



The Haunting of Jesus: Reading Mark through the Gothic Mode¹

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ABSTRACT

Spirits and the associated messianic secret play a central role in the Gospel of Mark. In this article I present a Gothic reading of the gospel. In the beginning of Mark, Jesus is driven by a spirit into the wilderness. In this Gothic, liminal space—filled with beasts, demons, and angels—he battles and overcomes the forces of darkness. Yet evil powers continue to make their presence felt in the rest of the narrative. Gothic literary criticism provides a fruitful domain in which to explore the way the spirits haunt Jesus. Utilising the concept of *hauntology*, I examine the interplay between Jesus and those that haunt him: the demons and his messianic secret. Gothic theory and hauntology elucidate the dark side to the good news Jesus preaches, demonstrating how Jesus and his good news haunt his followers and Mark himself.

KEYWORDS

Gothic, Hauntology, Insanity, Mark (Gospel), Messianic Secret, Spirits

The Gospel of Mark contains a number of encounters between Jesus and spirits, from the spirit that drives him into the desert (Mark 1:10–12), to unclean spirits that Jesus drives out (Mark 1:23–27; 5:1–13; 7:24–30), from spirits that fall to the ground and shout when they see Jesus (Mark 3:11), to ones that mute their hosts (Mark 9:17–29). Additionally, the spirits are often associated with the so-called Messianic Secret (e.g. Mark 1:25, 24; 3:11–12). From the point-of-view of contemporary literature, these themes—both spirits *and* secrets—resonate strongly with those often found in Gothic literature. Consider, for example, Jerrold Hogle’s description of a Gothic narrative in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*:

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a Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space [...] Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise [...] These hauntings can take many forms, but they frequently assume the features of ghosts, specters, or monsters (mixing features from different realms of being, often life and death) that rise from within the antiquated space, or sometimes invade it from alien realms, to manifest unresolved crimes or conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view.²

The similarities between Mark and a Gothic tale—the role of space, the hidden secrets, the hauntings, the spirits—will allow us to explore a darker side of the gospel. Thus, in this article I will present a Gothic reading of the gospel, focussing on the role of the spirits and the messianic secret. My Gothic reading of Mark will examine three interrelated aspects of Jesus’s haunting: the spirits themselves, the madness associated with the spirits, and Jesus’s role as haunter of his followers. Before examining the Gothic, discussing my methodology in more detail, and giving an overview of the argument of this article, a short examination of the first narrative in Mark will set the stage for our Gothic reading.

The Gospel of Mark begins in the wilderness. Mark introduces the audience to John the Baptist, who is drawing crowds to the wilderness for a ritual of forgiveness (Mark 1:1–7). John baptises many people, plunging them in the waters of Jordan, all the while predicting that someone much greater will plunge them in a holy spirit (Mark 1:8). At this moment Jesus appears on the scene, implying that he must be that predicted person. As John baptises Jesus in the Jordan, Jesus experiences something strange and surreal. He sees the heavens split and an unidentified spirit descending. A voice cries out ‘You are my beloved son, I am pleased with you’ (Mark 1:9–11).³

These events raise several questions. John prophesied a successor who would baptise people in a holy spirit but Jesus has not done this—is he the person John predicted? If so, why was *he* baptised in the spirit and not the crowd? Jesus sees the spirit descending, does the crowd see it too? Is he the only one who hears the voice, or does the crowd hear the voice? The narrative sets itself up as ambiguous.⁴ When ‘immediately

² Jerrold E. Hogle, “Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2, doi:[10.1017/CCOL0521791243.001](https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521791243.001).

³ Translations of Mark have been taken from the NRSV with minor editorial changes.

⁴ In fact, George Aichele argues that the Gospel of Mark was ambiguous from the very first sentence, where the book is called ‘the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.’ The genitive is ambiguous—is the gospel about Jesus Christ or presented by him? As is the beginning—is Mark 1 the beginning of the Gospel, or is the entire book just the beginning? *The Phantom Messiah: Postmodern Fantasy and the Gospel of Mark* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 86–91.



the spirit drives (*ekballō*)⁵ him out into the wilderness' (Mark 1:12), the ambiguity of the narrative is further strengthened. Now the nature of this spirit is added to the mix, if it is driving out Jesus can it be good? The spirit's power is not ambiguous: Jesus is exorcised by this spirit—while usually he would be the one doing the exorcising—and he is forced to leave, driven into another deserted place. He goes further into the wilderness, driven by a spirit into the preferred haunt of spirits (cf. Isaiah 13:21–22).⁶ Mark devotes but one sentence to Jesus's time in that place. 'And he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tested by Satan, and he was with beasts and the angels were serving' (Mark 1:13). For forty days Jesus is forced to remain in this deserted place. There Satan tests him, while he lives with or fights off beasts⁷ and is served by the angels. Mark still makes no attempt to solve any ambiguity: the nature and outcome of the testing is not described; the nature of the spirit that exorcised Jesus is not given; the identity of Jesus remains unclear. Thus, the opening of Mark sets the tone for an ambiguous narrative.⁸ Returning to Hogle's 'Gothic Tale,' we can see how the stage is set for a Gothic story. The narrative begins in the wilderness and Jesus proceeds to an even more deserted place—later on in Mark Jesus will return to the wilderness frequently as well as deserted mountains—these are typically Gothic locations.⁹ As I will argue, deriving from this place is the Messianic Secret

⁵ Most English translations choose to translate *ekballō*, in this verse, as 'drove to,' 'sent to,' or 'impelled.' The usual demonic context of this verb would not have been lost on the audience. Of Mark's eighteen uses of *ekballō*, twelve are explicitly related to demons and unclean spirits, and a case can be made that most of the other six are similarly related to unclean spirits.

⁶ See Leal for a recent discussion of the association of demons with the wilderness; "Negativity towards Wilderness in the Biblical Record," *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature & the Environment* 10 (2005): 364–81, doi:[10.1558/ecot.2005.10.3.364](https://doi.org/10.1558/ecot.2005.10.3.364).

⁷ What exactly the reference to the beasts means is a topic of debate, and the interpretation of Jesus's interaction with the beasts depends thereon. In general there are three possible interpretations: (1) this is a reference to an Adamic return to paradise (cf., e.g., Dale C. Allison Jr, "Behind the Temptations of Jesus: Q 4:1–13 and Mark 1:12–13," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, *New Testament Tools and Studies* 28, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 195–214; Jan Dochhorn, "The Devil in the Gospel of Mark," in *Evil and the Devil*, ed. Erkki Koskeniemi and Ida Fröhlich, *International Studies on Christian Origins* 481 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 98–107); (2) in a variety of ways the beasts refer to Israelite prophets or the Israelite nation in the wilderness (cf. e.g. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 151–53; Jan Willem van Henten, "The First Testing of Jesus: A Rereading of Mark 1.12–13," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 349–66, doi:[10.1017/S002868859800349X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S002868859800349X)); (3) the wilderness and animals represent demons in the Septuagint (c.f. Isa 13:21; 34:14; Psa 74:14) and these animals are thus a reference to the demonic (see Leal, "Negativity towards Wilderness," esp. 375–377). For the purposes of this article, no choice need be made.

⁸ See Aichele (*The Phantom Messiah*, 85–104) for a demonstration of how ambiguity influences the entire narrative of Mark.

⁹ Consider, for example, Spooner and McEvoy's list of spatial tropes of Gothic geography: 'ancestral houses, decrepit castles, precipitous mountains and windswept moors'; Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, "Gothic Locations," in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007), 51.



about Jesus's identity 'that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise'¹⁰ in the narrative, and there are beings rising from the wilderness—unclean spirits—that manifest truths 'that can no longer be successfully buried from view.'¹¹

The Gothic Mode and Mark

In this article I will explore Jesus's good news as the flipside to a Gothic tale. As I will demonstrate, when read alongside narratives and criticism of the Gothic mode, the Gospel of Mark takes on new and haunting resonances.¹² The Gothic mode, not to be confused with the eighteenth-century literary genre, describes a feeling that is almost synonymous with horror. Chris Baldick, in the *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, gives a very useful definition of the Gothic mode as combining 'a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration.'¹³ In the introduction to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has spent time in the wilderness, he has encountered spirits and beasts, he has overcome that space, but knows that he will succumb to time and to another space. Jesus, victor in the wilderness, must die in Jerusalem. Thus, the narrative becomes claustrophobic, slowly enclosing itself from the wide-open spaces of the wilderness to Jerusalem and its closed tomb. In the rest of the Gospel, while Jesus preaches his 'good news,' he also preaches his deathly inheritance. As he tours the country, healing the sick and exorcising demons, he is slowly drawn to his tomb in Jerusalem. Slowly and sickeningly, he descends into destruction. And each step of the way, spirits accompany him and haunt him. This article will demonstrate that the framework afforded by the Gothic allows for a better examination of the role that the spirits play in the Gospel. Building on this, will lead us to innovative readings of the so-called messianic secret, as well as the topic of Jesus's identity in Mark and the rather abrupt ending to the Gospel. I will argue that reading Mark as a Gothic narrative offers a reason for the lack of unclean spirits in the second half of the Gospel: the role of the spirits is taken over by Jesus, and the spirits are no longer driven to share Jesus's secret. A Gothic reading also helps understand the rather abrupt ending to Mark without resurrection narratives. The Gospel depends on a return to the beginning of the narrative, it

¹⁰ Hogle, "Introduction," 2.

¹¹ Hogle, "Introduction," 2.

¹² For an introduction and overview of the Gothic mode see Gina Wisker, *Horror Fiction: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2005); David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic*, Blackwell Guides to Literature (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

¹³ Chris Baldick, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiii.



demonstrates the way Jesus and his death continuously haunt his followers. Before I proceed to examine the Gospel of Mark as a gothic tale, I will introduce and contextualise a final methodological concept: haunting.

Haunting is a key element of the Gothic mode. In contemporary Gothic literary criticism, the trope of haunting and spectrality is often examined in the context of Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology'.¹⁴ In *Specters of Marx*, delivered as a series of lectures on the future of Marxism, Derrida coined the phrase 'hauntology' as an alternative to 'ontology'.¹⁵ He frames hauntology by reading *Hamlet* and Hamlet's haunting by his father's ghost. Building on Hamlet's statement that 'time is out of joint,' he suggests a neologism 'hauntology' as a system of knowing that (confusingly) includes incomprehension. There are thus two dominant themes present in hauntology: time and incomprehension. When it comes to the first, the ghost, as a figure of the past, is working in the present and often talking of the future. Thus, it stands outside of time. A presence that is neither fully absent nor present. This leads us to the second feature of hauntology: the liminal ghost harbours within itself knowledge, but this knowledge stands in tension with incomprehension. Derrida repeatedly emphasises the impossibility of truly understanding the spirit's secret, and this is key to the haunting. The ghost has a secret, a secret it wants to share, that seems impossible to communicate. Thus, in Derrida's hauntology unshareable secrets play a key role.

Besides the similarities already demonstrated between the Gothic mode and Mark, there is significant agreement in how, for example, Jean Delorme interprets Mark and the concept of hauntology. Let me place that concept next to Delorme's summary of the beginning to Mark:

Il ne suffit pas de l'enregistrer pour reconnaître en vérité le « Christ Fils de Dieu » [...] Il ne suffit pas de répéter les mots ni de leur prêter un contenu imaginaire. Ces mots mettent en cause l'ordre d'un monde, le cours *normal* des choses et des pensées. La déchirure n'atteint pas seulement le firmament.

[Recording the voice of God is not enough to truly recognize 'Christ the Son of God' [...]. It is not enough to repeat the words or lend them an imaginary content. These words call into

¹⁴ See, for example, Patricia Pulham and Rosario Arias, eds., *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds., *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2006), 10.



question the world order, the *normal* course of objects and thoughts. The tearing is not only in the firmament.]¹⁶

The events in the wilderness, what Delorme calls 'la qualification secrete de Jésus'; the ambiguous revelation of Jesus's identity, calls the entire order of the world into question. Objects and thoughts are no longer 'normal,' time is—to quote Derrida—truly out of joint. The heavens have split, but so has ontology itself. Thus, we arrive at how Colin Davis explains Derrida's hauntology in the context of Gothic studies:

the ghost's secret is the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or *the not-yet formulated possibilities of the future*. The secret is [unspeakable] because it cannot (yet) be articulated in the languages available to us. The ghost pushes at the boundaries of language and thought.¹⁷

The spirit has unfinished business, it has knowledge that needs to be revealed. Yet the very nature of that knowledge is that it cannot be comprehended by mortals, it stands outside of human knowing. The spirit exists because there is an imbalance in ontology, it knows something that should be known and it cannot rest until it has shared its secret. Thus, it haunts humans, itself haunted by the knowledge of an unshareable secret.

Let me summarise the Gothic narrative of a haunted Jesus. In the beginning of Mark, Jesus is put through two major events in the wilderness: a baptism and a testing. In the first, a voice pronounces him a son, the second is hardly described. These two events, taken together, form the secret that the spirits need to share: Jesus is the son of God. He was adopted or identified as the son and, exorcised by the spirit, he proved his place by withstanding the testing of Satan. These two events are definitely linked and revolve around Jesus's identity as son.¹⁸ Jesus returns from the desert with a secret about his identity, one which he cannot share: a secret that cannot be articulated in the languages available to us; a secret that haunts him terribly, as he knows the fatal consequences of his secret; a secret that cannot be revealed, yet follows him as he descends into Jerusalem. The spirits, as ghosts haunting Jesus, attempt to tell the living of future possibilities that cannot (yet) be expressed: Jesus is the son of God. They push against the boundaries of knowledge. They attempt to share the secret of Jesus's identity and death with the living, but the truth is, if not too horrific, then too horrifyingly foreign. Language itself does not have the power to portray the cosmological significance of Jesus. Neither

¹⁶ Jean Delorme, *L'heureuse annonce selon Marc: lecture intégrale du deuxième évangile I*, ed. Jean-Yves Thériault, *Lectio divina* 219 (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 69.

¹⁷ Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, 13 emphasis mine.

¹⁸ See, for example, Delorme, who argues that the test itself is in direct line with the manifestation of Jesus as son. The link regards Jesus's being and identity, not his mission or ministry. 'Jésus est testé en sa qualité de "fils".' Delorme, *L'heureuse annonce selon Marc*, 67.



the spirits nor Jesus himself can share that secret, only his death and accompanying signs will prove powerful enough. Throughout the narrative, no human can fathom Jesus's true nature until the secret is explained outside of language. When he, accompanied by theo-cosmological signs, dies for all to see, only then does someone understand: 'truly, this man was God's son' (Mark 15:39).

I will read Mark as a gothic tale. This is in many ways an anachronistic endeavour. Ancient spirits were imagined differently from those of the last centuries, parts of the gothic presume the concept of a rationalist self; to name but two issues. This is easily solved by seeing this as a reading of Mark with a Gothic lens, in the context of reader response. Yet at the same time, some of the characteristics of Mark that a Gothic reading illuminates are not as easily pushed aside. Mark appears, in some ways, to have gothic sensibilities and interests, and as I will demonstrate contemporary theory on the gothic mode elucidates these aspects of the Markan Gospel. In the rest of this article I will explore three aspects of Jesus and haunting in the Gospel of Mark. The first is an extension of the summary given above: the way that the spirits and their secret haunt Jesus throughout the narrative. Additionally, I will look at how this interacts with the typically Gothic theme of insanity—closely related to demon possession—in the narrative. Finally, I will explore how Jesus himself begins to haunt his followers, the haunted Jesus now haunts others.

The Haunting of Jesus

The secret of his identity and death must haunt Jesus, but so do literal spirits. In his very first public performance after the wilderness, Jesus is teaching in a synagogue. His authoritative discourse is abruptly interrupted by a ghostly apparition. A spirit is present, and the spirit knows who Jesus is. Loudly crying for all to hear, the spirit broaches the topic of the secret (Mark 1:24). Jesus immediately reacts strongly rebuking the spirit, and belatedly silencing it (Mark 1:25). Though the secret is out, the crowd does not pick up on it; they are more astounded by Jesus's teaching and exorcistic skills (Mark 1:27). The secret is safe for now. Already in this first interaction with the demonic the theme of silencing is evident, which is a common part of exorcism.¹⁹ There is no indication—yet—that there is more to this silencing than that. After this encounter, after his demonstration

¹⁹ Cf. Collins, who claims that 'within the dramatic context of the exorcism itself, Jesus' command to silence is first and foremost a "muzzling" of the spirit, which is analogous to the "binding" involved in many effective rituals'; Collins, *Mark*, 173.



of authority both in teaching and exorcism,²⁰ after his reperformance of his wilderness ritual, Jesus's fame begins to spread (Mark 1:28). The consequences of this encounter are clear: conflict is coming.²¹

Curing a Strange Sickness

There is no indication, in this first exorcistic narrative, of the place that secrecy will play in the rest of the Gospel. But in the very next narrative the importance of secrecy and silencing the demons becomes apparent. Simon's mother-in-law is ill with a fever, Jesus takes her by the hand and lifts her up (Mark 1:30–31). Immediately the fever releases (*aphiēmi*) her and she serves Jesus (Mark 1:31). The sickness is no different from exorcism: in the ancient context a fever would often have been thought to be a demon.²² Following this exorcistic healing, people bring many sick and demon-possessed to Jesus (Mark 1:32). Jesus cures and drives out, and most significantly he silences the demons (Mark 1:34). This time, however, it is given why the demons need to be silenced: the demons know Jesus. This is extremely important to notice, Jesus is not simply silencing demons as part of a generic exorcism, he did 'not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him' (Mark 1:34). Now the theme of secrecy and silence truly comes to fruition. The demons and—more importantly—their secret haunt Jesus. He reacts defensively: silencing the demons so that he does not have to face the secret. He uses his authority over the demons to flee from the secret. Yet it remains just under the surface, scratching to enter language, knowledge and thought. The secret, though momentarily silenced,

²⁰ At this juncture it should be noted that there does not seem to be any connection between messianic expectations and exorcistic skill; Richard H. Bell, *Deliver Us from Evil: Interpreting the Redemption from the Power of Satan in New Testament Theology*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 216 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 93–94.

²¹ Cf., e.g. Shively who writes 'Thus, Mark portrays Jesus engaged in two kinds of battles from the start, one against demonic forces, and the other against the religious establishment'; Elizabeth E Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22–30* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 28. In the context of haunting, we should rephrase this, so that the first battle is not against demonic forces, but against Jesus's secret identity (as expressed by the demonic forces haunting Jesus).

²² There is a significant correlation between sickness and the demonic, see e.g. Amanda Witmer, *Jesus, the Galilean Exorcist: His Exorcisms in Social and Political Context*, Library of New Testament Studies 459 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 151–53. James Crossley has recently argued that *aphiēmi* should be read as a demonic terminology; James G. Crossley, "Jesus, Healings and Mark 2:1–12: Forgiveness, a Release, or Bound Again to the Great Satan?," in *Evil in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Chris Keith and Loren Stuckenbruck, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 417 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 90. See also John Granger Cook's analysis of this passage, arguing that a demonic reading is certainly possible, but that the reader should not choose just one reading. He concludes 'the ambiguity [Mark] leaves in the text concerning the nature of the fever allows a reader to interpret the text in a variety of ways' John Granger Cook, "In Defence of Ambiguity: Is There A Hidden Demon In Mark 1.29–31?," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 207, doi:[10.1017/S0028688500023213](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500023213).



pushes against the boundaries, striving to enter the minds of the crowd and the reader.

Fleeing to the Wilderness

Immediately after he silences the demons at Simon's house, Jesus flees. He returns to the wilderness, where he prays (Mark 1:35). This return is often seen as returning to God: Jesus is seeking 'guidance and support.'²³ It seems more likely, however, that Jesus is returning to the wilderness for another reason. The wilderness is the place where his haunting began. It is a place that he has exorcised and is now free of bearers of his secret. There he is uncontested; the wilderness has become a place of safety. The wilderness, the former 'privileged haunt of Satan and evil,'²⁴ has now been cleansed. Jesus is safe there, safe from his secret, but it is not a place of secrecy. The disciples find him and draw him back out (Mark 1:38). As such there is a deconstruction of the wilderness taking place. Soon Jesus's fame will force him once again into the wilderness (Mark 1:45) where the crowds will still find him. And in the rest of the Gospel, Jesus will attempt to return to the wilderness one more time. There he will fail to find safety and be forced to feed five thousand men (Mark 6:30–44). Jesus can find no safety in this place of victory; it too haunts him.

Silencing the Spirits

The spirits and their secrets keep haunting Jesus. When he is preaching about the kingdom of God, Jesus begins to make a difference between his in-group and the out-group,²⁵ between those that have and will receive the secrets of the kingdom, and those that only hear parables (Mark 4:1–33). Here already we see how Jesus struggles with the secret and communicating it. Using a parable to elucidate his predicament, Jesus says 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light' (Mark 4:21–22). Jesus's secret is currently hidden, it will come to light, but as a hauntology it cannot be put in human words. The secret will only be seen when Jesus's nature is communicated outside of language, when he dies.

Once again fleeing from the crowds, Jesus crosses a sea. He is attacked by and easily overcomes and rebukes the sea-demons;²⁶ he calms a storm, astounding his in-

²³ Collins, *Mark*, 177.

²⁴ Leal, "Negativity towards Wilderness," 376.

²⁵ Cf. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 160–61.

²⁶ Mark's word choice in this narrative (*epitimaō* and to a lesser extent *phimoō*) place it squarely in the context of exorcisms cf. for *epitimaō* Ulrike Mittmann-Richert, "Die Dämonen Und Der Tod Des Gottessohns Im Markusevangelium," in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie Der Israelitisch-Jüdischen Und*



group with his authority (Mark 4:35–41). Yet that defeat is but a prelude to what will become his most famous haunting. A demon-possessed man runs at Jesus. This man lives in liminal places—graveyards and mountains—is inhumanly strong, howls uncontrollably, has insomnia and severely struggles with self-harm (Mark 5:3–5). He, like the demon in the synagogue, shouts out Jesus’s secret—even louder than the first demon (Mark 5:7).²⁷ The spirits’ secret is put into words, for the second time in the Gospel: Jesus is the son of God. Yet once again the sharing of the secret has no impact on those present, none seem to realise the import of the demon’s exclamation. The hauntology of the nature of Jesus, though put into words for the second time, still stands outside the limitations of human thought. The secret though verbalised is still safe. Jesus effortlessly exorcises the spirit, who turns out to be many demons named ‘Legion,’ and puts them into pigs which drown. The spirit has been muted, the secret safe once again. For now.²⁸

Sharing His Secret

Jesus’s last dramatic exorcism and the last time spirits play a role in the Gospel is part of a longer narrative (Mark 8:27—9:29). This narrative, that consists of three parts, signals a shift. Jesus has faced his fears and now *he* tries to share his secret. But the unknowable secret remains unshareable. Try as he might, even Jesus cannot break the boundaries of language and thought.

In Jesus’s first attempt to share his secret (Mark 8:27—9:1),²⁹ he asks the disciples who he is. There is some confusion, but Peter identifies him as the Messiah (Mark 8:29). Thus, it seems that at first Jesus has some success in sharing the spirits’ secret. The disciples recognise Jesus as the Messiah—the first ones to do so in the Gospel. But this recognition is not the key to Jesus’s identity, Jesus is Messiah *and* son, and there is no

Frühchristlichen Literatur Im Kontext Ihrer Umwelt = Demons: The Demonology of Israelite-Jewish and Early Christian Literature in Context of Their Environment, ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Diethard Römheld (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 488 n. 31. Collins concludes ‘the reason why the wind and sea are treated like demons is that demons or evil spirits were thought to be responsible for inclement weather. There is evidence in both Greek and Jewish literature, early and late, for the personification or demonization of wind and sea’; Collins, *Mark*, 261.

²⁷ Whereas the first demon simply cried out (*anakrazō*), this demon cries with a loud voice (*krazō phōnē megalē*).

²⁸ Jesus performs another dramatic exorcism. He is exasperated at the ignorance of the crowd, ‘How can you still not understand it?’ he shouts (Mark 7:18), talking of a simple matter of clean and unclean food. Leaving, he tries to remain anonymous (Mark 7:24), but the spirits keep haunting him. The mother of a possessed girl had heard much about him and finds him (Mark 7:25), Jesus exorcises the demon from a distance (Mark 7:29–30).

²⁹ This is the first of Jesus’s three attempts to reveal his secret to his in-group, see Mark 9:30–31 and 10:32–34 for his other attempts.



reason to assume these are synonymous.³⁰ His identity as son of God remains unspoken. Jesus commands them to be silent and starts to predict his own death (Mark 8:30–31). Peter cannot accept the secret, especially the deathly implications, and challenges Jesus, Jesus rebukes him ‘Get thee behind me, Satan.’ Though at first glance Jesus has some success initiating the disciples into his secret, when Jesus tries to share the dark implications of the secret, it becomes too much for them. Jesus reproaches Peter for thinking about human things. It seems that the hauntology is too much for them. To borrow R. T. France’s turn of phrase, it ‘makes no sense in human terms’³¹—the secret goes beyond human understanding. The realization that their Messiah and leader will soon die haunts them. Peter challenges Jesus’s deathly inheritance: he cannot take the full implications of the spirits’ secret. Jesus reaches for the only slur that truly covers this, Peter is called the worst of the worst, he is Satan himself.

Ghosts from the Past

Six days later Jesus tries again to banish the spirits by sharing their secret (Mark 9:2–13). The first attempt—with words alone—failed, the second attempt has more chance to succeed. Jesus leaves speech and language behind. He goes up a high mountain with Peter, James and John, and transforms in front of their eyes (Mark 9:2). Though earlier, it had become clear that the wilderness was no longer safe, the mountains remain safe for Jesus (cf. Mark 3:13, 6:46). On this mountain Jesus’s appearance changes and his clothes become unnaturally white (Mark 9:3). From bearer of a dark secret he becomes light itself. The heavenly nature of Jesus is clear for all to see. When long dead heroes of the Israelite past appear, the disciples are scared witless (*ekphobos*, Mark 9:6). A cloud suddenly puts everyone in darkness again, and a voice from heaven announces, ‘This is my beloved son’ (Mark 9:7). Thus, Jesus, transfigured into a truer representation of his sonship, is reminded of his baptism and his testing in the wilderness. As he becomes light, his dark secret is placed front and centre. His reaction is not recounted, but the disciples are suitably terrified by the secret, though—as soon becomes clear—they cannot comprehend it.

Shortly thereafter, the ‘ghosts’ of the past disappear, as does the cloud. Jesus appears normal again. One can imagine that Jesus now has shared his secret: a

³⁰ There is a link between the (eschatological) Davidic king and the son of God, but Mark only ever calls Jesus a king in his trial (Mark 15), does not explicitly present Jesus’s messiahship in royal terms. See, for example, John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1995), 171–90.

³¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2002), 339.



transfiguration, two ghosts, and voice from heaven must have been enough to allow the disciples to break through the boundaries of knowledge itself. One would imagine that Jesus has solved his haunting, the secret has entered the world of humans. Free from the spirits at last, Jesus tries to free himself from the secret. He commands the disciples to silence, but they are confused about what happened. The secret still has not been shared.

Jesus haunts... himself

Arriving back, the presence of a demon seems to prove Jesus's assurance wrong. The spirits still haunt. The disciples had been asked to drive out a demon causing muteness, but they had been unable to (Mark 9:18). This final demon in the Gospel does not speak and makes no attempt to share the secret. When Jesus sees that a crowd is forming (Mark 9:25), he quickly expels the demon. The final demon is the first that is mute. Now that Jesus has started to share his secret himself, now that he haunts himself, the demons no longer need to. The role the spirits played as heralds of an unshareable secret has been taken over by Jesus: he now pushes at the 'boundaries of language and thought.'³² The spirits no longer need to solve the imbalance in knowing, as Jesus has taken on this role. Jesus has expelled his demons, they no longer haunt him, but the secret still does. As he now tries to share the secret instead of the spirits, he has become his own ghost. Jesus has taken on the mantle of haunting, he haunts himself.

These are three interlinked episodes that all deal with Jesus's identity. They signify a shift in the haunting. Now it is Jesus who is trying to share the secret. Now that Jerusalem is drawing near, Jesus attempts to face his fears. His dark inheritance is coming to fruition, and he needs to share it with his followers. He tries it before going up the mountain, where he was reminded of his terrible secret. He tries again with almost the exact same words straight after expelling his final demon; this one mute—a sign that Jesus is now the one trying to share the secret? (Mark 9:30–31). Even after invoking divine transformation, undead prophets, and the voice of God from heaven, his closest followers have not understood (Mark 9:32). The secret remains beyond the boundaries of ontology, unknowable still. Jesus tries one final time before entering his tomb (Mark 10:32–34). After this Jesus makes no more explicit attempts, he relates one final parable about his death to his out-group and goes to his death. The Gothic tale ends when he cries out in terror 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). Only when he is dead, when the sky becomes dark, the curtain in the temple is torn and his secret is finally laid to rest, does someone understand his true identity.

Throughout the Gospel we see a development of a haunting of Jesus. Jesus carries

³² Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, 13.



a terrible secret: he is the Son of God and he will soon die. Spirits constantly appear to solve this gap in human knowledge, declaring his Sonship. They address the living about the past and the future. Yet the secret goes beyond human understanding, beyond language itself. Spirits, then, are not evil opponents to Jesus's mission, nor are they foils that exist so Jesus can show his power. The spirits haunt Jesus, constantly summoning questions for those around Jesus, as well as Mark's readers. They function to remind Jesus, them, us that Jesus may very well be the Son of God. When Jesus himself begins to discuss his identity, nature and future, the spirits disappear. Jesus starts to haunt himself and the spirits are no longer needed. Yet, while the spirits constantly identify Jesus, these supremely unreliable witnesses conjure up doubts, which leads us to the second Gothic theme in Mark.

Haunted by Insanity

Throughout the Gospel Jesus is haunted by the secret of his identity. Intertwined with this theme of haunting is another typically Gothic theme: madness. These two themes together give a complete picture of the Gothic tale of Jesus. The theme of madness starts early in the Gospel. After touring Galilee, Jesus returns home to find it no longer safe (Mark 3:20). People think that Jesus is insane (*existēmi*) and his family attempt to constrain him (Mark 3:21).³³

'Madness,' writes Scott Brewster examining madness in the Gothic, 'is thoroughly a Gothic concern.'³⁴ Admittedly, madness is difficult to concretely define.³⁵ As Louise Lawrence, examining madness and 'sanism' in the New Testament, writes "madness" evokes a variety of vivid and controlling images and associations.³⁶ At the same time, madness is easy to generically define in the context of losing control of one's rational

³³ The meaning of this verse is not unambiguous and thus subject to some debate. It seems that the 'traditional' translation (i.e. Jesus is *insane*, and it is *his family* that wish to constrain him) is the best option. For a discussion of other suggestions see Camille Focant, *The Gospel According to Mark: A Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 143–44.

³⁴ Scott Brewster, "Seeing Things: Gothic and the Madness of Interpretation," in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 79 (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 482, doi:[10.1002/9781444354959.ch33](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444354959.ch33).

³⁵ Cf. Lawrence's five-page discussion of possible, mutually exclusive definitions of madness in the context of the New Testament; Louise J. Lawrence, *Bible and Bedlam: Madness, Sanism, and New Testament Interpretation*, Library of New Testament Studies 594 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 5–9.

³⁶ Lawrence, *Bible and Bedlam*, 5.



faculties.³⁷ It is in this dichotomy of reason versus insanity that the Gothic thrives.³⁸ As the rational reader interacts with the text, there is a legitimate terror that they might lose their mind, that the madness of the narrative might somehow infect the rationality of the reader. Thus, for the Gothic, ‘madness is [...] haunting and driving the act of reading.’³⁹ In other words, it might not be the characters who are mad, but the readers. Ultimately, concludes Brewster, ‘the madness we find resides in us: madness in Gothic lies in the reading.’⁴⁰ In Mark this Gothic sensibility is present as two themes become entwined: madness and the secret. On the one hand madness: Jesus’s family accuse him of being insane. Yet Mark’s ambiguous⁴¹ narrative allows the inverse to be true as well: not Jesus, but Jesus’s family is insane for not recognising Jesus as the Son of God. On the other hand the secret: the reader is expected to believe the evil spirits’ testimony, the reader must accept the insane thought that the demons are telling the truth and Jesus is the Son. Suddenly the reader could realise that they are insane for *not* trusting the evil spirits who have been recognising Jesus all along. Thus, the text itself provokes the reader to engage with insanity, to enter madness.

Immediately intermingled with this development from fame to madness is the ironic accusation that Jesus the exorcist is in fact demon possessed (Mark 3:22). The scribes that accuse Jesus of being demon possessed are from *Jerusalem*, this seemingly minor detail begins to interweave the two parts of the gothic narrative. Jesus’s inheritance in time, the typically diachronic haunting of the spirits and their terrible secret, now begins to be reinforced by the claustrophobic enclosure in space. For the first time the narrative starts to speak of Jesus’s tomb—*Jerusalem*⁴²—and begins to hint of Jesus’s sickening descent into death. Jesus is now not only haunted by the spirits carrying a secret from the past, he now is haunted by the scribes reminding him of the future. The hauntology begins to become complete, time is now truly out of joint.

³⁷ This seems to be the root meaning of the verb *existēmi*, which, when used intransitively, means ‘(a) to move, move aside [...]; (b) to retreat, flee, avoid [...]; (c) to marvel, be confused, enter ecstasy, be out of one’s mind [...]; (d) to deteriorate, degenerate’ Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2015), s.v. “ἐξίστημι.” This passage appears to be using *existēmi* in the sense captured in meaning (c), to figuratively move or flee from one’s rational capabilities.

³⁸ Brewster explains that the ‘Gothic at once objectifies and lives out the madness it encounters, striving for a metalanguage to categorize or explain insanity at the same time as it performs, even participates in, that very irrationality’ Brewster, “Seeing Things,” 483.

³⁹ Brewster, “Seeing Things,” 486.

⁴⁰ Brewster, “Seeing Things,” 493.

⁴¹ Cf. Aichele’s analysis of the ambiguity of this narrative “Jesus’ Uncanny ‘Family Scene,’” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 74 (1999): 31–33, doi:[10.1177/0142064X9902107402](https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9902107402).

⁴² Jerusalem was only used before this in an alliterative list of places (Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan), from whence people came to listen to him (Mark 3:8).



As the reader struggles with the identity of Jesus, they too become haunted. On the one hand, they are haunted by the spirits who haunt Jesus, the untrustworthy spirits that seem to be telling the truth. On the other hand, reason itself haunts the reader. In the process of rationalising Jesus and his narrative as the effect of demon possession, or following Jesus's family in declaring him insane, the narrative is demystified. This in itself creates, in the context of the Gothic understanding of madness above, a haunting. Fred Botting writes:

Reason, curiously, in relocating ghosts as effects of irrational mental events, finds itself haunted: in disposing of ghostliness through invocations of irrationality, unreason returns upon reason as an after-effect or double effect. [...] Though ghosts and spectres are demystified, their internalisation introduces a limit and challenge to the sway of reason: irrationality and mental disturbance show that the mind is never fully under the control of reason.⁴³

Applied to Mark, we can see that two options are offered to relieve the reader of the Gothic madness of trusting spirits: we could assume Jesus is insane or he is demon possessed. Yet, the very possibility that Jesus's insanity is a solution to the problem, highlights the fact that the mind is not controlled by reason. Though the reader is seemingly let off the hook, there remains that haunting doubt that it might very well be the reader, not Jesus, who is possessed.

Returning to the concept of hauntology, we can see a second piece of the haunting falling into place here. In the first section I demonstrated how throughout the Gospel the secret of Jesus identity is framed as an unspeakable and unthinkable truth that only becomes apparent outside the domain of language. In this section we see the way that the haunting affects others. The spirits, while sharing an unshareable secret and pushing against the boundaries of language and thought, force the reader to evaluate sanity. Jesus's sanity, his family's sanity, and especially the readers' sanity has become a topic of debate. The spirits' secret is unsettling. Indeed, it is meant to be unsettling because once the narrative starts to entertain the option of insanity, the scene is set for the third aspect of Mark's haunting. Jesus's followers become haunted by Jesus himself.

Jesus Haunts

As the problem of the identity of Jesus haunts the audience, it is Jesus himself who becomes more and more responsible for haunting. On the one hand, as discussed above, Jesus takes over the spirits' need to share the secret. It is Jesus himself who starts to push at the boundaries of epistemology. On the other hand, the figure of Jesus in life and in

⁴³ Fred Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 107, 116.



death can be seen to haunt his followers. Jesus thus becomes, to borrow Derrida's words, 'the most spectral of specters.'⁴⁴

The most obvious way that Jesus literally haunted his followers is while they are sailing. Having failed to find safety in the wilderness a final time and feeding five thousand men, Jesus tries a different deserted place: the mountain (Mark 6:46). This place, like the wilderness, has already been associated with demons (Mark 5:5), and is—as discussed above—one of the places that Jesus's terrible secret will be revealed (Mark 9:2–8). Jesus sends the disciples away, telling them to sail to Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). Later that night, just before dawn, Jesus, seeing the disciples struggling against the wind, walks out to them (Mark 6:48). All the disciples see Jesus and, thinking he is a ghost (*phantasma*), they cry out in terror (Mark 6:49–50). Jesus calms them and the demonic wind (Mark 6:50–51). The narrative ends with the disciples being amazed or insane (*existēmi*)—the exact same thing Jesus's family thought he was. This passage, like many others in Mark, is 'saying something about the difficulty of perceiving the divinity of Jesus on the part of mere human beings.'⁴⁵

In the context of haunting, this is the first time that Jesus haunts his followers. Jason Combs, examining this narrative in its ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman context, argues that this narrative is not to be confused with one of divine intervention, such as an oracle, a vision or a theophany.⁴⁶ The narrative has all the hallmarks of an ancient haunting: '(1) ghosts appear at night; (2) though difficult to see, they look as they did in life [...]; (3) they cause fear and terror for the living.'⁴⁷ Yet, there is one significant peculiarity to this haunting: water is an anathema to ghosts.⁴⁸ In other words, Mark shares an 'absurd' narrative: the disciples seeing a shadowy figure walking *on water* assume that that figure must be a ghost; not the much more likely (for both Jewish and Greco-Roman audiences) assumption that Jesus was a king or other divinely inspired being. The 'ghost' on the water could not possibly have been a ghost, yet that assumption is more plausible for the disciples than the secret of Jesus's identity. The spirits' secret is so incomprehensible, that the disciples are forced to retreat to the absurd.

Though the narrative of the ghost on the sea takes the form of a haunting, it is not

⁴⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 180. Derrida is referring specifically to how Jesus as God incarnate makes him more 'incorporated' or 'incarnated' than other ghosts; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 180. He sees incorporation itself as that which separates spirit from ghost; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 157–61. This discussion moves in a slightly different direction than Derrida's original suggestion.

⁴⁵ Collins, *Mark*, 337.

⁴⁶ Jason R. Combs, "A Ghost on the Water?: Understanding an Absurdity in Mark 6:49-50," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 245–249, doi:[10.2307/25610124](https://doi.org/10.2307/25610124).

⁴⁷ Combs, "A Ghost on the Water?," 350.

⁴⁸ Combs, "A Ghost on the Water?," 356.



the ghost itself that haunts. Mark picks up this theme at the very end of the Gospel.⁴⁹ On Easter Sunday three female followers of Jesus set out to anoint Jesus's body. They intend to take part in a ritualised event of mourning and remembrance, one where the deceased is preserved in a certain state for the purposes of memory. They thus wish to create a disjunction between Jesus the person of the past, and the present corpse itself.⁵⁰ But, they cannot do this as they discover the tomb to be empty (Mark 16:1–2). A young man in white addresses them, explaining that Jesus is no longer dead (Mark 16:4–6). Jesus has risen and gone back to Galilee, the place where it all started:

'But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and insanity (*ekstasis*) had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:7–8)

Jesus has died and come back to life. He is—in the most literal sense—a ghost, haunting a personally important place. The three women have not been able to lock down his current state, they are unable to create a fixed identity for remembrance of his life. Jesus is not a person of the past, but very much in the present. He alluded to this haunting earlier, on the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:28), and has now kept true to his word. He has returned to Galilee, the place where he himself was haunted by the spirits, to the place where he shortly haunted his disciples on the sea. Jesus has returned to where the Gospel began. The end of the narrative is linked to the beginning. Time is out of joint, the narrative is over, yet Jesus is back where it all started. The disciples need to find Jesus where they first met him, and this fits perfectly in hauntology. Jesus who should be of the past, is active in the present. Jesus's tomb, which should have been the safe end to the haunting, has become a new horror: 'the horror of a tomb without end.'⁵¹ Jesus-as-ghost haunts his followers and will continue to do so. The three women react suitably to the haunting: they are aquiver (*tromos*), beside themselves (*ekstasis*), and with the final words of the Gospel, they were afraid (*phobeō*).⁵² Again, the cognates *ekstasis/existēmi* are the

⁴⁹ See Aichele, *The Phantom Messiah*, 141–45. for a list of other places Jesus can be seen as 'phantasm' haunting the disciples.

⁵⁰ Cf. McLellan, who analyses this passage in a similar way; Peter N. McLellan, "Specters of Mark: The Second Gospel's Ending and Derrida's Messianicity," *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016): 362, doi:[10.1163/15685152-00243p04](https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00243p04).

⁵¹ Andrew P. Wilson, "Trembling in the Dark: Derrida's *Mysterium Tremendum* and the Gospel of Mark," in *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood, Religion/Culture/Critique (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 210.

⁵² Clearly, fear is usually the general reaction to the appearance of an angel in various ancient narratives. Yet, in Mark the emphasis of fear seems to be different. As Topel argues fear in Mark is 'reverential' and 'positive'; John Topel, "What Were the Women Afraid Of? (Mark 16, :8)," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6 (2012): 87, [jstor.org/stable/26421436](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26421436). Topel concludes that 'fear usually for him is the response to God's power clearly manifested in someone or something. Trembling is associated with that fear, and witnessing the miraculous power of God awes, stuns them' Topel, "What Were the



appropriate reaction to being confronted by a revelation of Jesus's identity (cf. Mark 2:12, 5:42, 6:51).

Mark's ending, with silence, fear and no post-resurrection narratives, has confused readers for centuries. This is evidenced by multiple longer endings in textual tradition, and even hypothetical endings proposed by scholarship.⁵³ From the perspective of a haunting, the absence of the resurrected Christ in Mark and the reference to Galilee makes sense. Peter McLellan, examining the ending to the Gospel of Mark, argues that the 'women at the tomb are called to return to the events expressed earlier in the narrative at the very moment they are called to look for their messiah through the promise of a future meeting.'⁵⁴ Time is now truly out of joint, the future meetings with the ghostly, resurrected Christ are envisioned by and entwined with the previous events in the life of Jesus.

John Topel, attempting to identify what exactly the three women were afraid of, shows that the object of their fear is an exegetical dead end. Yet, from a theological point of view, the question can be extended to the all-encompassing question each follower of Jesus could ask: 'Why, after 2,000 years of faith-filled living of the cross grounded in the resurrection, am I still afraid?'⁵⁵ The answer to this question, I argue, is because the undead Jesus still haunts all his followers. Without a body he cannot be laid to rest. By returning to the beginning of his narrative, he forces Mark to reappear continuously. Jesus's secret is continuously and continuingly rehidden and revealed. The Gospel reappears, constantly attempting to articulate an unspeakable truth. Followers of Jesus, in and outside of Mark, thus repeatedly experience Jesus's haunting as inadequate language attempts to portray the cosmological significance of Jesus, pushing against the boundaries of ontology itself. Thus, Mark ends with the three women who are told to share the secret, yet who just cannot seem to find the words. Jesus's secret is still beyond the realm of language. All in all, Jesus haunts.

Jesus, a Haunted Man

Reading Mark with the Gothic has allowed us to explore some of the darkness that hangs over the Gospel. Mark has sensibilities and interests that resonate strongly with the much

Women Afraid Of?," 91. In the context of haunting, we could rephrase this as 'fear is the response to the spirit's attempt to share their secret about Jesus.'

⁵³ Cf. France, who argues that 'I therefore think it more likely that Mark did intend his gospel to continue beyond this point' France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 684.

⁵⁴ McLellan, "Specters of Mark," 360.

⁵⁵ Topel, "What Were the Women Afraid Of?," 95.



more contemporary Gothic mode. These resonances are not easily ignored or pushed aside. The anachronistic endeavour of reading Mark as a Gothic tale, functions as a heuristic tool to elucidate and clarify aspects of Mark's message. Mark's Gothic qualities allow for a reinterpretation of the role of the demons, of the lack of demons in the second half of the Gospel, of the peculiar ending, and indeed of the experience of following Christ.

Mark's Gothic 'good news' is a dark story of a haunted man, Jesus. His terrible experiences—and their terrible implications—in the wilderness haunt him. He carries a horrifying secret, a flipside to the good news he preaches: Jesus is the son of God and he will die. Carrying this terrible inheritance, the narrative encloses him in space, ever drawing him closer to Jerusalem, his tomb. Spirits appear, haunting him and trying to share his secret: Jesus, the son of God is going to die. There is this horrific secret and *no one knows*. 'The ghost's appearance,' writes Davis, 'is the sign of a disturbance in the symbolic, moral or epistemological order.'⁵⁶ Humanity does not know that Jesus will die, spirits must solve this disturbance in order itself: they haunt Jesus. But like all hauntings, the spirit's secret goes beyond what language can portray. At the same time, Jesus's secret causes madness. Those around him think him insane, or themselves. Even the readers are forced to re-examine their own sanity. The secret haunts more than Jesus, it haunts the readers and his followers equally.

The presence of unclean spirits in Mark has long haunted scholars. Though Jesus apparently defeats Satan in the very first chapter, the spirits persist for another nine chapters. The meaning of and reason for the presence of these forces of darkness has been a topic of much debate. Some critics, for example Ernest Best, see Jesus's victory in the wilderness as complete, and Jesus's encounters with demonic forces nothing more than 'mopping-up operations.'⁵⁷ In this case, the recurring exorcisms are the proof that the kingdom of God has arrived.⁵⁸ Others, such as Adela Yarbro Collins, argue that the wilderness episode was but an introduction to the cosmological defeat of Satan. 'The contest,' writes Collins, 'implies that, although [...] God has designated him as the messiah, Jesus will encounter opposition in his mission.'⁵⁹ Thus 'only,' concludes Christopher Skinner, 'through his death and resurrection is Satan overcome and God's dominion

⁵⁶ Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, 2.

⁵⁷ Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology*, 2nd ed., Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 61.

⁵⁸ See e.g. Martin Rese, "Jesus Und Die Dämonen Im Matthäusevangelium," in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie Der Israelitisch-Jüdischen Und Frühchristlichen Literatur Im Kontext Ihrer Umwelt*, ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and K. F. Diethard Römheld (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 473.

⁵⁹ Collins, *Mark*, 154.



established.⁶⁰ A third option is while the wilderness demonstrates 'the superiority of the Son of Man,'⁶¹ it is only in the exorcisms that Satan is truly denigrated and Jesus exalted.⁶² The exorcisms thus become the cosmological application of the wilderness defeat. None of these three options are entirely convincing. A Gothic reading allows for a fourth option. As Geert van Oyen has argued, 'the story of the period in the desert is a very general and almost mythic statement that needs to be explained and demonstrated in the rest of the gospel story.'⁶³ The two-verse testing is too vague and too succinct to play the significant roles outlined in the first three options. It cannot be more than an introduction to a theme that will be elucidated in the rest of Mark, and only make sense once Mark has developed the theme in more detail. The testing in the desert is not Best's final defeat of Satan, it is not Collins's introduction to Satan's defeat at the cross, nor is it a prelude to the real defeat of Satan in exorcisms, it functions to introduce the secret about Jesus's identity that Mark is trying to share. Jesus is the Son of God and he has died. The spirits try to share this secret haunting Jesus, and Jesus tries to share this secret haunting himself. After his death, haunted by Jesus, Christ-followers still try to share this unfathomable secret.

In the Gospel, as Jesus accepts his secret more and more, his hauntings decrease. As he comes to terms with his own demise, explicit spirits are no longer necessary. Jesus now haunts himself and his followers. The spirits can depart, because Jesus himself attempts to share their terrible secret. He starts to preach, not only good news of the kingdom, but also the bad news of his death. This also explains why as the Gospel progresses the demonic presence decreases—with not a single reference to demons in the last seven chapters.⁶⁴ Once Jesus has taken over the haunting, the spirits are laid to rest. True to form, however, humanity cannot accept the spirits' secret, and language falls short. Jesus tries in vain to share his dark secret—first with those closest to him, later with the crowds. But only when the secret is experienced and expressed in cosmological

⁶⁰ Christopher W. Skinner, "Overcoming Satan, Overcoming the World," in *Evil in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Chris Keith and Loren Stuckenbruck, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 417 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 111.

⁶¹ Doehorn, "Devil in Mark," 103.

⁶² Doehorn, "Devil in Mark," 106–107.

⁶³ Geert Van Oyen, "Demons and Exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark," in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, ed. Nienke Vos and Willemien Otten, Supplements to Vigilliae Christianae 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 108. See Delorme, who suggested this reading of the testing in the desert in a more general sense *L'heureuse annonce selon Marc*, 69.

⁶⁴ Cf. Van Oyen, who writes, 'All references to demonic presence occur in the first half of the gospel, the only exception being the expulsion of the demon of the possessed boy (9:25)' Van Oyen, "Demons and Exorcisms," 105. This statement assumes that the longer ending of Mark is less original, and does not take it into account.



and theological signs, only once Jesus himself is dead, can someone truly understand. But now... it is Jesus's turn to haunt his followers.

Jesus's return to the locale of the beginning of the Gospel, his return to the very beginnings of his secret forces the Gospel to continuously re-happen. Jesus, now himself a spirit, returns to continue haunting his followers. His secret caused his family to think him insane, it drove the disciples insane on the sea, it scared the women out of their minds at his empty tomb, and it continues to haunt and re-haunt followers and readers as they are forced to constantly attempt to articulate the unspeakable secret. It also causes readers to doubt both Jesus's sanity and their own. Ultimately, Mark ends his Gospel not at the end, but back at 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (Mark 1:1). Mark, like all of Jesus's followers, is haunted by Jesus and struggles to find the words to share his messianic secret. A Gothic reading helps explain the unsatisfying ending to the Gospel and elucidates a fundamental aspect of it: followers of a dead and ghostly Christ are constantly haunted by unbelievable truths. Following Jesus is a form of haunting, it is having a secret that cannot truly be shared. It is, to paraphrase the last verse of the Gospel, being seized by terror and amazement, being unable to say anything to anyone, on account of fear (Mark 16:8).

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