film, only triple meter was allowed until late in the 14th, or perhaps even the 15th century, would you find the Catholic Church embracing the idea that the profane duple meter could also be used in churches. So when you start to introduce twos adjacent to threes, you are literally taking music into the metric world of a crisis in the Catholic Church in which a profane world starts to find its way into the sacred world of religious music. I'll come back to that duple and triple division in just a moment. I want to say something also about timbre. Prog rock is also I think definitionally willing to explore the timbral possibilities outside of the traditional rock band, the electric guitar, bass, keyboards, possibly synthesizers, certainly drums, to bring in other sorts of timbres into that world. In the case of *Tubular Bells*, we hear the tinkling sounds of many different sorts of bells that remind me very much of the sound world of childhood in the early 1970s. Specifically, as embodied in the toys produced by Fisher Price for small children to play with. The Fisher Price sound world is full of tinkling timbres and small repetitious returns. I can't help but feel that in a certain sense, *Tubular Bells* provides this repetition of world of faint tinkling bells, very much familiar to the sound world

of every parent as their child plays. Of course, with play also comes danger of injuries and these sorts of things. And so Fisher Price has to create these tools of children with much care. That timbral world allows us to start to consider ways in which this music fits the theme of childhood corrupted. For example, the first time we hear the music in the film itself, is as Chris MacNeil is returning home after working on the film within the film. As she walks, she passes a group of trick-or-treating children, children literally transformed their faces by masks into the monstrous and the supernatural. And that is the only time within the film proper that we're hearing Tubular Bells. The other time is, of course during the final credits. Let's get back now to twos and threes. If the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages believed that three was sacred and two was profane, the fascinating thing about choosing prog rock is you're going to find a lot of threes adjacent to a lot of twos. Let's listen just briefly to the tune as it's heard at the beginning of the film of Tubular Bells. Let me share my screen just briefly, but we'll listen to a few seconds of it.

2:23:57 (Approx. 36 minutes in)

So I'll stop my sharing now and just say, do you notice the 121212312121231212123. So we have a unit of seven, followed by a unit of seven, followed by a unit of nine, two plus two plus two plus three. That's the asymmetrical meter that Oldfield uses in Tubular Bells at the beginning, it'll change later. And eventually it will also have a superposition of five, two and then three in the piano, creating a kind of chaotic 23 against 25 sequence. They'll take the entire side of an album to play through. We never get that far in *The Exorcist*, but what we do get is this collision of profane twos and sacred threes, adding up to the number 23. In the temp track, there is music by George Crumb, American avantgarde composer from his piece called *The Black Angels*. It presents a collision of good and evil in the context of the Vietnam War. And it is full of numerology, the number of 23 is the number chosen by George Crumb. George Crum uses 23 Is the paradigmatic number of evil. Why? Because the number two and the number three, form a ratio of 0.666. And now we see how there's a real magic to this choice of juxtaposing twos and threes. When the piano comes in in Tubular Bells, it's exclusively playing a two immediately followed by a 3, 666 over and over and over again. Now, I don't

think any of this was meant to be heard by the original audience, and I'm not positive it was heard by Friedkin. But I do believe when great art is made, great accidents happen. And I think *Tubular Bells* is more than just a great accident. It's a well-chosen lullaby. It's also a very well-chosen piece for conjuring the numerology of medieval Catholicism, and its fascination also with the profane. Thanks so much for listening.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

Thank you so much, Mike, for an absolutely fascinating paper, I wanted to hear more, much, much, much more. Hopefully, we'll get to address it a little bit. And now we're going to open the floor for questions. So if you have any, please send them to me as a direct message and I will read them out to our presenters. In the meantime, we already have a question. I also have a couple of questions on my own, but give you guys a chance. First. We do have a question from Kristopher, for Simon. And it says that this is a thought that comes out of thinking about the parallels between *Exorcist III* and the original and the kind of charming, almost parodic elements of the detective narrative in the original. So here's the question from Kris: In terms of negotiating genre, there are ways also that the original film resists certain narrative conventions that the sequels either tried to pick up or entirely abandon. Do you have any other thoughts this?

Simon Brown

That's a really good question. I'm tempted to say who cares, can we listen to Michael for another 10 minutes? The interesting thing about the *The Exorcist III* detective narrative, I think is, and this doesn't get picked up as much as it should, is that of course it's coming in this kind of cluster. And following on from this will be *The Silence of the Lambs*, which gets sort of picked up as this kind of granddaddy of this merging of horror and police procedural that that will get, you know, become so very, very prevalent. And rewatching, *The Exorcist III*, the Blatty original version of *Legion*, as it's called, which is an incredibly ponderously slow film, in many, many ways. I think. I think one of the things it does really interestingly is it takes this rather perfunctory, delightfully sort of bumbling kind of character from the original film played by Lee J. Cobb, and turn him into this sort of incredibly tortured figure. And if you watch the two films back to the

back, as I did, you know, I watched all the sequels very close together, I did it so you don't have to do. What leaps out at you is the transformation of the kingdom and character. He's completely different. There's flashes of Lee J. Cobb in there, but the character has been totally rewritten. And I am still working my way through this. But it seems to me to be very emblematic. And this is the underpinning of what I'm trying to say, in a shift in the genre that's kind of starting to happen around that that sort of time. Did that answer the question or was that woeful?

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

You get a thumbs up from Kristopher, leaving satisfied with the answer, and we can move on. Thank you for that. Simon. We now have a question for Mike from Steve. Steve Choe says: Wonderful talk, thank you. I wonder what your thoughts are on how the intro to Tubular Bells has become so emblematic as it is heard very briefly and only once in the narrative.

Michael Lee

One of the things that music does is it speaks to us at a nonverbal level, and it becomes sort of like a trademark in that regard. Trademarks sometimes have verbiage within them but sometimes they're just a symbol. And symbols can be very powerful mnemonics and they can capture imaginations. And so what I would say is that, just as the, you know, the shark motive and jaws becomes quickly emblematic, and you can't hear but two seconds of music without being transported into that world, or Harry Potter's magical theme by John Williams, which immediately transports you into the world of magic. I can't help but think the Tubular Bells is effective music, and it becomes the sort of a trademark. And I think Stella's point about the television program is really helpful to my thinking as well, that Fox may have been doing more than just, you know, trying to brand their show, they may have also accidentally lent it a little more of a demonic flair. I think it's I think it's because it's a nonverbal branding thing. But that's just one guy's opinion.

2:30:57 (Approx. 42 minutes in)

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

Thank you, Mike. We do have further questions in the chat. But I wonder if before we I address that, I might ask Stella a question as well. I'm gonna get in there as the Chair and be cheeky. And just for rank. Stella, you were talking about this television sequence that I haven't yet seen and I realized I'd been missing out! Because during your presentation, I could keep going oh, that's really interesting. That's really cool. So we'll go back to it. And you were talking about that moment when, you know, the daughter is actually tied up in a psych ward and instead in her head, she's living this sort of demonic fantasy, and the priest enters that fantasy and visits that world. That made me think a little bit about the contrast between the religious and the spiritual, that, Amy was talking about in our paper earlier in the day, and I wonder if perhaps, you could tell us a little bit more if there is a focus on that friction as well, like in the TV adaptation too? Or if that's something that perhaps only comes in as a glimpse, and it's not really focused on as much as it wasn't the original.

Stella Marie Gaynor

That sequence that I mentioned, sort of roughly in the story, grown-up Regan, when she figures out something's wrong with her daughter, she goes to see a priest and says, "Can you help me? I think my daughter is possessed." And the priest is saying, "Well, is it depression?" She's like, "No, I know, depression. And I also know fucking demons, you know, so please, please come." And then there's a nice switch where it's the other daughter that's possessed, and she's seeing her daughter be a moody teenager, she thinks she's possessed, but it turns out to be the other daughter, who's much more angelic. She's the good one, she's always doing homework, she's always coming home on time, and then suddenly, she's possessed. And when she she's not getting any help from the Church for a while, so they do have to go down the route of talking to the doctors and see if this is a mental illness problem. So they take it to various doctors and she's in a psych ward, and she's being wheeled around on wheelchairs and strapped to beds while she's thrashing around and doing all that kind of stuff. And it intercuts all the time by placing was in this demonic dreamscape to see what Casey Rance is going through. And eventually it gets to the point where Angela, or grown up Regan MacNeil, she decides, I want no more to do with this medicalization of trying to fix my daughter. And essentially,

she sort of kidnaps her own daughter out of the hospital, they sneak her out, because she starts to talk a little bit about her own experiences of being prodded and poked by the doctors back in 1973, and she wants to get a daughter out of that. She takes it upon herself to say, we need to do this through the church, through the police, through an exorcism. And yeah, she pulls a daughter out of that particular horrific situation, to just go and deal with the demons and the spirits in there, and the priests and the crucifixes and, and all the stuff that we love.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

Much less horrific, obviously. How very interesting, thank you, Stella. We have one more question for Simon from Mario: Could you talk about the different versions of the first film, two that were released in 1999 and 2000, as the version the author Blatty prefers?

Simon Brown

Yes, I spotted that one. So that was nice to actually get a chance to think about and prepare an answer. Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? Because there's lots of stuff in the version you've never seen. There's more stuff with the doctors, there's the spider walk, etc, etc. But I think rewatching the documentaries you know, the scene that Blatty talks about as being the scene that made him and Friedkin fall out is that quiet moment of reflection between Karras and Merrin on the stairs, where Karras asks, "Why this girl?" And Merrin sort of says, "I think it's because it's there to make us despair." And that question from Mario really made me think about that. I think this notion of despair is really interesting, and the idea of being made to despair and resisting the notion of despair, is a thread that then feeds very much through the sequels. And I'm thinking particularly about *Dominion*, which I kind of made fun of, and it's not entertaining, but it's very interesting. And it's a film about the idea of overcoming despair, the idea of learning that, no, we don't have to just lay back and take it, we can fight back, and there is a way of fighting and there is a way of winning. Even if you can't win, the fight becomes everything. And there's something about that crucial scene in the original film that renegotiates some of your feeling about what comes before and what comes after. And I think that's a very, very important

thread that then lends its way through. It's there in *The Heretic*, because that is a film about the absence of despair in a way. Ironically, for a film that's quite despairing to watch. It's kind of hopeful, I mean, at the end, Richard Burton's character and Linda Blair's character go off together, at least in the original version. And the ending is fundamentally hopeful. So yeah, I think that reinserted scene, that quiet dialogue moment is far more important than all of the other stuff that gets reinserted, and is the crucial part of this sort of negotiation of the legacy across this spectrum of theology to horror. Hopefully, that's a good answer the question.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

Very interesting. Thank you, Simon. I do we do have a little, a little bit a little bit more time. Just I think we can squeeze in one more question. And I wonder if I could ask Mike about something you said at the beginning, the fact that there was this spectacular and very lengthy sound score recorded for the film, and then, you know, it was believed to be to overpowering and then put to one side. And I was surprised to hear that, because so many other films, within and outside of the horror genre from that era, from especially the early 70s and then later a decade later in the early 80s, made the virtue of very overbearing and overpowering sound scores, that's what they became known for. So what was what was the thing, like the that search for realism and making it feel very emotional, that, you know, sometimes music creates a little bit of distance. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about that about what it was that made them walk away from a fully composed and recorded sound score?

Michael Lee

So what I know mostly comes to me, just for those of you want to read it for yourself, from George Parks essay, in the journal *Film Score*. And if you want to read a really nice, I think, terrific, interpretive analysis that really focuses on the use of the song *Rambling Man* in the film, I recommend the work of Claire Sisco King, and her essay "Ramblin' Men and Piano Men." Both of these sources tell me that Friedkin's objection to the, well, Hermann he just objected to interpersonally and no music was composed, but the Lalo Schifrin, kept saying to Schifrin, "less, less, less! I want chamber music. I want it to coexist with the

sound effects and the dialogue. And I don't want to bury them.” And so Shifffrin just went and turned down a dial for the master sound, reducing the sound and said, “There, now it's chamber music,” but Friedkin said “No, all these brasses, all this percussion, people are going to want to hear it. And it just it's just noise. It's not adding anything that the story.” Eventually Friedkin claimed that his rejection of music was built on realism, his desire to create a realistic movie. I personally want to say, when you have a dream sequence and the main character is a movie star and a Catholic priest of faith that doesn't feel like you know, *The Bicycle Thieves* to me. But in any event, it is at least a more realistic film. And so as a result, he just he just did not want music interpreting the action. He wanted the cold light of day and the audience interpreting the action. Then, you know, John Carpenter's *Halloween*, that score which Carpenter of course created himself has the same prog rock asymmetric rhythms now only on the piano. I haven't done any numerological analysis, I don't have anything to add there. But I will say that, that there of course, it's much louder, much brighter, and that's a film that's deeply manipulative in terms of creating jump scares and these sorts of things, which *The Exorcist* is largely not. The main jump scare is in the attic, and it's just poor old Carl, and there's nothing really to it. And so, as a result, I feel like *Halloween* is influenced musically, but it heaps music on because in the end, it's a film less invested in realism than *The Exorcist*. I love both, don't get me wrong. I'm just saying that that's why I think the music had to be jettisoned over the course of Friedkin's evolving thinking about reality and the film. Did I answer your question?

2:41:23 (Approx. 52 minutes in)

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

You absolutely did, thank you.

Simon Brown

Can I just jump in for a second? Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt but I just found this out today, so this was fascinating to me. I did not realize that Peter Gabriel left Genesis during The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway tour, partly because he was invited to Hollywood by William Friedkin, and this is the quote from Gabriel, “to help freaking develop a new Hollywood.”

Lorna Piatti-Farnell

That's fascinating! I feel that there's a paper in there somewhere, Simon. Sounds like interesting information and to be elaborated upon. All right, do we have any other questions for our speakers? If we don't I think we have about a five-minute break now. And then we will come back for the closing remarks with Kristopher.

Kristopher Woofter

Yeah, I think I can just do them now. Thank you everybody for coming today, it's a pleasure to be able to do this sort of work and reach out to so many people in all the different time zones and I'd just like to close by thanking our wonderful speakers. It was super fascinating hearing you talk and hearing this film being featured on its 50th birthday. And I'd like to also thank the the co-organizers, Stacy, Lorna, Mark and Gary, as well as Alanna Thain and Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare for being also part of this sponsorship here with the CORÉRISC Montreal Monstrum Society Moving Image Research Lab, and the FRQSC who gave us our funding. And once again, I'll just mention this symposium will be published in *Monstrum* in June online, the videos and with a framing introduction and transcripts for increased accessibility. I am putting a link there to the journal for future reference. Also, you can sign up for updates on future events on the Eventbrite page or on the Monstrum Society website, which is also where the journal is. We're creating a mailing list so if you want updates on future events or the journal or Montreal Monstrum Society lectures, there are two coming up one in April and one in May, the one in April is by Marcus Prasad, who was our wonderful tech person today. And also I just wanted to mention, last thing, if you haven't already, check out Steve Choe's book on Friedkin [*The Films of William Friedkin*]; it's with the ReFocus series [Edinburgh University Press]. I'm gonna put a link to that in here too. It's coming out in in a very affordable paperback sometime this year, so please check that out as well, it's a great book. And I think that's it for us! Thank you so much, everyone.

Horror Reverie

<https://www.monstrum-society.ca/horror-reverie-symposia.html>

- 2023 -

MONSTRUM is Published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society.
Copyright and intellectual property rights are held by the individual author(s).



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).