




2023

## Echoed Malice: Identity and the Doubled Voice in Gothic Horror

Brandon West

University of Kentucky, b.westxc@gmail.com

Author ORCID Identifier:

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7988-0328>

Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/13023/etd.2023.364>

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

### Recommended Citation

West, Brandon, "Echoed Malice: Identity and the Doubled Voice in Gothic Horror" (2023). *Theses and Dissertations--English*. 164.

[https://uknowledge.uky.edu/english\\_etds/164](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/english_etds/164)

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the English at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--English by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact [UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu](mailto:UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu).

## **STUDENT AGREEMENT:**

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statement(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to UKnowledge as Additional File.

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless an embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

## **REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE**

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Brandon West, Student

Michelle Sizemore, Major Professor

Matthew Giancarlo, Director of Graduate Studies

ECHOED MALICE:  
IDENTITY AND THE DOUBLED VOICE  
IN GOTHIC HORROR

---

DISSERTATION

---

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Brandon West

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Michelle Sizemore, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2023

Copyright © Brandon West 2023  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7988-0328>

## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### ECHOED MALICE: IDENTITY AND THE DOUBLED VOICE IN GOTHIC HORROR

My dissertation argues we would benefit from focusing on the voice when analyzing gothic and horror texts. That is, I contend, there remains significant fertile ground for us to till in these texts if we shift our focus to the voice and its various iterations across these texts' long history. To demonstrate this point, I delineate three variations of this theme: the doubled voice in the possession narrative, the split voice in the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic, and the inherent uncertainty of the voice without discernable origin. Each of these variations, I argue, offers fruitful readings of oft-studied texts and, moreover, offers interventions into existing scholarship on said texts.

In Chapter Two, I discuss how attending to the voice in *The Exorcist* allows us to trace the texts culturally conservative notions, and how doing the same in Hawthorne's "Egotism; Or, the Bosom-Serpent" allows us to read that story as a possession narrative investigating the role of the self in early American society. Then, in Chapter Three, I highlight a more conspicuous yet still understudied iteration of the voice in ventriloquism. Here, I argue that the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic splits the ventriloquist's self, thereby making these texts rich for psychological exploration and deserving of further scholarly attention. And, finally, in Chapter Four, I turn to texts where the voice's origin is questionable. Here, I argue that reading Poe's "The Raven" as a ventriloquial text allows us to answer some prevailing concerns in Poe studies as well as to discern the voice's potential for exploiting epistemic uncertainty and thereby destabilizing audiences.

KEYWORDS: Horror, The Gothic, Film Studies,  
Ventriloquism, Poe, The Voice

---

Brandon West

*(Name of Student)*

---

07/10/2023

Date

ECHOED MALICE:  
IDENTITY AND THE DOUBLED VOICE  
IN GOTHIC HORROR

By  
Brandon West

Michelle Sizemore  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Dissertation

Matthew Giancarlo  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Graduate Studies

07/11/2023  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Drs. Michelle Sizemore, Lisa Zunshine, Jeffrey Peters, Thomas Marksbury, Mark Jancovich, and Stefan Bird-Pollan. In addition, I would like to thank my fellow graduate students whose company in our oft-rescheduled Dungeons & Dragons game provided a necessary outlet that helped me reach this finish line: Kimaya Thakur, Tanner Underwood, Matthew Wentz, and Jessica Van Gilder. Thanks as well to my family, who provided emotional support throughout this journey: Georgette West, Salem West, Marty West, and Victoria West.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 <i>Terms and Literature Review</i> .....	2
1.1.1 The Gothic .....	2
1.1.2 Horror .....	10
1.1.3 Gothic Horror and Text Selections.....	16
1.1.4 Ventriloquism .....	20
1.1.5 The Voice .....	21
1.1.6 Textual Interventions.....	25
CHAPTER 2. Vox ex Machina: Doubled Voices in the Possession Narrative .....	28
2.1 <i>Introduction</i> .....	28
2.2 <i>Mocking Possession: Ventriloquism and Cultural Conservatism in The Exorcist</i> .....	30
2.2.1 Ventriloquizing the Past: History and Sex in <i>The Exorcist</i> .....	30
2.2.2 Still Thy Tongue: Patriarchy in <i>The Exorcist</i> .....	46
2.3 <i>Venomous Sanctimony: Hawthorne’s Serpent and Vision for the Community</i> .....	59
CHAPTER 3. Speak Unto Evil: Ventriloquism, Identity Formation, and the Evil Dummy Narrative .....	86
3.1 <i>Introduction</i> .....	86
3.2 <i>Time’s Echo: History and the Evil Dummy</i> .....	86
3.3 <i>How Families Matter: Ventriloquism and Identity Formation</i> .....	108
CHAPTER 4. Acousmatic Terrors: The Disembodied Voice from Poe to Crystal Lake .....	138
4.1 <i>Introduction</i> .....	138
4.2 <i>Parroting: The Disembodied Voice and Poe’s Agenda in “The Raven”</i> .....	138
4.3 <i>Kill Them All: The Killer’s Voice and The Slasher Film</i> .....	169
4.4 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	180
Bibliography .....	185
VITA .....	201

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

My dissertation argues literary and film scholars would benefit from focusing on the voice when analyzing gothic and horror texts. That is, I contend, there remains significant fertile ground for us to till in these texts if we shift our focus to the voice and its various iterations across these texts' long history. To demonstrate this point, I delineate three variations of this theme: the doubled voice in the possession narrative, the split voice in the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic, and the inherent uncertainty of the voice without discernable origin. Each of these variations, I argue, offers fruitful readings of oft-studied texts and, moreover, offers interventions into existing scholarship on said texts.

My central thesis is this: despite being relatively underexplored in scholarship of horror and the gothic, the voice, in fact, plays a central role in identity formation in these texts, and, identity formation being a key concern of these works, the voice therefore proves a useful analytical focus which allows us to make interventions into the existing scholarship around these texts. I demonstrate this last part of the thesis through a number of case studies which comprise this dissertation's chapters and which I describe briefly in the last section of this introduction. Ultimately, I assert the ventriloquial voice is a powerful cinematic and literary artifact which deserves more sustained attention than it has received and that focusing on this artifact helps elucidate hitherto underexplored elements of seminal texts and helps bring to our attention texts whose obscurity belie their thematic richness.

In Chapter Two, I discuss how attending to the voice in *The Exorcist* allows us to trace the text's culturally conservative notions, and how doing the same in Hawthorne's "Egotism; Or, the Bosom-Serpent" allows us to read that story as a possession narrative



investigating the role of the self in early American society. Then, in Chapter Three, I highlight a more conspicuous yet still understudied iteration of the voice in ventriloquism. Here, I argue that the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic splits the ventriloquist's self, thereby making texts that feature this dynamic (e.g., *Dead of Night* and *Magic*) rich for psychological exploration and deserving of further scholarly attention. And, finally, in Chapter Four, I turn to texts where the voice's origin is questionable. Here, I argue that reading Poe's "The Raven" as a ventriloquial text allows us to answer some prevailing concerns in Poe studies as well as to discern the voice's potential for exploiting epistemic uncertainty and thereby destabilizing audiences.

## 1.1 Terms and Literature Review

### 1.1.1 The Gothic

As many scholars have observed, defining the gothic is a tricky endeavor.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of defining the gothic owes in part to the term's long and complicated history. This history is so complex, in fact, that noted scholar Nick Groom's effort to chart all different uses of the term "gothic" yielded enough material to become its own book: *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction*. Groom observes that the term first referred to northern European tribes infamous for their role in the sack and collapse of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> From there, the term became associated with barbarism and the advent of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Longmans, 1980. 1;  
Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print. 155;  
Spooner, Catherine, and Emma, McEvoy. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*. Routledge, 2007. 1;  
Hughes, William. *Key Concepts in the Gothic*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018. 1.  
<sup>2</sup> Groom, Nick. *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2012. 2;  
Hughes 3.

so-called Dark Ages.<sup>3</sup> This vernacular connection of the gothic to the medieval era led to the description of medieval architecture as “gothic,” denoting its distinction from the Roman era or “classical” architecture.<sup>4</sup>

And so, Devendra Varma notes in *The Gothic Flame*, the term “gothic fiction” arose in connection with gothic architecture, known for inspiring a sense of awe, of making people aware of their insignificance.<sup>5</sup> According to Varma, the gothic positions humanity experiencing gloom and terror before a(n) (architectural or numinous) vastness towering over them.<sup>6</sup> From out of its historical origin denoting northern European tribes to its association with the medieval era and medieval architecture specifically, then, the gothic became associated with death, and, consequently, with fear and the supernatural.<sup>7</sup> These various traditions thus informed Walpole’s decision to dub his *The Castle of Otranto* “gothic” and thereby begin the first wave of gothic fiction.<sup>8</sup>

Scholarship of the gothic would come later, though some of its authors (e.g., Walpole, Radcliffe, and Coleridge) wrote some essays on the subject.<sup>9</sup> In the early twentieth century, however, a few books on the gothic emerged, including Dorothy Scarborough’s *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* in 1917.<sup>10</sup> After World War

---

<sup>3</sup> Hughes 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Varma, Devendra P. *The Gothic Flame; Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England, Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966. Print. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Varma 15-17.

<sup>7</sup> Groom 22.

<sup>8</sup> Groom 69-71.

<sup>9</sup> Groom 69;

Hughes 8.

I note the gothic’s long tradition here to establish my work’s context. My own study, however, will not attempt to analyze works from the full length of the gothic’s extensive history and will instead limit itself to the period from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes 8.

II,<sup>11</sup> however, scholarship of the gothic became more common, with landmark studies including Varma's aforementioned *Gothic Flame* and, more notably, Punter's *The Literature of Terror*, which Hughes regards as the most important work in starting the modern systematic study of the gothic.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the twenty-first century, discussion of the gothic became increasingly theoretical.<sup>13</sup>

Much of the work preceding this theoretical turn was psychoanalytic. For instance, Marie Bonaparte's lengthy study of Poe's fiction relies heavily (even entirely) upon psychoanalysis for its insights.<sup>14</sup> Freudian psychoanalysis, moreover, informed Punter's work, in which he asserts the gothic's tendency to mythologize the self.<sup>15</sup> More recently, however, psychoanalytic readings of the gothic have lost popularity in favor of historicist and cultural materialist readings.<sup>16</sup> Such readings, those of the rise of new historicism, tend to focus on the material realities in which gothic texts are and were composed.<sup>17</sup> They may also go further in asserting the folly of psychoanalysis in treating works as somehow "timeless" or intelligible apart from their historical/cultural

---

<sup>11</sup> I use World War II here merely as a time marker, not to suggest that the war directly affected studies of the gothic.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

See: Bonaparte, Marie. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, a Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. [1st English ed.], Imago Pub. Co., 1949.

<sup>15</sup> Hughes 177.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Of course, this is not to assert that cultural materialism is the only lens through which contemporary scholars investigate the gothic. Eco-gothic, new historicist, and gender studies readings have also gained prominence in the recent discourse, for example.

<sup>17</sup> Hughes 174.

contexts.<sup>18</sup> These readings have variously connected the gothic to such contemporary concerns as the legal system, the advance of science, and capitalism/neo-liberalism.<sup>19</sup>

Even past this materialistic turn, however, scholarship of the gothic has continued to address issues of identity. Eric Savoy, for one, notes identity is central to the gothic itself: "...the gothic might be broadly conceptualized as a cultural ritual of inscribing the loss of coherent ego formation, the negation of national imaginary, and the fragmentation of linguistic accountability."<sup>20</sup> Joining Savoy, Paul Margau observes that gothic literature often asks the question "Who am I?"<sup>21</sup> And Sian Silyn Roberts agrees that gothic texts reveal issues of identity, namely how identity becomes porous and malleable.<sup>22</sup> Thus, amid the materialistic bent in modern gothic scholarship, questions of identity have lingered even as they have lost primacy. Such questions have revolved around the individual's place within larger systems such as nation (Goddu and Savoy), gender/sex (Halberstam and Meyers), capitalism (Benjamin Fisher), and race (Fiedler). At the same time, though, psychoanalysis continues to inform modern gothic scholarship, as we can see from the continual reappearance of "abjection" in contemporary studies of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 174-175.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 175;

Botting, Fred. *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008. 3. Print;

Derry, Charles. *Dark Dreams 2.0: a Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century*. McFarland & Co., 2009. 14;

Tropp, Martin. *Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture, 1818-1918*. McFarland & Co., 1990. 1& 28;

Halberstam, Jack/Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. 102.

Halberstam prefers to alternate between masculine and feminine pronouns

(<http://www.jackhalberstam.com/on-pronouns/>).

<sup>20</sup> Savoy, Eric. "The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic." *American Gothic*. University of Iowa Press, 1998. 11. Print.

<sup>21</sup> Margau, Paul. "Changes of Perception in Gothic Literature. An Inquiry into the Effects of Reading Gothic." *British and American studies: B.A.S* 21.21 (2015): 36. Print.

<sup>22</sup> Silyn Roberts, Siân. *Gothic Subjects: The Transformation of Individualism in American Fiction, 1790-1861*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2014. 106. Print.

gothic.<sup>23</sup> Like identity, then, psychoanalysis has never really left even though it has lost prominence.

Questions about identity in the gothic, ergo, have drawn heavily from the psychoanalytic tradition. Marie Bonaparte's aforementioned 1934 psychobiography of Poe, for example, undertakes a traditional Freudian analysis of Poe's oeuvre, seeking keys to Poe's psyche she believes are buried in his writings.<sup>24</sup> Such studies of the gothic self tend to rely on the dual issues of abjection (Kristeva and Creed) and repression (Wood and Clemens). Both these issues, of course, become embodied in the figure of the doppelganger, a central gothic feature.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the centrality of the doppelganger or double to the gothic as well as the gothic's tendency to favor broadly drawn caricatures over developed characters<sup>26</sup> and its frequent use of dream imagery all help explain why the gothic is a genre uniquely interested in questions about identity and the self. Broadly speaking, one could divide gothic scholarship of identity into two main camps: 1) those exploring sexuality and 2) those exploring the gothic's resonance with psychology, namely its depiction of feelings of guilt and danger.<sup>27</sup> For the former, existing scholarship connects protagonists' gothic

---

<sup>23</sup> Spooner & McEvoy 143 & 167.

<sup>24</sup> See: Bonaparte.

<sup>25</sup> Savoy 11.

<sup>26</sup> Punter 1.

<sup>27</sup> The doppelganger, arguably the gothic's most common tool for questioning identity, is not unique to either of these camps. Hughes, for instance, writes: "In academic criticism, though, the double is frequently a figure of profound psychoanalytic significance, with the divided self being interpreted as expressive of the conflict between the Pleasure and Reality Principles. With the self fractured in this manner, a reunion or reapproachment of the divided components of desire and restraint might well...bring about resolution..." (60).

experiences to their sexual repression.<sup>28</sup> Questions of gothic identity, then, become questions of sexuality or of female agency.<sup>29</sup>

Creed, for example, argues that *The Exorcist* explores protagonist Regan's repressed incestuous longing for her mother.<sup>30</sup> Relatedly, Clover argues horror films (some gothic, some not) explore the viewer's ability to identify across genders.<sup>31</sup> And Meyers argues that gothic fiction provides an analog for the experience of women in Western society, allowing women to reflect upon the dangers they and their sexualities face at every turn.<sup>32</sup> Yet, while much gothic scholarship about identity questions sexual matters, gothic scholarship has also long noted the primacy of guilt in the gothic narrative.<sup>33</sup> And occasionally scholars have explored the question of identity by delving into the psyche of protagonists, most notably Roderick Usher.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, on this last topic, Punter notes that Poe is known for his exploration of extreme psychological states.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, then, scholarship of the gothic has, to date, not focused on the questions of identity and identity formation qua identity and identity formation, instead relegating such matters to sidenotes or passing gestures. Extant investigations that address these

---

<sup>28</sup> Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 1993; Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, NJ: BFI, 1992; Clemens, Valdine. *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from the Castle of Otranto to Alien*. State University of New York Press, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. SUNY Press, 2001. Print.

<sup>30</sup> Creed 36.

<sup>31</sup> Clover 217.

<sup>32</sup> Meyers ix & xii.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes 176.

<sup>34</sup> Wilbur, Richard. "The House of Poe." In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. 108. Print;

Fisher, Benjamin Franklin. *The Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge, UK ;: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 77. Print;

Punter 206.

<sup>35</sup> Punter 198.

topics tend to focus on psychoanalysis, frequently sexualizing their arguments. My study, however, turns away from the larger societal forces upon which modern scholarship often focuses, in favor of reinvigorating the psychoanalytic/psychological currents underlying much modern scholarship. In doing so, I offer a way of reading the gothic outside a cultural materialist perspective that nevertheless does not treat the text itself as a timeless truth. Furthermore, my approach connects with readings of the gothic that, like Punter's, observe the gothic's rendering of psychological states.

However, whereas Punter's work refers to but does not focus on the question of identity, my study focuses on this question, identifying and discussing an element that has hitherto recurred throughout gothic scholarship only as an undercurrent. I am, therefore, highlighting and exploring a topic that has undergirded gothic scholarship while remaining underexplored. And, since discussions of sexuality have dominated previous investigations of identity in the gothic, examining other aspects of the self will allow my study to offer an alternative way of envisioning identity in the gothic, a way which will often focus on topics other than sexuality.<sup>36</sup> That said, in following the general direction of gothic and horror scholarship on identity and in the hopes of reinvigorating psychoanalytic investigations of these texts, my project shall draw upon psychoanalysis as its primary critical lens. Psychoanalysis, I demonstrate, continues to offer a variety of fruitful readings of often challenging texts.

---

<sup>36</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 9.

Sexuality will, however, be a recurring element throughout my project, as sexuality is indeed integral to some of the texts I discuss, such as *The Exorcist* and *Pinocchio's Revenge*. Here, I am trying to note that my project will focus on sexuality less often and less exclusively than other works of scholarship on gothic horror.

In undertaking this investigation, I have selected texts from two distinct media (cinema and literature) and from different time periods, ranging from the 1800s to the present. The gothic's long history means I need to consider different time periods and forms to examine the gothic's different variations. The gothic is, however, too expansive to fully explore in such a short project, meaning I will focus my attention on case studies. That way, I can mix depth with breadth in my investigations. Furthermore, for each case study, I have found useful points of comparison which allow me to put texts from the gothic's past in conversation with more contemporary gothic texts (as befitting my argument about the genre's dialogic nature).

And so, in this project, I shall rely upon the definition of the gothic as "Dark Romanticism" as given by scholars G.R. Thompson<sup>37</sup> and Bridget Marshall.<sup>38</sup> Marshall argues the gothic is the evil twin of the romantic. That is, both modes, the gothic and the romantic, focus on shared topics, which Marshall renders as: "imagination, intuition, idealism, inspiration, and individuality." Whereas, according to Marshall, both gothicism and romanticism explore these topics and push back against empiricism and rationalism, gothicism focuses on their potential dangers (i.e., the pitfalls or problems of romantic ideals). For example, romance and the gothic often render nature as a sublime object, but the gothic sublime tends to focus on nature's danger as opposed to its grandeur. Thus, their topics are the same, their tones and focuses different.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Spooner & McEvoy 20.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall, Bridget M. "The Gothic Tradition in Literature," University of Massachusetts, Lowell, 22 January 2015, <https://faculty.uml.edu/bmarshall/romanticismandgothicartlit.html>, Accessed 15 October 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Marshall.



I have chosen to rely upon this definition over its (many) competitors because it articulates the gothic's relationship to an adjacent genre<sup>40</sup> (a useful characteristic because it helps me fit the gothic within the broader literary canon amid its generic counterparts) and offers particular focus on the self (individuality) and the mind (imagination), the two elements upon which my analysis focuses.

### 1.1.2 Horror

Stephen King describes horror as a ritualistic outpouring of unpleasant emotions<sup>41</sup> and furthermore divides the horror genre into a three-tiered hierarchy of terror, horror, and revulsion, in that order.<sup>42</sup> Thus, horror's association with negative emotions is clear in King's treatise on horror, which, then, is a genre consisting of works that arouse or are intended to arouse strong, unpleasant emotional responses of fear, dread, terror, disgust, and/or physical discomfort.<sup>43</sup> As Douglas Cowan puts it, horror tells stories to scare, whereas other genres scare to tell stories.<sup>44</sup>

---

One might argue the gothic and romantic are, in fact, one and the same. Nevertheless, Marshall's point stands that the gothic and romantic treat the same topics but with different tones. Whether this difference differentiates the two into distinct modes would be the subject of a separate study.

<sup>40</sup> Discussions of the gothic must reconcile themselves with the gothic's connections not only to romantic literature but to the sentimental as well (Punter 28). The sentimental certainly bears some similarities to the gothic in its opposition to realism and emphasis on atmosphere, but the two differ, for example, in the former's focus on tears over fears (Braudy 5). Nevertheless, June Howard argues the sentimental is a very flexible (73) and hard to define category (76) relying on an evocation of sympathy (73). In this conception, then, the gothic and sentimental may well overlap at times and run parallel at others. Like so many questions in this project, resolving this one (if doing so is even possible) lies outside this work's purview. Moreover, horror and the sentimental may also overlap, as Zillman and Gibson note horror plays with audience empathy (28).

<sup>41</sup> King, Stephen. *Danse Macabre*. New York: Gallery Books, 2010. 12; West, Brandon. *At the Edge of Existence: Liminality in Horror Cinema since the 1970s*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2021. 207. Web.

<sup>42</sup> King, *Danse Macabre*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Here, I would like to offer the disclaimer that my proffered definition of "horror" is almost certainly imperfect. On that note, I follow the footsteps of renowned philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in asserting definitions are inherently imprecise (Wittgenstein 65). Wittgenstein famously argued the various activities we lump under the word "game" are united not by some common characteristic but rather by a sort of "family resemblance" (66). In this way, I believe Wittgenstein anticipated some of the struggles of later

While this definition shall guide my project, it does not quite capture the long history of scholarship about the horror genre and horror films. One could argue that history's respectability began with Punter's seminal work on the gothic.<sup>45</sup> And certainly the rise of the horror film, as the mention of Punter indicates, is tied with the history of the gothic, which influenced the horror genre.

Nevertheless, the history of the horror genre itself far predates studies thereof. Indeed, in his influential work *The Monster Show*, David J. Skal argues horror films emerged (largely) from the carnival, including side shows.<sup>46</sup> In connection, Skal points out how the formative horror director Tod Browning cut his entertainer's teeth as a carnival worker.<sup>47</sup> The horror film, then, finds its roots in the live shows, the same stage whence early cinema would draw its actors. This probably does not surprise most readers, given the prominence of The Grand Guignol in entertainment history.<sup>48</sup>

Arguably the first horror film itself, George Melies's 1896 effort, *The House of the Devil*, cements the connection between the stage and horror cinema.<sup>49</sup> This 6 minute vignette features a group of actors on a sound stage enacting the tale of a gendarme's

---

genre theorists. I should, however, note that some disagree with Wittgenstein's assessment, including Bernard Suits, who offers what I believe is a robust definition of "game": <https://www.jstor.org/stable/186102>. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's original point still has merit in my view, for Suits' definition is so detailed as to lose much of its utility in common parlance. And it strikes me that much of the importance of generic definitions stems from their applicability in popular culture, not merely their esoteric precision. For an overview of Wittgenstein's philosophy, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/>

<sup>44</sup> Cowan, Douglas E. *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008. 17. Print.

<sup>45</sup> Wisker, Gina. *Horror Fiction: an Introduction*. Continuum, 2005. 232.

<sup>46</sup> Skal, David J. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. Revised Edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. 37. Print.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>49</sup> Since the prevailing narrative is that the first movie camera was invented by the Lumiere brothers in 1895 (Metz, "Semiotics," 54), this means horror films are practically as old as films themselves.

encounter with Mephistopheles. And it also foregrounds perhaps the figure horror scholars have held most important to the genre: the monster.<sup>50</sup>

On this important figure, we should spill some ink. Seminal horror scholar Robin Wood has argued the monster is the central figure of the horror film.<sup>51</sup> Wood, moreover, connects the monster to the psychoanalytic concept of the repressed.<sup>52</sup> Around this central figure, other scholars have rallied. Andrew Tudor, for example, uses the monster as a key figure in his argument about the horror film's conservative structure, whereby he construes the typical horror plot as 1) stability, 2) disrupted by the monster, who 3) is then defeated, whereupon 4) stability returns.<sup>53</sup> Horror, therefore, upholds the status quo in this conception.<sup>54</sup> That same structure meshes well with horror's folkloric roots,<sup>55</sup> which have led seminal scholar Carol J. Clover to argue horror movies resemble folktales<sup>56</sup> and folklorist and film scholar Mikel J. Koven to argue convincingly that most American horror films follow a folkloric formula he renders as "interdiction, violation, ensuing consequences, and attempted escape."<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Darryl Jones writes: "Central to the power of horror is the spectacle of the monster" (22). And Cohen's "monster theory" has become increasingly influential (See: Cohen).

<sup>51</sup> Wood, Robin. "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *American Nightmares: Essays on the Horror Film*. Festival of Festivals, 1979. 14.

<sup>52</sup> See Wood, Robin. "Return of the Repressed." In *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, Wayne State University Press, 2018. 57-62.

<sup>53</sup> Tudor, Andrew. *Monsters And Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*. 1989. 18-19.

<sup>54</sup> While the conservative nature of horror is not my primary focus in this study, I nevertheless note how various scholars, including Cowan, have observed significant departures from this formula, including in *Dagon* (Cowan, *Sacred Terror*, 84). Thus, it would be a mistake to claim that all horror films inevitably uphold the status quo.

<sup>55</sup> Influential scholar Jan Brunvand frequently explored the connection between horror and modern folklore (i.e., urban legends). For one such work, see Brunvand's *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*.

Walter Evans has further reinforced the connections between horror and folklore by observing the accuracy with which horror fulfills the role of the initiation rite (See: Evans "Initiation Rites").

<sup>56</sup> Clover 10.

<sup>57</sup> Koven, Mikel J. "The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film," *Scope: An Online Journal*, 2003. 6.

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2003/may-2003/koven.pdf>.

Thus, scholarship of the horror film not only connects it to folkloric roots but, moreover, argues that American horror films, in addition to their conservative ideology, push a very puritanical sort of morality. Note, for example, how the common invocation against premarital sex in horror films (e.g., *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *Scream*, which I discuss in Chapter Four) aligns with a very strict interpretation of morality, the violation of which tends to result in death.<sup>58</sup> And, of course, the monster remains a central figure throughout this discussion.

For instance, notable film scholar Noel Carroll argues the monster is not only integral to horror but that it represents a break in the natural order.<sup>59</sup> And David J. Russell has further reinforced the monster's essential role in horror by making it central to his taxonomy of the genre.<sup>60</sup> Even Tzvetan Todorov's respected taxonomy of the fantastic likewise puts the monster in an important role when Todorov argues horror is that which explains the supernatural, the supernatural, of course, often being part and parcel of the movie monster.<sup>61</sup> And while Freud's oft-cited essay on the uncanny does not center on

---

"Interdiction" refers to a warning, meaning the typical formula is: there is a cultural or explicit warning against some behavior, a character performs said behavior, that character faces the monster because of said behavior, and that character then tries to flee from or defeat the monster.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

I have also discussed Koven's formula for horror films or "Terror Tales" in *At the Edge of Existence*. For an application of this formula to *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, see *At the Edge of Existence*.

<sup>59</sup> Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror*. New York: Routledge, 1989. 16.

<sup>60</sup> Russell, David. J. "Monster Roundup: Reintegrating the Horror Genre." *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, edited by Nick Browne, University of California Press, 1998. 241.

<sup>61</sup> Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, transl. Richard Howard. Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973. 43-47. Print.

I have also discussed the prevalence of the monster as well as these scholars' discussions of it in *At the Edge of Existence*.

A precise definition of the supernatural is outside this work's scope. Cowan argues persuasively that we can connect the horror movie monster to the religious belief in an "unseen order" and that said order is supernatural, thus making monsters supernatural (*Sacred Terror* 65). Others have, however, argued the supernatural merely pertains to the outside (Cisco 80). To this last definition, however, I offer the brief rebuttal that the proposed definition does not match well the word's actual usage and therefore risks being an unhelpful distinction. That same definition may, however, mesh with H.P. Lovecraft's assertion in "Supernatural Horror in Literature" that fear of the unknown is the strongest fear (1). My concern, though,

the monster per se,<sup>62</sup> we should observe the ease with which the Freudian uncanny connects with the movie monster of Wood, Tudor, Carroll, and Russell et al.<sup>63</sup> After all, if Wood is correct to assert the monster is the return of the repressed (itself a Freudianism),<sup>64</sup> then the Freudian uncanny naturally accompanies the monster.

Moreover, horror scholars have long argued for the connection of the movie monster to the time and place of its instantiation. For instance, Jason Bivins contends that monsters arise from cultural taboos, meaning one can look to a culture's monsters to understand that culture.<sup>65</sup> And for his part, Adam Lowenstein connects the figments of American horror to the nation's historical traumas, such as when he reads Wes Craven's notorious *Last House on the Left* (1972) as allegorical for the United States' experience in the Vietnam War.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Mark Jancovich details how the exact definition and parameters of horror are historically conditioned, varying from one time period to another.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the book and documentary *Nightmares in Red, White, and Blue: The Evolution of the American Horror Film* thoroughly and persuasively connect the

---

is that we risk excluding such beings as ghosts from the category of "supernatural" if we merely focus on interiority versus exteriority.

<sup>62</sup> Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." 1919, Available at: <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Because the horror monster is often taken as a return of the repressed (Wood, "Return of the Repressed"), that means it evokes an experience of the uncanny, that which is familiar yet alien (in this case, self yet other).

<sup>64</sup> Wood, "Return of the Repressed."

<sup>65</sup> Bivins, Jason C. "By Demons Driven: Religious Teratologies." In *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning. 2012. 108.

<sup>66</sup> Lowenstein, Adam. *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. 111.

Wood draws a similar line between the Vietnam War and *Last House on the Left* (Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Regan*, 113-118).

<sup>67</sup> Jancovich, Mark. "'Psychological Thriller': Dead of Night (1945), British Film Culture, and the 1940s Horror Cycle." In *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning, 2012. 40.

See also Jancovich's *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*

horror films of past decades to the cultural anxieties permeating American society at those times.<sup>68</sup>

While this information is important enough to form a basic backdrop for the academic study of the horror genre, it is, of course, but a (very) inexhaustive survey of some highlights. Despite its relatively maligned status,<sup>69</sup> horror still has a rich and growing body of studies around it. Much has been made, for example, on the importance of sexuality and sexual politics in horror, a topic I have purposefully avoided summarizing here, owing to the parameters of my current project.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, a complete summary of the genre and studies thereof would be the basis for a project unto itself, as the number of titles resembling “The Horror Film” grows by the year.<sup>71</sup> That

---

<sup>68</sup> *Nightmares in Red, White, & Blue*. Directed by Andrew Monument, Lux Digital Pictures, 209.

<https://tubitv.com/movies/15641/nightmares-in-red-white-and-blue?start=true>.

<sup>69</sup> Barber, Nicholas. “Is horror the most disrespected genre?” BBC, 2018.

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180614-is-horror-the-most-disrespected-genre>

<sup>70</sup> Waller argues that horror films, more than any other genre, have foregrounded the debate about female independence in American society (Cowan, *Sacred Terror*, 9).

Zillman and Weaver have argued horror reifies gender norms (95).

Relatedly, Barbara Creed’s influential *The Monstrous Feminine* (which I discuss in Chapter Two) argues that horror movies often portray the feminine as monstrous (1). And Clover’s seminal work *Men, Women, & Chainsaws* argues that slasher films push their (mostly male) audiences into cross-gender identification (51). On a related note, Walter Evans argues horror film monsters are frequently associated with either masturbation or menstruation (See Evans, “A Sexual Theory.”). Finally, there is a large body of horror films and studies thereof which directly feature or address sexual violence. See, for example, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas’s *Rape-Revenge* and Jacinda Reed’s *The New Avengers*. And there are studies of horror that specifically focus on the genre’s feminist elements: see Freeland.

<sup>71</sup> For overviews of the genre, see the following: *Horror: A Very Short Introduction* by Darryl Jones, *The Horror Film* by Gina Wisker, *Horror, the Film Reader*, edited by Mark Jancovich, *The Monster Show* by David J. Skal, *Danse Macabre* by Stephen King, and *Historical Dictionary of Horror Cinema* by Peter Hutchings.

Pivotaly, however, these studies aim (largely) for generic and historical analysis. They do not try to trace the history of horror scholarship so much as the history of horror proper. As such, I have followed the field in tracing not the history of academic studies of horror but rather in sketching the genre thematically, an approach rife with precedence (e.g., in *The Horror Film*, edited by Stephen Prince). While detailing the history of horror studies would need to be the subject of a separate study, for now I note briefly that possibly the original study of the genre came not from the academy, but from the great practitioner Ann Radcliffe, whose “On the Supernatural in Poetry” attempts to delineate terror from horror (available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230108110659/https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KMg2AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA145#v=onepage&q&f=false>). Fittingly, given Radcliffe’s gothic literature, the scholarly study of horror thereafter pertained largely to the gothic, with such studies as Dorothy Scarborough’s *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, Montague Summers’ *The Gothic Quest* and *A Gothic*

being said, horror's focus on the monster connects readily to my central concern with identify negotiation via the voice.

Film and literary scholarship has, after all, recognized the monster as an important element for character identity negotiation,<sup>72</sup> especially via the monster's status as a sort of initiation rite.<sup>73</sup> Often, then, the monster represents the part of a character's self they must defeat or reconcile to reach maturation.<sup>74</sup> And if this type of identity negotiation resembles the type we see in gothic fiction via the double, that is certainly no coincidence. Indeed, horror, like the gothic, often uses the doppelganger to investigate this type of subject matter. Thus, as I analyze identity negotiation in these texts, it will often be back to psychoanalysis and the double that I turn, for it is through these avenues that horror fictions and scholars have so often found in-roads to these complicated topics.<sup>75</sup>

### 1.1.3 Gothic Horror and Text Selections

As I hope the preceding discussions show, horror and the gothic frequently overlap to such an extent that some definitions even conflate the two. Jack/Judith Halberstam, for example, defines the gothic as “the rhetorical style and narrative structure

---

*Bibliography*, and Devendra Varma's *The Gothic Flame* forming important touch stones. The study of horror, then, has followed a similar (and often shared) trajectory with studies of the gothic.

<sup>72</sup> Twitchell, for example, argues that horror (and its monsters) sees its protagonists moving from masturbation to reproductive sexuality (66), meaning he notes how horror navigates its protagonists' sexual identities and maturation.

<sup>73</sup> See Evans, “Initiation Rites.”

<sup>74</sup> McNamara, Patrick. *Nightmares*. Westport, CN: Praeger, 2008. 22.

<sup>75</sup> This is not, however, to assert that the voice and double are the only means horror has to explore issues of identity. Indeed, Harry Benshoff argues horror monsters often resemble or reflect contemporary conceptions of queerness, making horror a genre fertile for queer readings (Benshoff 131). And Jack/Judith Halberstam has picked up on this thread to similarly argue that some horror movies (e.g., *Seed of Chucky*) depict distinctly trans conceptions of biology, breaking down the binary sexual barriers modern society sometimes still takes for granted (Halberstam, “Transbiology,” 147).

designed to produce fear and desire within the reader.”<sup>76</sup> Given my project’s disparate uses of the terms “gothic” and “horror,” I have attempted to delineate these two and, as such, disagree with Halberstam’s definition, which elides the frequent differences between these two modes of storytelling. Nevertheless, Halberstam’s definition is useful in establishing just how closely tied the two often are. And, indeed, as I shall demonstrate in this section, most my major texts are both gothic and horror.

In what follows, I will briefly categorize my major texts and justify their inclusion in this study. Inclusion, in this case, is based on the following criteria: belonging to either the gothic or horror genre (preferably both) and employing a creative or interesting use of the voice to navigate the question or problem of identity (re)formation. This last criterion is the most essential, though all the works I discuss herein fit at least two of the above criteria. That is, they will all use the voice in ways I consider fruitful for discussion in the context of identity formation and negotiation and they will all be classifiable as gothic, horror, or gothic horror. Here, I discuss my texts in the same order as my chapters will.<sup>77</sup>

Chapter Two contains two major texts: *The Exorcist* and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Egotism; or, The Bosom-Serpent” (“Egotism”). *The Exorcist* is a work of gothic horror. As a gothic work, it explores the issues of imagination and individuality, and its story (I argue) opposes rationalism.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, as a horror movie, *The Exorcist* evokes horror and terror, often being considered one of the scariest films ever made,<sup>79</sup> and it evokes disgust (e.g., via green vomit and incest). Meanwhile, “Egotism” is a gothic work

---

<sup>76</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 2.

<sup>77</sup> I will elucidate how each text uses the voice in this introduction’s final section, and I will then explore those uses in detail throughout this work’s three principal chapters.

<sup>78</sup> Marshall.

<sup>79</sup> Lervolino, Stephen. “‘The Exorcist’ named the scariest horror movie of all time.” ABC Audio, 2022, <https://digital.abcaudio.com/news/exorcist-named-scariest-horror-movie-all-time>



investigating the individual's place in society while also raising questions of possession and identity. And while the story does arguably feature a monster via the seemingly possessed Roderick Elliston, the story itself does not appear aimed to scare so much as educate, as I will discuss at length in Chapter Two.

Moving on, in Chapter Three I discuss a larger number and wider variety of major texts. I start with *Magic*, a work of gothic horror which uses the figure of the dummy (in this case, a doppelganger, a monster) to explore questions of identity as well as the dividing line between fiction and reality. *Magic* also features a couple murders, clearly designed to distress the audience and make them question whether the dummy is alive (living dummies being common horror monsters). Finally, this film introduces the element of explicit ventriloquism (via the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic) that unites the major texts of Chapter Three. The following text, *Dead of Night*, is similarly a work of gothic horror, showing one's mind (i.e., dream) presaging a dismal, repeating future, thus resembling one of Stephen King's depictions of hell.<sup>80</sup> *Dead of Night* is, therefore, both gothic and horrifying, and it clearly aims to terrify its audience with both movie monsters (the dummy, Hugo) and existential dread (in the frame narrative).

After examining these two films, I turn to Gerald Kersh's "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy," a short gothic horror story that uses the dual specters of (possibly living) dummy and (possibly) psychologically unstable ventriloquist (horror) and the haunting presence of the past (the gothic) to create dread in both the narrator and reader.<sup>81</sup> Thereafter, I consider *Pinocchio's Revenge*, a gothic horror film addressing questions of

---

<sup>80</sup> King, Stephen. "That Feeling, You Can Only Say What It Is in French." In *Everything's Eventual*, Scribner, 1998.

<sup>81</sup> Noel Carroll argues such mirroring of character and audience emotions is central to the horror genre (17).

imagination and the individual while playing its monster(s)<sup>82</sup> for dread and terror. Said dread and terror are perhaps most evident in two facets of this film: first in the series of violent “accidents” befalling those around the protagonist’s family and, second, in the culminating scene where it appears the living puppet is trying to murder the protagonist.

From *Pinocchio’s Revenge*, I pivot to perhaps the most famous evil movie doll, Chucky, and his eponymous television series, the first episode of which is a work of gothic horror centering on questions of the individual and the figure of a murderous, living doll. The episode also hinges on questions of identity and features such gothic tropes as the double, the dark, and an impending sense of doom.<sup>83</sup> And, finally, I also refer, somewhat briefly, to *Child’s Play* (2019), a reboot of the *Child’s Play* franchise of which Chucky is the main antagonist. *Child’s Play* (2019) is a horror film revolving around the spectacle of horrific violence enacted by an artificial intelligence run amok.

Afterward, in Chapter Four, I consider four major texts, Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven,” the American slasher films *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *Scream*, and the Italian Giallo classic *Suspiria*. “The Raven” is a work of gothic horror, raising questions about the imagination and the individual while also evoking imagery of devils and demons. *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* is likewise a work of gothic horror, including such gothic tropes as the (violent) eruption of the past into the present and such horror tropes as the serial killer and the spectacle of horrific violence played to distress the characters and audience.<sup>84</sup> Following in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*’s footsteps, *Scream* is also a work of gothic horror, and for

---

<sup>82</sup> In Chapter Three, I discuss how the identity of the monster in *Pinocchio’s Revenge* is subject to debate since it has multiple possible identities.

<sup>83</sup> The *Chucky* series employs gothic tropes to varying degrees throughout the two seasons it has of this writing. For brevity’s sake, I only examine the series’ first episode in this work.

<sup>84</sup> Note, for example, Alice’s screams of terror upon finding Bill dead and impaled with arrows.

much the same reasons as its predecessor.<sup>85</sup> And, finally, *Suspiria* is also a gothic horror film, focusing as it does on the line between fiction and reality, the individual, and magic (as opposed to rationality) and featuring as it does graphic violence, including multiple murder scenes, and a serial killer.<sup>86</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Ventriloquism

In each of my dissertation's three body chapters, I invoke ventriloquism, regarding it as a useful lens through which to read multiple works of gothic horror. In what is perhaps the most definitive work on ventriloquism to date, Steven Connor defines the act as the "long-lived practice of making voices appear to issue from elsewhere than their source."<sup>87</sup> The most common form of ventriloquism today is that of the ventriloquist and their dummy, in which the ventriloquist throws their voice to make it appear the dummy is speaking when, in fact, said dummy is inanimate. Historically speaking, however, the term "ventriloquism" has also referred to a supernatural being speaking through a possessed human.<sup>88</sup>

And so, my dissertation follows Connor's foundational work by exploring his three articulations of the ventriloquial voice in three chapters: in Chapter Two the doubled voice of the possessed body (i.e., when one being speaks through the body of another), in Chapter Three the doubled voice of the ventriloquial performance (as we typically see now in ventriloquist acts via the ventriloquist and their dummy), and in

---

<sup>85</sup> For an argument about *Scream*'s gothic nature, see Kendall Phillips' *Dark Directions*.

<sup>86</sup> *Suspiria*'s cinematographer refers to the film as a "gothic fairytale" (Heller-Nicholas, *Suspiria*, 84). Heller-Nicholas also argues that: "Every facet of *Suspiria* is laced with a knowing self-awareness that not only shuns but also aggressively mocks any attempt at realism" (14).

<sup>87</sup> Connor, Steven. *Dumbstruck—A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2000. 13-14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

Chapter Four the dislocated or acousmatic<sup>89</sup> voice (a voice whose origins are difficult to pin point).<sup>90</sup> This organization has the added benefit of allowing me to move from the corporeal to the increasingly abstract, thereby revealing how the voice's destabilizing and identity-splitting qualities are not unique to embodied manifestations of it. My work, further, departs from Connor's by focusing on the gothic and horror, investigating the ventriloquial voice's different manifestations in these types of works. To get a sense of the genres' longevity as well as the ventriloquial voice's flexibility as a device, I analyze both literary and cinematic works, with my focus on the former coming from 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature and my focus on the latter coming from Western horror films.<sup>91</sup>

#### 1.1.5 The Voice

Thus far, though I have used the phrase "ventriloquial voice," I have left "voice" itself undefined. And though the voice may appear quotidian at first blush, the philosophical study of it reveals surprising richness and complexity in a phenomenon I believe we too often take for granted. Arguably the most important work on this phenomenon to date is Slovenian philosopher and film critic Mladen Dolar's ironically titled *A Voice and Nothing More*. Indeed, luminaries such as Frederic Jameson and Dolar's Slovenian colleague Slavoj Žižek have both praised the work, and Kenneth

---

<sup>89</sup> Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema*. Translated by Caludia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. 18.

Chion traces the history of the term "acousmatic," attributing its inception to the teachings of Pythagoras, who would teach his students from behind a curtain (as if he were an Ancient Greek Wizard of Oz) at the early stages of their studies (18-19).

<sup>90</sup> Connor 45, 103, & 177.

<sup>91</sup> While I do discuss one Italian film, *Suspria*, I do so because it offers a useful comparison to its American Slasher film counterparts while also having enough generic similarities with them to warrant the juxtaposition. Overall, however, my dissertation draws primarily from American sources, using sources from outside The United States when said sources offer useful comparisons and therefore warrant discussion. In one such case, that of *Dead of Night*, while the film is British, it is also one of the most famous and noteworthy evil dummy movies, meaning I would be remiss to not discuss it in this work, particularly in my chapter on evil dummy films.

Reinhard's blurb on the book's back cover declares it "the definitive book on the topic."<sup>92</sup>

As this praise may suggest, Dolar's taxonomy of the voice is rich and nuanced. He

writes:

"I will try to argue that apart from those two widespread uses of the voice—the voice as the vehicle for meaning; the voice as the source of aesthetic admiration—there is a third level: an object voice which does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify in a object of fetish reverence, but an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation."<sup>93</sup>

Here, Dolar highlights a distinction between the voice and language, arguing they are irreducible to one another. This move is well-supported in the literature, as seminal film scholar Rick Altman likewise distinguishes language from voice.<sup>94</sup> And Christian Metz argues similarly when he asserts that language drowns out other sounds.<sup>95</sup>

We can connect two of Dolar's three delineations of the voice to two common phenomena: "vehicle for meaning" to language and "aesthetic admiration" to vocal performance (e.g., singing).<sup>96</sup> Dolar, then, is acknowledging both communication and aesthetics as key components of the voice, but he devotes substantial time and effort to exploring the so-called "object voice," that ineffable part of the voice which does not neatly reduce to the two aforementioned qualities.<sup>97</sup> We might describe this "object

---

<sup>92</sup> Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice And Nothing More*. The MIT Press. Short Circuits, 2006. Back Cover. Print.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>94</sup> When discussing our Western cultural perception of sound, Altman writes: "Among sounds, language clearly reigns supreme" (68).

<sup>95</sup> Metz, Christian. "Aural Objects." Translated by Georgia Gurrieri. *Yale French Studies*. 60, 1980, 24. Michel Chion similarly attempts to separate the voice from language in his book *The Voice in Cinema* (1), even as he focuses on the "speaking voice" (ix). I am, therefore, departing from the work of other scholars in this field by honing in on the spoken word. And I have done so because it allows my work greater focus and greater attention to its key texts than it would have were I to broaden the study's parameters. This is not, however, to claim that said broadening would be unfruitful.

<sup>96</sup> Dolar 4.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

voice”<sup>98</sup> as the voice apart from communication (the conveyance of meaning) and apart from focus on its pleasing qualities (or lack thereof); we might describe it, therefore, as the mechanical construction of a binding, sonic force which we, as a species, often reduce to signification or pleasure.

And so, the voice is more than language, even as language forms an important component of the voice’s usage. It is essential, therefore, for me to state explicitly that I am not herein endeavoring to define the voice contrariwise to how these influential thinkers have done. While I focus largely on the voice as language, on the voice as the spoken word, I am doing so as a means of honing my project’s scope rather than as an ideological statement meant to reduce the voice to the word.

In attempting to delineate different manifestations of the ventriloquial voice, I have, by necessity, focused on the voice when it includes words and at least appears intended to convey some linguistic meaning. The ventriloquial voice, after all, is treated largely as a means of signification in the texts I consider. As such, hereafter when I use the term “voice” I am referring to “the voice as the vehicle for meaning,”<sup>99</sup> and I am acknowledging now as an important caveat that other (well merited) uses of the term exist. Future studies on the topic could very well consider non-linguistic uses of the voice (as well as non-ventriloquial uses of the voice) in gothic horror.

I have chosen to focus primarily on the voice’s communicative role because this role puts the voice front and center in identity negotiation. Awash in sound waves ever

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

since our time in the womb,<sup>100</sup> we embrace our voice as a central pillar of our identity.<sup>101</sup> Our voice, after all, is unique to us, “like a fingerprint” as Dolar puts it.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, as the “vehicle for meaning,” the voice is a natural tool for one to use when renegotiating one’s sense of identity.<sup>103</sup> After all, because the self (as we shall see) is constructed vis-à-vis the Other,<sup>104</sup> communication is essential for identity (re)negotiation.<sup>105</sup> And the voice, as the personalized tool of communication rooted to our very sense of self, is therefore an integral tool for identity formation, particularly in the voice’s role in communication. As a result, in this project, I focus on the communicative voice, since it is the negotiation of identities via conversation (the doubled and/or disembodied voice) upon which I dwell. Such negotiation is frequent enough in gothic horror texts (e.g., via the doppelganger) to warrant sustained attention.

As I mentioned already, each of my key texts includes some use of the (ventriloquial and/or doubled) voice that I consider fruitful for consideration. Here, then, I briefly preview my texts to justify their inclusion in this work. In Chapter Two, both *The Exorcist* and “Egotism” use the ventriloquial voice to signal the nature of their possession narratives, meaning, as I argue, highlighting the voice in these texts provides a useful analytical in-road to them. In Chapter Three, all the major texts feature the ventriloquial voice via the ventriloquist-dummy performance.

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.22.

This is not to assert, however, that everyone likes the sound of their own voice.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>104</sup> Dolar, for example, brings up this idea when noting the importance of difference to identity (17).

<sup>105</sup> That is, one can only define one’s sense of self by contrasting it with an Other. And that contrast occurs, often, through conversation. This is the dynamic of the doubled voice, my central scholarly focus.

Focusing on the voice, then, is a natural (though, I point out, under-utilized) analytical method for understanding these works. Finally, in Chapter Four, I argue Poe's famous poem "The Raven" can be usefully read as a ventriloquial text, and I connect "The Raven" to the American Slasher film by demonstrating their shared interest in evoking what Connor deems "the vocalic uncanny."<sup>106</sup> That is, the texts I treat in Chapter Four are united in their use of the voice to undermine audience comfort as well as stable connections between the voice and individual identities.

#### 1.1.6 Textual Interventions

Before getting into the bulk of my argument, I would like to delineate here the interventions I offer into the scholarship of the texts I consider as my case studies. In Chapter Two, I argue focusing on the voice allows us to highlight the culturally conservative politics undergirding *The Exorcist*. These politics have, I show, often been overlooked in the existing scholarship around this film. Moreover, focusing on the voice allows us to elucidate this challenging text by understanding why *The Exorcist* often confuses audiences and fails to adequately deliver its culturally conservative message, a message we can discern by focusing on the voice's role in the text.

Next in Chapter Two, I argue focusing on the voice when analyzing Hawthorne's "Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent" allows us to undertake a textual analysis of this understudied story from the seminal author. Focusing on the voice furthermore reveals the story's status as a possession narrative, an aspect the existing scholarship leaves unexplored, having focused, as it does, on the story's folkloric origins. Finally, recognizing "Egotism" as a possession narrative further showcases Hawthorne's view of

---

<sup>106</sup> Connor 412.



sanctimony, a concern running throughout his opus, meaning this reading of this understudied story helps us gain a deeper understanding of one of Hawthorne's central topics.

After exploring these two texts, I move into the evil dummy narrative. First in Chapter Three, I build on existing analyses of *Magic* as a text about identity by pointing out how the resulting dialectic between ventriloquist and dummy becomes the text's central mechanism for exploring identity formation, a fact the existing scholarship hints at but does not explore. Then, I analyze *Dead of Night*, showing how the spirality of the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic in fact reflects the spirality of the film itself, thereby showing how the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic is integral to *Dead of Night* and, furthermore, how that spirality reflects the film's place in British history, a fact the existing scholarship leaves underexplored by, namely, not considering the film's relationship to the world wars.

Third, I consider Kersh's short story "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy," about which I offer two interventions: first that the story deserves more scholarly attention than it has received because of, second, its thematic importance in showing the role one's family plays in one's process of identity formation, an important facet running throughout these ventriloquist-dummy texts but that remains ripe for sustained exploration.

After "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy," I discuss *Pinocchio's Revenge*, which, I argue, deserves further scholarly attention and which also offers the atypical dynamic of exploring queer identity formation via ventriloquism and of showing delusion's role in selfhood formation. Finally in Chapter Three, I examine *Chucky* and

the role of language itself in helping form human identities, an important idea occurring throughout these texts but seldom studied and rarely as explicit as *Chucky* (and its associated *Child's Play* 2019) renders it.

Following Chapter Three, I analyze two last texts in Chapter Four. First, I argue focusing on the ventriloquial voice in “The Raven” helps us answer multiple questions in Poe studies (insofar as the questions are answerable), helps us see Poe’s deliberate ambiguity, and helps us recognize Poe’s absurdist take on the topic of meaning. Finally, I argue the voice provides an uncanny power to the slasher film (i.e., *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, *Scream*, and *Suspiria*), a power the current scholarship elides.

## CHAPTER 2. VOX EX MACHINA: DOUBLED VOICES IN THE POSSESSION NARRATIVE

### 2.1 Introduction

To begin my discussion proper of the disembodied voice in gothic horror, in this first chapter I will start with its most corporeal manifestation that I will consider: that of two beings (and, consequently, two voices) inhabiting the same body. These beings (voices and bodies) are those of the possession narrative.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, I begin this chapter with perhaps the quintessential possession story, *The Exorcist*. Then, however, as part of my agenda of connecting the modern horror film with the 19<sup>th</sup> century American gothic, I move, in part two, to considering Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent." These texts, I argue, make for an unusual but thematically rich pairing.

Before that, though, in part one I argue *The Exorcist* is a ventriloquial text (an important point current scholarship overlooks) and that, by focusing on the voice and ventriloquism in it, we can more readily discern the culturally conservative Catholic politics that I believe are integral to the movie. And from there I build toward a queer reading of *The Exorcist* by exploring how the voice not only reveals the film's political underpinnings but also helps us understand why so many have misread the film's meaning.

Then, in part two, I aver "Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent" is a possession narrative featuring the ventriloquial voice. After establishing the rationale for such a reading of Hawthorne's story, I consider that reading's implications. There, I use the voice to trace Hawthorne's concerns with history and the individual's interactions with

---

<sup>107</sup> Though the possession narrative is perhaps most popularly connected with horror, I have discussed my key texts' gothic elements in the introduction.

the community, both of which, I argue, Hawthorne uses the possession narrative (and its doubled voice) to explore. In looking at these subjects, I also consider the story's religious and serpentine imagery. That is, I contend Hawthorne uses the doubled voice of "Egotism"'s possession narrative to deride sanctimony and relitigate the Fall narrative by showing that humanity's salvation lies in community, not the sort of interiority the possession narrative entails.

And so, I thereby tie "Egotism" to *The Exorcist*, showing how the two, despite their apparent differences, share a number of striking similarities and preoccupations. Both works, I argue, rely on the doubled voice to negotiate the place of the individual in an historicized present, presents these two writers (Hawthorne and Blatty) view very differently. Whereas Hawthorne attempts to tie the individual back to his or her community, thus distributing political power, Blatty seeks to concentrate that same power in the divine. Thus, putting these two works in conversation with one another not only reveals their otherwise unilluminated similarities (consequently opening doors for us to explore) and suits the doubled voice (by putting the 19<sup>th</sup> century in conversation with the 20<sup>th</sup>), but also allows us to see how the doubled voice can play both sides of the political spectrum, becoming for Hawthorne a tool for community building and for Blatty a tool for theological moralizing. This comparison, moreover, allows us a more encompassing understanding of how the doubled voice interrogates the place of the self in history.

## 2.2 Mocking Possession: Ventriloquism and Cultural Conservatism in *The Exorcist*

### 2.2.1 Ventriloquizing the Past: History and Sex in *The Exorcist*

Released in 1973, William Friedkin's Oscar-winning film *The Exorcist* rapidly cemented its place in Western culture, becoming one of the most renowned and influential horror films in history.<sup>108</sup> The movie is based on a screenplay by American writer William Peter Blatty, who adapted the story from his own novel of the same title. Both stories, film and novel, follow a similar plot structure.

*The Exorcist* tells two stories which first run parallel but later entwine. One story is that of Father Damien Karras, the other that of actress Chris MacNeil and her pre-teen daughter Regan (Linda Blair). A trained psychiatrist, Father Karras' faith is waning, as is his ability to care for his elderly mother, who dies during the film. Meanwhile, Chris is a recent divorcee temporarily living in Georgetown while shooting her latest movie, Regan being along for the ride. Together, they live in a rented house with Regan's nanny, Sharon, and their servants.

While Karras struggles with his faith and feelings of guilt over his mother's death, Regan and Chris struggle with Regan's escalating personal problems. Beginning innocuously enough with Regan making an imaginary friend, "Captain Howdy," her pathology worsens. She grows violent and abnormally strong then (apparently) murders, off-screen, Burke, the director of Chris's film.

Believing Regan ill, Chris takes her to the hospital, where the doctors subject her to a battery of (ultimately fruitless) tests. As a last resort, one of the doctors suggests an

---

<sup>108</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will make occasional references to *The Exorcist* film's extra-textual elements, including its eponymous novel. My argument and analysis will, however, focus on the film. Thus, unless otherwise noted, I will use "*The Exorcist*" hereafter to refer to the movie.

exorcism to Chris, speculating the ritual might have a placebo effect upon Regan and thereby rectify a psychosomatic disorder from which he postulates she might be suffering. And, as if on cue, Regan's condition becomes yet worse, as she begins acting out sexually and, in an iconic scene, spins her head 180 degrees and taunts Chris with the voice of Burke, the dead director.

Out of options, a distraught Chris contacts Karras. And, though initially skeptical, Karras asks the church permission to perform an exorcism. The church approves and assigns an experienced exorcist, Father Lankester Merrin, to lead the ceremony. Merrin, unlike Karras, operates under no uncertainty about Regan's condition, and immediately concludes she is possessed. So, the two priests perform the exorcism, experiencing an array of supernatural phenomena in the process. After Karras's composure breaks and Merrin attempts to finish the ritual himself, the older priest dies off-screen.

Desperate, Karras demands the demon (Pazuzu) possess him instead of Regan, whereupon Karras's eyes turn green and he begins struggling with himself before leaping out Regan's bedroom window. Seemingly freed, Regan begins crying for her mom in her own voice. Meanwhile, outside the MacNeil home, Karras lies dying at the bottom of the same stairs where Burke's body was found. Just before he passes, his fellow clergyman, Father Dyer, arrives and administers last rites to Karras. Sometime later, Chris and Regan are moving away from Georgetown when Father Dyer visits. Seeing his priest's collar, the recovered Regan kisses him on the cheek.

It is my central contention here that, by understanding *The Exorcist* as a ventriloquial text, we can foreground the voice's role in the movie and thereby understand the story's political goal of advancing Catholic cultural conservatism.

Likewise, foregrounding the role the voice plays in the story allows us to examine how lay viewers and scholars alike have misinterpreted this element of the film. And focusing on the voice in *The Exorcist* enables us to analyze how and why the film does not quite succeed in its political agenda. On this last note, I argue Blatty (likely inadvertently) queers his film and that, in doing so, he undermines his avowed and manifest sociopolitical ideology. This undermining, moreover, makes *The Exorcist* the challenging, oft-misinterpreted text that it is. Finally, centering our analysis of the text on the voice helps us showcase hitherto overlooked elements in this important film while also re-contextualizing the important role of sexuality in the movie.<sup>109</sup>

Scholarship of *The Exorcist* has long since established sexuality's integral role to the narrative. Noted gothic scholar Nick Groom writes that *The Exorcist* represents female sexuality as savage, and Gina Wisker argues the film centers on female puberty and patriarchal attempts at controlling female sexuality.<sup>110</sup> Likewise, Sara Williams reads the movie as evoking paternal incest,<sup>111</sup> and influential scholar Barbara Creed similarly argues the film revolves around repressed longing for maternal incest.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> As we shall see, discussions of sexuality have dominated much of the discourse around this film. These discussions are well-warranted (and, indeed, I will examine the film's sexual elements as well) but sometimes draw attention away from other worthwhile, even essential, elements of this provocative film.

<sup>110</sup> Groom 76;  
Wisker 132.

<sup>111</sup> Cowan, Douglas E. *The Forbidden Body: Sex, Horror, and the Religious Imagination*. New York: New York University Press, 2022. Print. 30.

<sup>112</sup> Creed argues that Regan's repressed incestuous desires for her single mother, Chris, manifest in the possession-like symptoms Regan portrays, that the animating force or "demon" is Regan's rebellious Id. To make this case, though, Creed rests her argument, I aver, on inadequate foundation. She contends the "entity" possessing Regan is not male but female. The problem is that the possessing entity is, in fact, the male being Pazuzu, who appears twice within the film. Creed further writes: "Without a father or a father-figure present, Regan and her mother live together, almost like lovers" (40). Yet, the fact is that a pre-teen daughter living alone with her single mother need not carry any sexual connotations. The fact is also that Creed elides Sharon's presence in the text. Most the time, at least, Chris and Regan are not alone; Chris has multiple employees around to help her and look after Regan.

The issue here is not that sexuality lacks an important role in the film. Rather, the issue is that a second vein rich for analysis (the voice) intertwines with the vein of sexuality and yet remains underexplored. These two veins are, I argue, inseparable, and by combining our understanding of them (i.e., analyzing sexuality through the voice), we become best able to make sense of this challenging text and thereby open up a wide array of new scholarly possibilities with an influential film. Specifically, intertwining these two textual elements reveals the film's approach to the patriarchy.

As aforementioned, to understand the voice's central role in *The Exorcist*, we should think of the film as a ventriloquial text. Here, the reader may object that *The Exorcist* does not feature ventriloquism. And yet, scholarship has long noted the association between possession and ventriloquism as we know it today. In his seminal work on ventriloquism, Steven Connor observes at length the historical alignment of these two phenomena.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, while our modern conception of ventriloquism focuses almost entirely on the performer-dummy dynamic, this dynamic is a relatively recent development in ventriloquism's extensive history.<sup>114</sup>

And so, reading *The Exorcist* as a ventriloquial story is possible irrespective of dummies. Nevertheless, we can still perceive the movie as ventriloquial even if we stick to this limited definition. In the film, the demon speaks through Regan, operating her body (and violating it) as if she were a ventriloquist's dummy. Rather than inserting a hand and then manipulating the dummy's body to cast one's own voice, though, Pazuzu

---

<sup>113</sup> Connor 131.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid 249.



inserts his essence and manipulates Regan's body. And he does so to cast and mimic a variety of voices, a performance certainly like that of the modern ventriloquist's.

That performance, moreover, parallels that of Pazuzu's possessing Regan in *The Exorcist* in yet more ways. As will become essential to my later analysis, the male Pazuzu using the female Regan as a puppet reflects the tendency of dummies to be feminized, ventriloquists masculinized.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, Rick Altman has argued that dubbing in films is a ventriloquial act, meaning that dubbing the possessed Regan's voice over that of actress Linda Blair's own voice makes this film ventriloquial once again.<sup>116</sup> In short, while I have taken pains to justify my assertion about *The Exorcist's* being a ventriloquial text, the connection between the two is, in fact, overdetermined.

Considering *The Exorcist* as consequently ventriloquial, we see the voice's central role in the film. After all, what is a ventriloquial performance but a play of sound, an art of the voice? Thus, once we accept ventriloquism's multifarious role in the movie, we simultaneously foreground the voice. And that movement opens an array of possibilities for interpreting this challenging and seminal film.

The first of these avenues is that of the self. Connor argues the voice defines the self, and Davies likewise connects voice and self.<sup>117</sup> Thus, foregrounding the voice in our assessment of *The Exorcist* is one method by which we can recognize the work's preoccupation with the notion of selfhood and, more pressingly, the permeability of

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid 328;

Davies, Helen. *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print. 8.

<sup>116</sup> Pramaggiore, Maria. "Queer from the Horse's Mouth: Francis and Mr. Ed as Mid-Century Man Whisperers." In *Media Ventriloquism: How Audiovisual Technologies Transform the Voice-Body Relationship*, edited by Baron, et al., Oxford University Press, 2021. 62.

<sup>117</sup> Connor 7;  
Davies 43.

selfhood. Indeed, Davies notes that the voice renders the self permeable, an observation Connor elaborates upon by pointing out how sound is unrelenting.<sup>118</sup>

Consider, for instance, how, unlike the eyes or even the mouth, the ears lack a dedicated mechanism for closing. The closest we can get is sticking our fingers in our ears to lock out unwanted sounds. So, hearing is less well-regulated than sight and taste. It is, therefore, a sense that makes us open to the world, enterable from the outside at all times unless we make a conscious, concerted effort to preclude that possibility. And yet, even that attempt at shutting out sound, at cancelling this chaotic sense run amok, does not actually stop sound. Instead, it limits it. Even now, my finger pressed into my ear canal, barring its passage, I can hear a faint humming, the inward rush of air around the digit lodged futilely in front of my eardrum.

Thus, sound persists like a universal case of tinnitus. And, in *The Exorcist*, sound renders Regan's self porous and gives Pazuzu his entrance. King and Backer have observed how the supernatural events in the movie begin with the sound of rats in the attic.<sup>119</sup> Those faint noises, then, are the first step in Pazuzu's possession of Regan. And the second step likewise comes from sound, albeit from Regan this time. Often in horror movies, protagonists face the monster only after they have violated some cultural edict.<sup>120</sup> Within the logic of a horror film, characters have to do something wrong before they can

---

<sup>118</sup> Davies 44;  
Connor 17.

<sup>119</sup> King, *Danse Macabre*, 422;  
Backer, Ron. *Classic Horror Films and the Literature That Inspired Them*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015. 327.

<sup>120</sup> Koven, "The Terror Tale," 6.

be punished.<sup>121</sup> Regan's violation comes when she uses a Ouija board to speak with her imaginary friend, "Captain Howdy." As Perez-de-Luque argues, characters in horror often complete the transgression necessary to unleash the monster when they move downward into a subterranean space.<sup>122</sup>

Regan completes that movement when she and her mother play with the Ouija board downstairs. Here, Regan invokes Captain Howdy, asking him questions (or, at least, pretending to) and then intimating his answers to her mother. And so, Regan, in fact, positions herself as the intermediary between an invisible, speaking entity, and Chris, a role Pazuzu later forces her to continue occupying. Technically, the film never confirms the heard-but-not-seen rats were connected to the possession, that they were Pazuzu's work. Yet, since Karl, the house servant, lays traps and catches no rats, and since Western culture associates rats with virulence and evil, and since the rats are never found, and since they show up through sound just as Pazuzu does when he finally begins speaking through Regan, we can easily draw a connection between the rodents and the demon.

Similarly, the film never confirms whether Captain Howdy is the entity who later possesses Regan. But, given how popular culture connects Ouija boards to the occult, the leap here from imaginary friend to demon is a short one, indeed. Ergo, Regan's possession escalates via the proximity of sound and the gradual displacement of Regan's

---

<sup>121</sup> Here, we should be careful to note that "wrong" in horror often has a very wide-reaching definition and that "punishments" in horror tend to be very draconian. We also should also note that this formula is not a cultural universal, being specifically applicable to American horror.

<sup>122</sup> Pérez de Luque, Juan L. "Descending Spirits: Ideological Implications of the Vertical Movements in Poe and Lovecraft." In *The Lovecraftian Poe: Essays on Influence, Reception, and Transformation*, edited by Sean Moreland. Lehigh University Press, 2017. 92.

own voice.<sup>123</sup> First the sounds are in the attic. Then they are in the cellar, and Regan parrots a voice only she (ostensibly) hears. Later, Regan begins speaking in voices other than her own. Far from external noises, then, the possession becomes an internalized conflict. Sound travels from without only to then reverberate from within like an echo across the space of the MacNeil house, or, more significantly, the space of Regan's body.

And it is here we reencounter sexuality in the film. When Pazuzu possesses Regan, he takes over her body, an act all too uncomfortably similar to the real-life act of sexual assault. The body's violability is forefront in works about sexual violence, and sexual violence certainly highlights the body's vulnerability to intrusion. It is easy, ergo, to construe the possession as inherently sexualized. Indeed, we should further observe that the historical figure of Pazuzu had a serpent for a penis, the zoomorphized appendage showcasing the danger of the demon's sexuality.

These sexual elements I have noted are, furthermore, in accordance with ventriloquism. Ventriloquism is, of course, a performance, and Kaja Silverman has established how female sexuality is typically spoken in a way male sexuality is not.<sup>124</sup> And so, sexuality and the voice travel hand-in-hand in *The Exorcist*. To see how, let us look at the film's most incestuous scene. In this disturbing moment of cinematic spectacle, the possessed Regan forcibly masturbates with a crucifix, repeating this grotesque command: "Let Jesus fuck you."<sup>125</sup> That the possessed Regan has to order

---

<sup>123</sup> Richard Hand has pointed out how sound in horror, especially radio horror, has an unavoidable immediacy that images often lack (Hand 5-6).

<sup>124</sup> Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics*. Oxford University Press, 1983. 189. Silverman supports her perspicacious observation by pointing to the "numerous discourses" that have emerged in Western culture around female sexuality and the female body (189). Female sexuality and the female body, then, remains subject to sustained cultural and legal litigation.

<sup>125</sup> *The Exorcist*. Directed by William Friedkin, performance by Linda Blair, Warner Bros, 1973.

(apparently) herself to allow the (apparent) masturbation to continue suggests two minds occupy Regan's body. The repeated exhortation further makes the sexual element spoken. Likewise, in this same scene, the possessed Regan speaks their sexuality when they grab Chris and attempt to force her to perform oral sex, this time replacing the previous demand with: "Lick me."<sup>126</sup>

This scene plays the pronoun game. Note how "Let Jesus fuck you" is in the second person.<sup>127</sup> One party, Pazuzu, is ordering another, Regan, to commit sacrilege while sexually assaulting them. And yet, the second command, "Lick me," shifts to the first person.<sup>128</sup> Whereas the first order seems to travel from Pazuzu toward Regan, the second appears to travel from Regan toward Chris. But the case is not so clear cut. As my use of the singular "they" above foreshadowed, it becomes rather difficult to parse identities when two very different beings occupy the same ontological space. Where Pazuzu ends and Regan begins is hard to determine.

Pivotaly, though, in both instances, sexuality is performative and taboo. Penetrating oneself or another with a crucifix is surely sacrilegious, and trying to force someone to commit incest is to violate a number of religious and legal injunctions. But doing so through the spoken word is to make a show of both acts. Because of the aforementioned pronoun game, parsing Pazuzu from Regan is difficult if not impossible in this scene. Since they are so intertwined, however, and since the sexual behavior is so blatantly exhibitionist, a prudent, if unintuitive, reading would be to cast this scene in terms of the voice. The sexual acts are announced. And that fact may seem unimportant

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

at first glance. After all, it seems bizarre to focus on such a banal element when such strikingly immoral acts are on display. But that may be the point.

The immoral acts distract us, the audience, from the most salient elements, the motives behind the acts rather than the shocking acts themselves. As a demon, Pazuzu is prone to the profane. This scene, then, is one of him flaunting as many social taboos as he can in as short a time as possible. Not only does he defile the holy symbol of Christianity, but he also commits two acts of sexual assault, including the disturbing act with his victim's mother. Not only is the scene incestuous, but it is also homosexually incestuous, pederastically incestuous, and non-consensually incestuous since this is a pre-teen girl trying to physically force her mother into performing cunnilingus.<sup>129</sup> All this is to say that, in the broader context of the film, sexuality seems a means to an end in a broader way than existing scholarship allows. *The Exorcist* is less making a point about sexuality than it is using sexuality to make a point about the self, a point it makes via performative immorality.

Indeed, in that same scene, Pazuzu gives us some insight into this aspect of his agenda. In one of the film's most iconic moments, the possessed Regan's head spins around 180 degrees and then ventriloquizes Burke's voice: "Do you know what she did, your cunting daughter?"<sup>130</sup> And what did Chris's "daughter" do?<sup>131</sup> Well, recall how Burke died after Sharon left him alone in the house with Regan. Detective Kinderman

---

<sup>129</sup> Here, I list homosexuality alongside pederasty and rape not to conflate the three acts in reality but, instead, to note how, to a culturally conservative audience, homosexuality would, like pederasty and rape, likely be considered taboo. While I make this observation, however, I do not consider homosexuality at all similar to the other two acts. Indeed, my argument will later observe the text's queer themes and how the culturally conservative Batty likely did not intend such themes.

<sup>130</sup> *The Exorcist*.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

later points out that, according to the medical examiner, falling out Regan's window and down the stairs could not have turned Burke's head all the way around. Collate this fact with how Burke had to have fallen from Regan's window according to Kinderman and with the possessed Regan's abnormal strength, and the evidence strongly suggests the possessed Regan murdered Burke by forcibly twisting his head around. Adding further evidence is how the possessed Regan similarly spins their own head before uttering the line above. In that moment, then, the possessed Regan mocks their victim.

This is Pazuzu forcing Regan to embody her trauma. Throughout the film, there is a lingering question: why was Burke Dennings in Regan's room? The implication of sexual misconduct lurks beneath the film's murky surface. There is, of course, no concrete evidence one way or the other. But the very suggestion that Burke may have tried to molest Regan helps us to understand why Pazuzu's forcing Regan's body to speak with Burke's voice would be a rather traumatic event for Regan.

Not only would she have lost her agency, but her assailant would also be forcing her to use her other assailant's voice. Of course, even if Burke did not assault Regan, the fact remains that Pazuzu contorts Regan's body beyond the limits of human anatomy and, in doing so, forces her to relive the moment her body murdered a man. The question, then, is whether Regan's trauma is multifold. Regardless of the answer to that question, though, the point remains that Pazuzu forces Regan to embody, and therefore relive, her trauma, including the moment when her body became a murder weapon.

And this embodiment of trauma is an assault on Regan's very notion of self. Renowned trauma scholar Judith Herman argues that childhood trauma can break down barriers within the self (e.g., between body and mind or reality and mind) and even lead

to the creation of “A Double Self.”<sup>132</sup> Certainly, it is tempting, then, to interpret *The Exorcist* as Creed and others have done, as a narrative about a split mind. Put another way, it is tempting to psychologize our readings of *The Exorcist*. And, to be clear, I do believe there is and remains fertile ground for such readings of the film. But psychological assessments of *The Exorcist* tend to miss the forest for the trees. That is, they emphasize elements the text downplays and, in the process, overlook some of the most essential elements of the narrative, so much so they admit how the text confounds them.<sup>133</sup>

To cut to the chase: *The Exorcist* is a religious text, advancing a culturally conservative, Catholic position. Accordingly, the text deemphasizes psychological elements in favor of emphasizing religious elements. To read the text psychologically, therefore, is to risk reading against the grain. And while counter-intuitive readings or readings against authorial intention are valuable, such readings dominate the popular and critical conversations about *The Exorcist*, such that the more established textual and extra-textual elements end up receiving less attention than they merit.

Namely, *The Exorcist* is a ventriloquial text about the construction of the self in history. Indeed, extant scholarship of the film has long acknowledged how the movie’s narrative divides itself between two competing camps: the scientific on the one hand, the supernatural on the other. Clover, for instance, points out that Father Karras finds his inner priest (that is, his pious self) at odds with his inner psychiatrist (that is, his rational

---

<sup>132</sup> Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*. BasicBooks, 1992. 96 & 103.

<sup>133</sup> Clover calls the film almost incoherent (87), and King and Backer both admit to finding the film’s prologue, which I will soon argue is essential to reading the film, “puzzling” (King 422; Backer 331).



self).<sup>134</sup> Karras's self is divided, and the tormented priest's character arc therefore follows his attempts at resolving this internal division, finding a way to unite these two parts of his self or to abandon one in favor of the other. Likewise, Regan finds herself divided, not just between her Id and ego as in Creed's conception,<sup>135</sup> but, rather, between herself, the modern girl, and her attacker, the ancient, supernatural being possessing her. Thus, the central conflicts of *The Exorcist* are not merely between science and religion but also between the present and the past.

Notably, the movie opens with an archaeological dig, an investigation into the past. And it is here that Father Merrin encounters the statue of Pazuzu that is pivotal to the film's narrative. In other words, the movie starts with a glimpse of the past before cutting to 1970s Georgetown. Here, we should observe that film theorists like Sergei Eisenstein have argued the juxtaposition of shots creates meaning for the viewer through the conflict between thesis and antithesis.<sup>136</sup> In this moment, said conflict is between the past and its attendant superstitions and the present and its corresponding reliance on rationality.

The collision of these two, ergo, creates meaning for the viewer in Eisenstein's theory.<sup>137</sup> That meaning, moreover, is that of the present, when the colliding forces of then and now find their battleground in and across Regan's body. After all, Regan finds herself possessed by a supernatural being (that remnant of the past) and prodded by

---

<sup>134</sup> Clover 87.

<sup>135</sup> My argument does not necessitate accepting or rejecting Creed's view of Regan's self-division.

<sup>136</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei. "Beyond the Shot." In *Film Theory & Discussion*. 8th edition, edited by Leo Braudy and Mashall Cohen, Oxford University Press, 2016. 15.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

scientists (those arbiters of the present and, presumably, future). The conflict between these forces, therefore, has as its stake the negotiation of the future.

*The Exorcist* privileges the voice and uses it to complicate notions of selfhood, and does this, partially, by putting the past and present in contentious dialogue with one another. Like sexuality, history in *The Exorcist* is inevitably spoken. The division between past and present in the movie, moreover, aligns with the broader gothic conception, as Hervey puts it, of the past as irrational, the present as rational.<sup>138</sup> Said distinction, where the turning of history hinges upon the progression from irrationality to rationality, is essential to *The Exorcist*, where Blatty deliberately pits modern medical and psychological science against past piety.

Now, to be sure, history is essential in psychiatric treatments. Herman writes: “Like traumatized people, we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and future. Therefore, an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history.”<sup>139</sup> Thus, history would be important in *The Exorcist* whether the text focused on the psychological or the spiritual. Crucially, though, the polarization of these two areas is central to understanding theology. In charting the devil’s literary and theological histories, Darren Oldridge observes how, over time, Protestantism came to believe the devil is entwined with thought.<sup>140</sup>

That connection may seem natural enough to contemporary readers, and yet it marked a pivotal moment in Western theological history, transforming belief in the devil

---

<sup>138</sup> Hervey, Benjamin. “Contemporary Horror Cinema.” In *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, Routledge, 2007. 235.

<sup>139</sup> Herman 2.

<sup>140</sup> Oldridge, Darren. *The Devil: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2012. 1.

as a concrete, external entity to a belief in an internal adversary.<sup>141</sup> This movement co-evolved with the solidifying concept of an insulated self, a concept that undermined popular perceptions of demonic power.<sup>142</sup> Thus, released in the 1970s, *The Exorcist* entered a world in which belief in the demonic and their power to, say, possess people, was on the wane. It entered a world therefore vulnerable to its avowed threat.

By casting Karras as a psychiatrist and priest, Blatty pits psychological science and piety against one another as competing weapons in a cosmic battleground. And in such a battle, according to *The Exorcist*, psychology is bound to lose. Throughout the film, medicine (physical and psychological) fails to help Regan. Worse still, the scenes where Regan undergoes medical treatment are some of the film's most visceral. Science, then, is not only unhelpful; it is outright harmful in Blatty's fictional world.<sup>143</sup> Once the exorcism scene truly kicks off, Karras' psychological hypotheses (e.g., about Regan suffering from multiple personalities) seem woefully misguided, his training futile. Conversely, Merrin's self-assured religious faith comes across as a potent weapon to be wielded in the face of evil, indeed, the only weapon capable of fighting such evil. And so, it is no surprise that Karras must resort to faith, to making himself a martyr, to save Regan. In that moment of self-sacrifice, Karras becomes somewhat analogous to a Christ figure, as he willingly takes the burden of Chris and Regan's "sins" (i.e., the possession

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>143</sup> This movement befits the common construal of science as gothic and less useful than faith (Groom 91-92).

they invited) onto and into himself, thereby suffering the consequences for others' actions.<sup>144</sup>

Thus, Blatty de-psychologizes the text so that he can push his characters and audience to move back toward religious faith and toward a bygone time in which science had not so commonly displaced religious belief. While Karras' death is a useful moment for understanding how piety triumphs in the movie, the prologue, as mentioned above, is also essential for reading the film. And yet, the prologue is likewise perhaps the most challenging aspect of the narrative, as many scholars and critics have struggled to make sense of it. King and Backer both deem it "puzzling," though King also concedes its affective power.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, Creed and Backer do not know Pazuzu's name, and David Punter accuses the movie of lacking thematic coherence.<sup>146</sup>

These oversights and criticisms are understandable, but they stem from misreading the prologue, which, though difficult to follow, is essential to understanding the movie. The prologue, in effect, bookends the film. Introducing Pazuzu and Father Merrin in Iraq allows Blatty to foreground religion and the past in the film. Bringing them both back in the exorcism scene indicates the religious conflict has mirrored

---

<sup>144</sup> While it may appear Karras actually commits a mortal sin by leaping to his death, Catholic doctrine distinguishes between suicide and self-sacrifice (Litwa). And since Karras leaps to protect Regan, his act would fall under self-sacrifice. Indeed, in his book on *The Exorcist*, Mark Kermode argues Karras's leap is virtuous (83 & 115). Furthermore, official Catholic doctrine (with which Karras is undoubtedly familiar) allows for salvation even in the case of suicides (Catechism 2283).

<sup>145</sup> Backer 331;

King 422.

<sup>146</sup> Punter 370

Christianity's journey from the middle-east to North America. The Old World has penetrated the New. And only the past (religion) can defeat the past (Pazuzu).<sup>147</sup>

### 2.2.2 Still Thy Tongue: Patriarchy in *The Exorcist*

*The Exorcist's* cultural politics have been largely overlooked in existing scholarship, but the prologue and the film's focus on the voice help us see that *The Exorcist* pushes a culturally conservative, Catholic position. That position, moreover, is informative for interpreting the text. As established, the prologue and statue of Pazuzu illustrate the text's desire to return to a more Edenic past. Such a nostalgic view of the past, and such a push to regress to said prior state, is a conservative position.

And, indeed, that the film adopts such a position makes sense in light of Blatty's personal history. William Peter Blatty was a staunch Catholic. As a student at Georgetown (a university affiliated with the Catholic Church), he read about the exorcism of Roland Doe, which Blatty would later adapt into *The Exorcist*.<sup>148</sup> Blatty would later contribute to the production of *The Exorcist* film, which cast a number of actual clergyman as actors, and which he set at his alma matter, the same alma matter against whom he would eventually file a canon law petition.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> This is a common convention of gothic fiction: the finding of order in a mythical past (Botting, *Gothic*, 89-90).

<sup>148</sup> Roland Doe is the pseudonym of Ronald Edwin Hunkeler, whose "possession" was reported in Maryland newspapers in 1949, when Hunkeler was 14. While uncovering or discussing the "true story" behind *The Exorcist* is not my agenda with this project, it bears noting that the novel and subsequent film were based on a reported account contemporary to Blatty's college days.

For information about Hunkeler and his life, please see: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/20/the-exorcist-boy-named-magazine>

For a thorough investigation of Hunkeler's story, see: <http://www.strangemag.com/exorcistpage1.html>

<sup>149</sup> For the cast of *The Exorcist*, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Exorcist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exorcist)

For Blatty's canon law petition against Georgetown, see: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/exorcist-author-william-peter-blatty-to-sue-georgetown-university-in-catholic-court/2012/05/18/gIQA90GIZU\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/exorcist-author-william-peter-blatty-to-sue-georgetown-university-in-catholic-court/2012/05/18/gIQA90GIZU_story.html)

These extra-textual Catholic elements reinforce my interpretation of *The Exorcist* as a pro-Catholic text. Whereas many have claimed *The Exorcist* is somehow anti-Christian, and whereas Punter has asserted the devil does not matter in *The Exorcist*, the film's textual elements, wherein faith triumphs over science and evil, and extra-textual elements, where the film clearly stems from a Catholic source and background, demonstrably resist such interpretations.<sup>150</sup> As Oldridge notes, *The Exorcist* calls for a return to Christian, specifically Catholic, faith when it makes of Karras a martyr.<sup>151</sup>

We should also observe that the film's ventriloquial elements further augment the narrative's connections to Judeo-Christianity. For, the Cartesian dualism that informs popular Christian understandings of the soul-body connection is by nature ventriloquial, as it makes puppets of us all. That is, belief in the soul as the animating force of the body renders the body a mere puppet held aloft by an outside force. Just as the puppeteer's hand reaches into and thereby animates the puppet, the soul enters into and thereby animates the body, which becomes, in this view, a mere vessel. That vessel, moreover, does not speak on its own, as the voice, the agency behind said vessel, comes, necessarily, from the soul.<sup>152</sup> Remove the soul, and the body will crumble; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Christianity and Christian doctrine therefore pervade *The Exorcist*.

And yet, as we have seen, those Christian themes, including the triumph of Christian good over supernatural evil, often get lost or misinterpreted in existing conversations about this film. That they do get lost may, however, stem from the cultural

---

<sup>150</sup> Oldridge 88;  
Punter 370.

<sup>151</sup> Oldridge 88 & 7.

<sup>152</sup> In this theology, the voice comes also from God, who breathed life into humanity and continues to breathe into us via "inspiration."

context which begat *The Exorcist*. Namely, societal secularization tilled the ground from which bloomed the reactionary religious right, into whose annals *The Exorcist* fits all too well.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, Connor has shown that even ventriloquism has become more secular overtime, becoming increasingly recognized as not a supernatural power but rather a natural performance.<sup>154</sup> Thus, we see the societal questions at stake in *The Exorcist*, as King alludes when he observes how *The Exorcist* derives unease from changing mores and illustrates a generational gap between the children and the adults of 1970s' America.<sup>155</sup>

Blatty's novel and the subsequent, world-shaking film entered into an historical time rife with concerns about the state of society and religion's role therein, a scary prospect to a staunch religious conservative like Blatty. Religion used to be central to Western society, the devil an accepted reality, and religion a great unifying force whose power seemed to wane with the spread of urbanization.<sup>156</sup> That correlating decline of religion's power perhaps later begat conceptions of the industrial revolution as linked to societal decay, a connection King invokes when discussing *The Exorcist*: "...in Blatty's *The Exorcist*...foul doings become fouler when set against the backdrop of Georgetown, a suburb which is quiet, graciously rich...and nice."<sup>157</sup> Indeed, Blatty's choice to place his story in Georgetown provides a fitting metaphor for views of cities as sites of societal decay. Behind Georgetown's nice interiors lurk corruption and evil. Thus, with the spread of cities (like Georgetown) came the decline of religion as the central governing force of

---

<sup>153</sup> Derry 222.

Influential horror scholar Robin Wood has similarly noted how horror films became reactionary in the 1980s (Wood, *Hollywood*, 168). In this way, *The Exorcist* may have preempted a later generic turn.

<sup>154</sup> Connor 228.

<sup>155</sup> King, *Danse*, 177 & 179.

<sup>156</sup> Oldridge 15, 31, & 43.

<sup>157</sup> King, *Danse*, 330.

Western society, and the church's decline weakened the nation's immune system against the onslaught of demonic virulence, the sort embodied in Pazuzu's projectile green vomit. His is the rot at the core of urbanizing, secularizing civilization.

The trouble with rot, however, is its insidiousness. Ergo, the religious conservative finds themselves searching for enemies at every turn. And Blatty finds his enemies not only in Pazuzu but also closer to home in the form of the single mother. As a divorcee and a successful career woman, Chris is the sort of figure cultural conservatives demonize. Furthermore, the move of connecting the gothic protagonist's struggle to the struggles of societal woes and of ideology against reality is established in the scholarship.<sup>158</sup> Accordingly, let us take Chris's strife as synecdochic for societal challenges at large.

As an actress, Chris makes her (pecunious) living by speaking words others have written on a page. That is, she makes herself something of a puppet, contorting body and voice to fit others' whims. Acting is a performance. And so is ventriloquism. Therefore, when Pazuzu turns Chris's daughter into an unwilling ventriloquist's dummy, he makes a profane mockery of Chris's job. What is more, Pazuzu turns Regan into a sort of actor, one whose body and voice are contorted to an Other's whim. This contortion of her daughter means that Chris must confront, in the film's narrative, an uncomfortable reality: that her seeming independence and success have made her daughter vulnerable, have made her and Regan victims. Thus, Chris's career dictates Regan's punishment.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> Clemens 6.

<sup>159</sup> I want to take a moment here to make clear that I am, in no way, denigrating single mothers or their children. Rather, I am elaborating on what I see as the film's attitude toward single-mother households. I am not advocating for such a view, and, indeed, will later discuss why Blatty's invectives against such households ultimately become self-defeating.



And Regan's punishment is a tool to push Chris to, for example, teach her daughter proper religion. It is fitting, in this context, that ventriloquism has historically been considered demonic.<sup>160</sup>

We know Blatty's film criticizes the single-mother household both because it mocks its heroine's career and because it insists on the necessity of a male father figure in the household. Notably, the lack of a patriarch in the house lets in Pazuzu, who seems to strike into the vacuum left by the absence of Regan's unseen father. Thus, the missing man is replaced by another masculine figure, who finds himself, in turn, replaced by the Catholic Church at the film's conclusion, when Father Dyer stands in for the Church more broadly. Put another way, the patriarch of the MacNeil house was Regan's father, then was Pazuzu/the possessed Regan, and then is the Church. This continual line of succession implies that, in *The Exorcist*, the lack of a patriarch invites chaos in the form of a foreign invader who usurps that throne for himself. *The Exorcist* thereby casts patriarchy as a natural inevitability.

The replacement of Pazuzu/possessed Regan with the Catholic Church is key. Edmund Burke argued the church is essential for an ordered society.<sup>161</sup> And, certainly, against the possessed Regan's violent and incestuous behavior, the Church continues to represent a force for order and law. Note, therefore, how *The Exorcist* casts the lack of a male authority figure as an invitation for evil and chaos to victimize mothers and daughters alike. Women in *The Exorcist* occupy the unenviable position of needing to submit to the Church or to the demonic; female empowerment, it would seem, is a cosmic

---

<sup>160</sup> Connor 297.

<sup>161</sup> Botting, *Gothic*, 87.

impossibility in the regressive worldview this narrative conveys. In furthering this conservative agenda, Blatty's *The Exorcist* aligns itself with the gothic warning against dividing the physical, social, psychological, and, most pivotally in this film, spiritual.<sup>162</sup>

It aligns itself also with the conservative "family first" agenda, whereby the GOP has labelled itself the party of "family values." Notice that the horror in Blatty's story centers on the collapse of the traditional nuclear, patriarchal family. Notice, too, that the diegetic answer to this assault, the proper retort as it were, is a return to faith and the church. Thus, *The Exorcist* upholds two conservative institutions, the church and the family, painting them as the bedrock of society, the absence of which invites chaos and evil.

This is a centering function. Against the backdrop of post-structuralism and the increasing independence of women in the workforce as well as the advent of "no fault" divorces in the United States, Blatty erects a monument to a more, in his view, structured past wherein society revolved around common bulwarks. To be sure, this is a regressive notion. So too is it hierarchal, for it privileges the church and the male, relegating humanity to a series of traditionally prescribed roles. *The Exorcist*, in other words, is an atavistic strike against social progressivism, which the story depicts as societal decay. Just as Regan's body cracks and rots under the assault of Pazuzu (invited, in this view, by modern decadence), so too do societal mores and, consequently, societal strength. For, in this fictional world, it is only with the patriarchal pillar that society may stand firm against hellish onslaught.

---

<sup>162</sup> Clemens 6.

I have added "spiritual" to Clemens' list of the physical, social, and psychological (6).

Such a focus on the family is unsurprising in such a conservative text, for scholars have long noted the importance of the familial institution for the state's continued existence. For instance, Levi-Strauss argues that families are essential to the state, and Althusser deems family the state's ideological unit.<sup>163</sup> Their arguments make sense when we consider the state's nature as a collective. Because a state, no matter how ruggedly individualistic, relies necessarily on the connections between individuals, the state reduces its ideological appeal not so much to the individual as to the individual's family, the smallest collective unit to which the state's ideological apparatus may appeal. Without those connections of individual to family, the entire network might collapse under the countervailing pressure of individualism.

To this, we can add Roberts' helpful observation that the American Gothic distills society into the family.<sup>164</sup> From these assertions, then, we can determine Blatty protects the institutions of the church and family from what he construes as secular assaults precisely because those two institutions are historically and traditionally foundational to the type of state Blatty is trying to preserve. And this is a type of state where single mothers do not pursue their own careers, do not earn their own wages.

Important for our purposes is how ventriloquism, like acting, is a commercial endeavor, entertainment in exchange for money. So, when Blatty attacks Chris's career via Regan's possession, so too does he attack the very idea of career women. Likewise, he attacks, consciously or not, the very idea of women's liberation. As an art form, acting relies upon giving voice. And yet, the religiously conservative often fall back on the

---

<sup>163</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Semiotics*, 180 & 220.

<sup>164</sup> Roberts 19.

admonition that women are to be silent in church.<sup>165</sup> That is, they use their religion to justify their misogyny; and Blatty's attack on Chris's career therefore reflects a malignant strain of sexism within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Now, horror scholars have long identified the genre's tendency of attacking the status quo.<sup>166</sup> Accordingly, it is only natural that *The Exorcist* attacks the state of society around the time of its release. Pivotal, however, horror attacks the status quo so it can restore and reify it.<sup>167</sup> Horror, Stephen King asserts, is an agent of the status quo.<sup>168</sup> After all, Annette Hill has argued that thresholds affirm social taboos.<sup>169</sup> Threatening social taboos in a horror film consequently helps to reaffirm those very taboos, to vindicate their existence, to show why they should remain taboos. Put another way, fantasy neutralizes transgression.<sup>170</sup> When the possessed Regan violates the incest taboo, she attacks the taboo at the very heart of human culture; she attacks, in other words, culture itself.<sup>171</sup> Pazuzu therefore uses female sexuality (or, at least, the sexual behavior of a possessed female body) to undermine the patriarchy as part of his larger assault on Western culture.<sup>172</sup>

Much of this material is unsurprising, given the discoveries of gothic and horror scholars. Heller, for one, observes how the gothic reveals society's failure to fulfill the individual, and he further argues that the gothic resolves its conflicts by restoring the lost

---

<sup>165</sup> First Corinthians 14:34.

<sup>166</sup> Tudor 18.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> King, *Danse*, 41

<sup>169</sup> Hill, Annette. *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Violent Movies*. University of Luton Press, 2005. 106.

<sup>170</sup> Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981. 72.

<sup>171</sup> Silverman, *Semiotics*, 177.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 187.

distance between the characters and the taboo, the culturally forbidden that erupted forth during the plot.<sup>173</sup> Blatty restores said distance when he has Karras banish Pazuzu near the end of the film. And, in that moment, he shows that *The Exorcist* exists in a universe where God and his agents can protect humanity from the demonic if humanity but believes. Hereby, Blatty reifies the Catholic church and the nuclear family.

Crucially, though, Blatty does more than merely return his characters to the status quo. Instead, *The Exorcist* ends by suggesting Regan's conversion to Catholicism, a return to the past, or, in other words, a microcosmic return to faith for American society.<sup>174</sup> And so, *The Exorcist* does not just return to a state predating the monster's arrival; it implies instead the creation of a new, antiquarian state. It is for this reason I have deemed Blatty's impulse atavistic rather than only conservative.

In returning power to the church and to male authority figures (in order, the father figure, the priest, the Church, and God), Blatty's text upholds the patriarchy and attempts to centralize power in that authoritarian figure (ultimately in God Himself). The text's apparent goal, therefore, is to fight post-modern decentralization, to recentralize power, in other words. But, and this is key, *The Exorcist*, in following Catholic theology (and theodicy), posits the individual (in this case, Regan) as caught in a cosmic tug-of-war between the forces of good and evil. Thus, *The Exorcist*, in fact, de-centralizes power. Far from a neat hierarchy of good trumping evil, *The Exorcist* suggests a war in which supernatural, external evil can threaten people and in which agents of God like Father

---

<sup>173</sup> Heller, Terry. *The Delights of Terror: an Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror*. University of Illinois Press, 1987. 9 & 200.

<sup>174</sup> Oldridge also argues that *The Exorcist* pushes for a return to faith (Oldridge 88).

Merrin can lose in a showdown against said evil. Good and God may win at the text's conclusion, but theirs is a hard-earned victory coming at a price.<sup>175</sup>

In writing *The Exorcist*, Blatty appears to have made some mistakes. That is, I assert, despite Blatty's clear ideological agenda, his resulting text does not make the clear-cut case Blatty appears to have had in mind. Instead, *The Exorcist*, as we have seen, is a confusing text and is confusing, I contend, because of the disconnect between its author's ideological goal and the inherent ideological baggage in the tools he uses to tell his story. It is ironic that Blatty tries to tell *The Exorcist* using a form that has historically critiqued the very goals he is trying to accomplish.

The first irony I wish to consider relates to Blatty's religion. Whereas Blatty uses the gothic form to tell a pro-Catholic story, the gothic has historically been an anti-Catholic art form.<sup>176</sup> Fred Botting, for one, has traced the gothic novel's tendency to associate Catholicism with despotism and superstition.<sup>177</sup> This particular irony or disconnect might be surmountable, with Blatty adapting a usually anti-Catholic form for pro-Catholic ends. He does not succeed, however, because he adopts not only this anti-Catholic style but also aspects of Protestant theology, including notions of the devil as being entwined with thought.<sup>178</sup> Despite pushing for Catholicism, then, Blatty's is a theology informed by Protestantism, influenced by the diffusion of broader ideas about Christianity. One should note, also, that Pazuzu originates from outside Christianity, thus undermining the religion's presented monotheism.

---

<sup>175</sup> Cowan goes further when he argues in *Sacred Terror* that the war between God and evil continues at the movie's conclusion (170).

<sup>176</sup> Botting, *Gothic*, 5.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>178</sup> Oldridge 1.

Perhaps more troubling for Blatty's endeavors is his (likely unintentional) borrowing from the female gothic tradition to tell what he hopes will be a patriarchy-affirming story. Hoeveler has described how the female gothic finds enemies from without by considering the gothic nature of female lives under bourgeois ideology.<sup>179</sup> And Helene Meyers has taken this argument even further by arguing that women in Western society live a generally gothic (i.e., dangerous) existence.<sup>180</sup> Thus, the female gothic, like *The Exorcist*, casts the weight of history as the monster of its horrors. That tradition, moreover, clashes with that of the male gothic, meaning Blatty's story hereby becomes feminized in ways counterproductive to his patriarchal ends. Once more we see that Blatty's tools do not well match his purpose.

Furthermore, Zillman and Gibson point out how society conditions men to be fearless.<sup>181</sup> And yet, in *The Exorcist*, our primary male protagonist, Father Karras, is far from the ideal of fearless Western masculinity. Unlike the traditional Western male hero, Karras suffers from self-doubt and a crisis of faith. On this point, Clover notes how possession narratives "repudiate" typical Western masculinity when they construe the female body as a sort of "structural standard."<sup>182</sup> Possession narratives, in other words, feminize whereas, as I have shown, *The Exorcist* intends to masculinize, to privilege the male and patriarchal. That is, *The Exorcist* sure seems like a work of the female gothic. It is essential, therefore, that Christianity hinges on the idea that one will open oneself to God, will subjugate oneself to the deity. As Clover perceives, Karras is able to defeat

---

<sup>179</sup> Hoeveler, Diane Long. *Gothic Feminism: the Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998. xvi & 3.

<sup>180</sup> Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. SUNY Press, 2001. Print. 4.

<sup>181</sup> Zillman and Gibson 18.

<sup>182</sup> Clover 113.

Pazuzu only by opening himself up to Pazuzu (i.e., by allowing another being to enter his body).<sup>183</sup>

To win, Karras not only has to die: he has to feminize himself, has to be penetrated rather than penetrate. And thus, Karras's actions do not align with traditional Western heteronormativity. Ergo, *The Exorcist* reveals a view of Christian theology that is, ironically, less patriarchal and masculine than traditionally believed. Notice how Karras triumphs by intermixing traditionally male and traditionally female characteristics. Such intermixing, such queering of traditional, conservative gender norms, aligns well with the gendering of ventriloquist dummies, who are simultaneously feminized, as Davies argues, and portrayed as puerile males, per Connor.<sup>184</sup> In ventriloquism, as in *The Exorcist*, the division between sexes and genders blurs, becomes queered (whether intentionally or not). Despite pushing for a conservative text, then, Blatty does not fully succeed. Where he tries to tidy his materials into a neat, hierarchal world view, he instead makes messes, muddies the waters as it were.

And this messiness stems, foremost, from the voice.<sup>185</sup> Voice is, in fact, essential to Judeo-Christianity in a way many overlook. In the bible, sound precedes sight, as God speaks light into existence (how can one see with no light?).<sup>186</sup> God is also conjured via prayer, and these two facts, in isolation, may appear unnoteworthy. Yet, they are vital to

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 112-113.

<sup>184</sup> Davies, Helen. *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print. 8; Connor 402.

<sup>185</sup> *The Exorcist* is also messy in its subversion of the typical horror story's attic-basement dynamic. Whereas most horror stories depict the attic as the place of salvation and the basement as the place of inhuman terror, *The Exorcist* makes both the attic and basement dangerous, avenues for Pazuzu's invasion of the MacNeil house (Perez-de-Luque 89-92). Such a depiction suggests either that God in *The Exorcist* is incapable of stopping Pazuzu from possessing Regan or does not wish to.

<sup>186</sup> *Genesis* 1:3.



begin forming our understanding that the God of Christianity is, textually speaking, presented as a wind deity.<sup>187</sup> To further buttress this interpretation, we need only consider how God breathes life into Adam. God thereby gives life through air, is connected with air before sight, and can be summoned via air. Moreover, he cannot be looked upon yet can be heard.<sup>188</sup> And, while Pazuzu can theoretically be looked upon, he, like God, is both a king and wind deity. Pazuzu is, therefore, a fitting choice for God's evil counterpart in *The Exorcist*, and for that reason it makes sense that Pazuzu uses sound as his means of ingress. It all traces back to the voice, to broken air.<sup>189</sup>

This reliance on the voice necessarily makes the text messy because voices are dialogic since they require (and, indeed, demand) an audience.<sup>190</sup> And yet, when the voice demands an audience, it invites a dialogue. Dialogue, moreover, is messy and multiplied (i.e., de-centralized). And it gets even more de-centralized when one throws ventriloquism into the chaotic mix. In the iconic head-spinning scene, the crew of *The Exorcist* deployed a dummy of Regan to complete the anatomically impossible stunt. In this scene, then, we have a dummy of a character possessed by another character parroting the voice of yet another character.<sup>191</sup>

The voice is multiplied, its provenance uncertain, attempts to trace it headache-inducing. The dummy evokes an uncanny affect, undermining the audience's resolve

---

<sup>187</sup> Ra, Aron. *Foundational Falsehoods of Creationism*. Pitchstone Publishing, 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Chion 19;

Cowan, *Sacred Terror*, 51.

<sup>189</sup> The importance of air in Christian theology could probably form the basis of its own study. After all, as mentioned above, one of the creation stories in Genesis sees God breathe life into Adam (Genesis 2:7). And Satan is also sometimes connected to wind (Ephesians 2:1-2).

<sup>190</sup> Connor 4.

<sup>191</sup> Whereas Kermode downplays the dummy's affectiveness, I continue to find the dummy effect remarkably unnerving, its unnatural quality merely adding to its uncanniness (Kermode 68-69).

precisely because of its unusual blend of human and inhuman qualities. Just as its appearance reminds one of the uncanny valley, so too does its disembodied, multiplied voice whereby the wrong voice speaks out of Regan's mouth. The figure of the dummy, here as elsewhere, becomes a destabilizing, de-centering force, one which challenges our, the audience's, perceptions and attempts to attribute voices to their origins.

Blatty's reliance on the voice, then, (an inevitability given Christianity's theological roots) doomed his text to at least partial failure, as it meant the text would rely on dummies, on ventriloquism, and on (inadvertently) mixing the genders Blatty's social conservatism would have rather left divided and binary. Thus, privileging the voice in this text shows us why the film is so hard to grasp and has been so widely misconstrued by popular and critical audiences alike. In conclusion, *The Exorcist* is a messy, challenging, confrontational text that remains ripe for continued exploration.

### 2.3 Venomous Sanctimony: Hawthorne's Serpent and Vision for the Community

While existing studies have sought the source for Hawthorne's "Egotism; or, the Bosom-Serpent"<sup>192</sup> (1843), it would, I argue, behoove us to consider this more obscure story of his as a possession narrative in which the doubled voice of the public and private spheres allows Hawthorne to envision a de-centralized form of Protestant spirituality and history that provides a glimmer of hope for redemption ostensibly at odds with the author's normally gloomier opus, which takes aim, broadly, at the issue of sanctimony. Perhaps, however, my reader's initial reaction is to question why I have paired Hawthorne with *The Exorcist*. Separated by 130 years, the two are disparate in time and

---

<sup>192</sup> I will henceforth refer to the story with the shortened appellation "Egotism."

medium, after all. And yet, as my analysis will show, these texts share significant thematic concerns despite their apparent differences, and together they illustrate an arc of worries about the places of the individual, the voice, and religion in American culture, the trajectory of which illuminates a series of underlying themes in American gothic fiction.

Perhaps odder still is my choice of “Egotism” as my key text from Hawthorne’s expansive bibliography. This story, though, remains understudied relative to many of Hawthorne’s other works, regardless of, what I shall argue, is its departure from Hawthorne’s typical plot structure. That deviation alone makes the story noteworthy as does its comparative obscurity. Moreover, this story provides a surprising amount of insight into Hawthorne’s opus, as Harold Schechter observes.<sup>193</sup>

Existing scholarship about this tale has made much ado about finding the inspiration for Hawthorne’s eponymous and quixotic parasite. In a series of articles in *American Literature*, Harding, Monteiro, and Barnes have taken turns positing different sources that may have inspired Hawthorne’s story. Such a track makes sense in light of the author’s own declaration that the truth of bosom-serpents is well-attested.<sup>194</sup>

And so, Harding has identified one newspaper story that may have inspired Hawthorne’s monster, Monteiro another.<sup>195</sup> Barnes, however, takes a different approach, arguing Hawthorne found his inspiration not in an identifiable news account but rather

---

<sup>193</sup> Schechter calls “Egotism” “a compendium of Hawthorne’s central concerns” (106).

<sup>194</sup> Hawthorne, Nathaniel. “Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.” In *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987. 279.

Hawthorne’s asterisked note making this statement is missing from Project Gutenberg’s version of the tale but is present in Penguin Books’ version. Hereafter, when I cite merely “Egotism,” I am referring to Gutenberg’s version of the story.

<sup>195</sup> Harding, Walter. “Another Source for Hawthorne’s ‘Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent.’” *American Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1969, 537-538.

Monteiro, George. “A Nonliterary Source for Hawthorne’s ‘Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent.’” *American Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1970, 575-577.

from the folklore of the bosom-serpent which appears to have been circulating at the time.<sup>196</sup> Barnes's take is especially helpful for my purposes, as he connects the story's likely folkloric roots to its emphasis on morals and symbolism, two topics I intend to take up.<sup>197</sup> To be sure, these approaches to studying Hawthorne's story have been valuable for identifying the traces (be they legend or news) underlying the work. For now, however, I propose we adopt a narratological approach rather than an literary archaeological one and focus, thereby, on the story of "Egotism," and, especially, on its nature as a possession narrative.

"Egotism" follows narrator Geroge Herkimer's attempts to save his erstwhile friend, Roderick Elliston, from a bizarre affliction that has caused him to emotionally isolate himself from the world. Roderick believes he carries a serpent in his bosom, that the serpent "gnaws" him, and that, moreover, most people also carry serpents in their bosoms, albeit with blissful ignorance.<sup>198</sup> Having been gone for several years, Herkimer is shocked to see his friend's transformation, whereby Roderick has come to resemble a serpent in his movements and gauntness. Finding himself unable to cure Roderick on his own, the narrator seeks out his cousin Rosina, Roderick's estranged wife, and conspires to reunite the two. When he does so, and when Rosina offers to reconcile with Roderick, the latter appears cured of his serpent, and the story ends on this hopeful note.

From this summary, we can see how the story beats in "Egotism" align with those of a possession narrative. Like Regan, Roderick finds himself transformed, apparently because an outside force has invaded his body. Also like Regan, this force torments him.

---

<sup>196</sup> Barnes, Daniel R. "'Physical Fact' and Folklore: Hawthorne's 'Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.'" *American Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1971, 117-121.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

<sup>198</sup> "Egotism."

Both Regan and Roderick visibly waste away from their illnesses (be they demonic or psychosomatic). And though *The Exorcist* foregrounds religious concerns more prominently than “Egotism” does, the latter still casts Roderick’s suffering in terms of possession. Roderick himself comes to view his serpent as some sort of celestial, a demon lodged in his breast.<sup>199</sup> If we couple that religious language with the simple observation that Roderick’s illness manifests as the intrusion of an external being into his body, we can easily construe of “Egotism” as a possession narrative, an interpretive move which opens the story to a variety of fruitful readings.

As in *The Exorcist*, the possession in “Egotism” takes the form of a ventriloquial and doubled voice. Like Pazuzu, the eponymous “bosom-serpent” speaks through its host, albeit in the form of disembodied hisses rather than articulated words. Nevertheless, the point remains that Roderick’s body becomes the source of sounds emanating from another being. Roderick becomes a dummy, a conduit for the snake’s voice. Simultaneously, of course, Roderick remains capable of speaking his own voice, meaning his voice becomes doubled. Hawthorne’s effect, however, differs from Blatty’s in that Blatty’s possessing spirit, Pazuzu, is capable of actual speech whereas Hawthorne’s serpent may not be. Certainly we never hear the snake speak in the story. And this distinction between the two texts is significant despite its seeming banality.

As I discussed in the previous section, Pazuzu is performative. He makes grotesque statements and asks questions in as profane a manner as he can so he can shock his audience and spread his demonic immorality (as Blatty perceives it). Yet, where Pazuzu speaks out, the serpent speaks in. That is, Pazuzu broadcasts his varied voice to

---

<sup>199</sup> “Egotism.”

an external audience (e.g., Chris, Damien, and Merrin), but the serpent seems to broadcast its true voice only to Roderick. In the story, the only sound the snake seems to make is its disembodied hiss, it is true. But, pivotally, the snake also seems to imbue Roderick with knowledge he should not have. Indeed, Roderick shows preternatural insight into the people around him, prognosticating at length about their various hypocrisies, sins, and hidden guilt.

That unnatural insight furthermore mirrors that of the possessed Regan, who predicts the death of an astronaut and gleefully uses Damien's guilt against him. Like the possessed Regan, the apparently possessed Roderick takes pleasure in ferreting out the secrets others would rather keep hidden. Moreover, Roderick uses these disclosures to find a sense of power, power his condition would otherwise deny him. Now, since the story never confirms whether Roderick's is a true possession or merely a psychosomatic affliction, we cannot ascertain if the snake actually communicates with Roderick. Actually, we cannot ascertain if there is a physical snake. Nevertheless, the story's alignment with the possession narrative, the disembodied hisses, and the suggestion of Roderick's carrying a celestial or fiend of some kind all combine to suggest the snake may be real after all; on this point, the story is stubbornly ambiguous.<sup>200</sup>

Whether the snake is physical or not, though, Roderick's sickness seems to endow him with unnatural powers of perception about people's characters and hidden habits. Either way, then, the snake "communicates" with Roderick, whether as a sort of split personality (a mental doppelganger, if you will) or as a distinct entity separate from Roderick himself. Roderick's illness therefore afflicts himself primarily. Conversely,

---

<sup>200</sup> Barnes 120-121.

Regan's possession, as I discussed earlier, targets Father Karras and Chris perhaps more than it targets Regan. Unlike *The Exorcist*, it follows, Hawthorne's story focuses first and foremost on the journey of an individual, on Roderick himself. This fact will become essential to my later analysis.

Before then, however, we should note that Blatty and Hawthorne are both concerned with the connection between the individual and society. Yet, where Blatty emphasizes the role of the church in forging this connection, Hawthorne avoids the church and sticks with that other conservative ideal, the family. Hawthorne's concerns, therefore, remain more intimate than Blatty's even as both writers look to speak to American society more broadly (i.e., outside the confines of a single possessed individual). Both texts push to unify their characters' public and private selves.<sup>201</sup> In *The Exorcist*, the career woman, Chris, finds her career detrimental to her daughter's health, and in "Egotism," Roderick's character arc forces an alignment of his private suffering with his public facing role as husband. Put another way, Roderick learns to stop weaponizing his sickness against society at large.

*The Exorcist*, therefore, seeks the conservative (and sexist) goal of relegating women to the home. By contrast, "Egotism" forces its male protagonist to make peace between his warring private and public selves.<sup>202</sup> Whereas the doubled voice in *The Exorcist* comes to represent the battle between past and present to define the future, the

---

<sup>201</sup> For this push in Hawthorne's work, see Swann (79).

<sup>202</sup> Rosina's exact fate remains uncertain at the story's conclusion. While she has reconciled with Roderick, it is unclear whether she will thereafter become relegated to the home or whether she will continue venturing into public as she does to reunite with her estranged husband. Thus, I cannot, in good conscience, proclaim Hawthorne more progressive on this front than Blatty was. Hawthorne's story does, however, not so clearly punish women for straying from their traditional gender roles. That is, "Egotism" is not as outwardly misogynistic as *The Exorcist* is.

doubled voice in “Egotism” manifests as the struggle to align one’s two, separate lives, a battle Roderick ultimately wins only with assistance from his friend and wife. In “Egotism,” then, the individual cannot triumph without the collective’s assistance. Alienating society or isolating from society are both giant non-answers in Hawthorne’s work;<sup>203</sup> they demonstrate a stubborn and self-destructive misunderstanding of humanity’s social nature, whereby the social defines the individual.<sup>204</sup>

Moreover, Hawthorne symbolizes this self-destruction in the story’s primary figure: in the serpent itself. The snake famously appears in the Ouroboros figure, that of a serpent consuming its own tail. Here, we find the snake’s mythological connection to rebirth: from out its own self-consumption, the snake renews itself. In effect, the snake’s lifespan mirrors the circular shape it forms when it bites its own tail. In real life, of course, snakes shed their skins, thus renewing themselves periodically. In mythology, then, we see the exaggerated depiction of snakes as self-birthing and self-destructing.<sup>205</sup> Such a snake, the Ouroboros, requires naught but itself, for this snake is its own food source, its own parent, and its own murderer.<sup>206</sup> In accepting the bosom-serpent, the “Egotism” of the title, Roderick makes of himself a metaphoric Ouroboros. That is, by shunning the people around him, by looking down on their bosom-serpents and seeing himself as the anointed one, blessed with this burdensome gift of insight, Roderick places

---

<sup>203</sup> Arner, Robert D. “Hawthorne and Jones Very: Two Dimensions of Satire in ‘Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.’” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1969, 268; Swann, Charles. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution*. Cambridge University Press, 1991. 82 & 84.

<sup>204</sup> Swann 8.

On a related note, Jung argues that the individual must resist letting society define them, as the mass populace’s ability for rational consideration can be weaker than the individual’s (Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 4-5).

<sup>205</sup> Burton, Neel. “The Symbolism of Snakes.” *Psychology Today*, 2021.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-see/202105/the-symbolism-snakes>

<sup>206</sup> “Ouroboros.” *Britannica*, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ouroboros>



himself outside society. Therefore, in Hawthorne's estimation, Roderick fancies himself a self-sustaining man, one who does not need others, one who can subsist purely on his own.

Such subsistence is, of course, but a grotesque fantasy, which is precisely Hawthorne's point. Roderick's self-union (when his only companion lies within his own bosom) is a doomed enterprise that sees Roderick waste away under its dominion. And yet, once Roderick reunites with Rosina, he finds himself cured, with sunny days before him. In other words, by reengaging with society, Roderick unlatches from his own tail and accepts his reliance upon others for sustaining his individual identity. He accepts, ergo, his true nature as a social creature, not an Ouroboros. He can, after all, recreate some semblance of that mythological reptile's self-destruction, but self-creation remains well outside Roderick's grasp.

In fact, that spectacular feat is so far outside his grasp that Hawthorne mocks Roderick's pretensions by ironically using narrative elements to make Roderick appear as the sort of Christ figure Roderick seems to view himself as. Earlier, I noted that Roderick considers himself special because he construes the bosom-serpent as a celestial. We can take those religious pretensions further, however, if we chart Roderick's movements within the story. Infuriated by Roderick's behavior (his itinerant and judgmental preaching about hidden sins), his neighbors have him institutionalized.

After a brief time, however, Roderick returns. That is, he departs before returning, almost as if from the tomb. The connection is not as stark as it could be, but Roderick's return, coupled with his habit of passing religious judgment on others and his self-proclaimed divine ordination, all code him as one with pretensions of being a Christ

figure. That Roderick has a high opinion of himself is evident. That Hawthorne plays into said opinion by depicting this narrative journey for his protagonist suggests Hawthorne is mocking Roderick's pretensions of divinity. Unlike Jesus, Roderick is returning not from the dead, but from a mental asylum. Surely Roderick's feat is less impressive, less faith-inspiring.<sup>207</sup>

Note, however, the movement's circular nature, whereby it returns to its beginning, almost like an Ouroboros. Hawthorne did not choose this narrative structure accidentally. After all, Goodman Brown follows the same narrative trajectory in "Young Goodman Brown," wherein he ventures out to the woods before then returning to his starting point. That starting point, moreover, is the same as Roderick's: the home. As the family's domicile, the home carries particular symbolic value for a society priding itself on "family values." The home, in other words, represents the state, that uneasy and messy union of the social and domestic spheres. In this sense, too, the home mirrors Roderick's body, with its public facing side and its private interior.

In returning home, Goodman Brown and Roderick ostensibly seek that bastion of the family; symbolically, they seek a return to the social and a reunion with their families. Ironically, of course, neither finds that refuge, at least not at first. Goodman Brown's return home is not the jubilant occasion his wife Faith has believed it would be. Rather, it marks the unhappy beginning of the rest of their marriage: a perfunctory, joyless social union yielding a silent congregation at the unhappy man's funeral.

---

<sup>207</sup> Such a satirical movement makes sense on Hawthorne's part if we accept Arner's argument that Hawthorne is using "Egotism" to satirize a local mystic, *Very* (267-268).

Along this same circular trajectory travels the better-fated Roderick. Of course, he returns home to find not his wife (Rosina) but instead his friend (the narrator, George). Nevertheless, Rosina later finds her way to their home, where they reconcile. It is fitting they reunite in their home and in their home's garden. For the former, their family reunifies in that very symbol of the family. For the latter, the two of them hereby reenact, in twisted form, the story of the Fall.

Undoubtedly the most important garden in Western culture is that of Eden, that glorious beginning whence our species has fallen, that paradise where, ironically, our corruption began. For, crawling upon his belly was the serpent so he could penetrate and disrupt the naked, blissful ignorance our species enjoyed. From out of his words came pain, evil, shame, and death. Arguably the Ur myth of our very culture, then, holds that humanity began without shame. Shame had to be learned and only could be because of the serpent's intervention.<sup>208</sup> It is fitting, therefore, that a snake brings Roderick his profound "jealousy" that makes him broadcast his pain ("It gnaws me") and seek the shame in others by unearthing their hypocrisy, their sins.<sup>209</sup>

Thus, the climax of "Egotism" becomes Hawthorne's attempt to relitigate the Fall. In his version, instead of the serpent corrupting humanity, the joyous reunion of man and woman in the garden casts out that slithering fiend. Of course, a natural criticism to

---

<sup>208</sup> The Fall narrative occurs in Genesis 3. Of particular note for my discussion here are verses 1-6. Genesis tells of humanity beginning without shame (2:55) until the crafty serpent (3:1) convinced Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (3:4-6), after which Eve shared the fruit with Adam (3:6), and the first two humans became ashamed of their nakedness (3:7 & 3:10).

To consider the Fall narrative's centrality to Western culture, start with Christianity's role in shaping that culture, and then consider how the doctrine of Original Sin has influenced Christian theology. Traditionally, Original Sin stems from Adam and Eve disobeying God by eating of the forbidden fruit, whereafter humanity was cast out of paradise and forced to live mortal lives outside of God's immediate grace ("Original Sin"). Much of Western moral thinking, then, has tied back to this narrative and to the notion of a lost paradise and a sin all humans now carry.

<sup>209</sup> "Egotism."

my reading would be to point out the “Fall” has already occurred symbolically in “Egotism.” After all, Roderick and Rosina have separated, and the serpent is tormenting Roderick in the garden. So, this argument goes, Roderick’s garden is no Eden. Such a critique, however, fails to consider how Roderick and Rosina’s separation in the story in fact mirrors the distance between Adam and Eve in the Fall story.

In *Genesis*, the serpent approaches Eve when she is alone. Eve next carries that corruption over to Adam.<sup>210</sup> Thus, divided, humanity falls. One of Hawthorne’s twists on the story, then, is to conceive of how that tragedy would play out if Adam and Eve were together instead of separated. And, together, Roderick and Rosina rise to the serpent’s challenge. In “Egotism,” it is the serpent, and not the humans, who gets cast out from the garden. Immediately, however, we recognize another of Hawthorne’s deviations from the biblical Fall narrative. In the Fall, there is no return to Eden. Humanity has to find its own path outside the garden. Conversely, Roderick and Rosina both return to their garden. Unlike Adam and Eve, Roderick and Rosina get a second chance on Earth. Like serpents, their union is reborn.

The circular shape these two stories (“Egotism” and “Young Goodman Brown”) take is unsurprising given the time period in which Hawthorne wrote. Infused with Romanticism, Hawthorne’s was a time fascinated with the circle, though, as Swann points out, Hawthorne was less optimistic about that shape than was such a luminary as Coleridge.<sup>211</sup> Hawthorne’s skepticism extended to other story structures, though, as he was also skeptical of revolution, of linear breaks from the past.<sup>212</sup> Such concerns are

---

<sup>210</sup> Genesis 3:1-6.

<sup>211</sup> Swann 212.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 5 & 42.

natural for a writer in post-Revolution and Antebellum America. With one revolution fading into the past and another looming on the horizon, Hawthorne was right to be worried. And those worries percolate into his fictions, which are rarely as optimistic as “Egotism” is.<sup>213</sup>

Think, for example, about the fate of Goodman Brown, whose nighttime foray into the forest transforms him from a bright, loving young husband to a miserable misanthrope. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Goodman Brown transforms for primarily the same reason Roderick does: both these men see their neighbors’ hypocrisy. That is, they become acutely aware of the evil and sin lurking in all humans. Once they have these revelations, they cannot forget them. And it is their inability to forgive or forget the sins of others that leads them to their self-imposed isolations, out of which Roderick but not Brown breaks free. In this sense, “Egotism” represents a break from Hawthorne’s usual patterns, as other scholars have observed.<sup>214</sup> Interestingly, though, the story also manifests typical Hawthornian tropes to such a degree we might consider “Egotism” an in-road into some of Hawthorne’s other works. In particular, “Egotism” helps tell us Hawthorne’s view of knowledge and sin. Here, I return us to the image of the snake, who worms his way once more into our discourse.

In addition to representing rebirth, snakes represent evil. But they also represent something else: cunning.<sup>215</sup> In mythology and literature, snakes are intelligent, but theirs is a short-lived intelligence. Like foxes, snakes can outwit their opponents, can maneuver

---

<sup>213</sup> Arner 275;  
Punter 202.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Genesis 3:1;  
Burton.

in the moment, but they appear to make no long-term plans. They are not plotters but, rather, tricksters. Such a view of snakes is highly informative for reading not just “Egotism” but *The Exorcist* as well. For the latter, we should recall the mythological Pazuzu’s snake penis. And in the film, we should recall that iconic head-spinning scene, wherein Regan turns her head 180 degrees to look over her own back. While the human body is typically incapable of contorting itself in this manner, a snake’s body is entirely capable of bending this way.

The ability to look over one’s own back suggests a certain wisdom, a sight others lack. The serpent, then, is a knowing figure, and to connect a character with a snake is to endow them with a sort of pernicious knowledge, pernicious because the serpent is also a reviled symbol, long connected to wickedness both for the venom common to that suborder of reptiles and for their role in the story of the Fall. Thus, the knowledge a snake carries is always dangerous; it is as their second venom. Their teeth poison the body, their words the mind.

Pivotal, in *Genesis*, the serpent envenomates humanity by convincing Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That is, he corrupts humanity by getting them to acquire knowledge.<sup>216</sup> Knowledge, then, is dangerous in Judeo-Christianity. And so, too, is knowledge dangerous in “Egotism,” where it is Roderick’s knowledge of the sin running rampant in his community that most torments him. Note Hawthorne’s emphasis on how chronic illness makes egotists of us all: “All persons, chronically diseased, are egotists...”<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, symbolically, Roderick’s affliction may merely

---

<sup>216</sup> Genesis 3:1-6.

<sup>217</sup> “Egotism” 284.

be his awareness of that sin. Here, we should recall two key facts. First, that Punter has observed how Hawthorne often leaves his characters trapped in “circles of guilt,” and second that Goodman Brown’s circle is that of realizing his neighbors are all sinners and hypocrites.<sup>218</sup>

The parallels between Roderick and Brown are clear, as we have already discussed. Knowledge of good and evil, therefore, brings torment by revealing the devil (or bosom-serpents if you prefer) within us all, and it is the inability or unwillingness to look past this sin, to forgive or forget, that brings ruin. For, the key in Hawthorne’s works is to connect with the community despite its sin. Doing just this brings Roderick his salvation at the end of “Egotism.”

It is crucial, however, that we not misunderstand Hawthorne’s point here. The answer in his work is not to forsake knowledge, per se, but rather to reconcile oneself with uncomfortable realities and, as he often renders it, uncomfortable histories.<sup>219</sup> This notion of sin that I have been discussing connects readily to the notion of original sin, whereby the Fall endowed all humanity with a measure of guilt and darkness, both of which threaten to consume us. To resist that self-annihilation, that egotistical inward turn, one must instead turn outward to the community. That outward turn, moreover, is one essential for a divided people.

This desire for unity and push for community are also why Hawthorne negatively codes the journey motif in his works. As we have seen, the journeys away from home in “Egotism” and “Young Goodman Brown” cause great pain for the journeyers. And while

---

<sup>218</sup> Punter 202.

<sup>219</sup> Swann 4.

Roderick in the former story goes to an asylum, surely a part of society, Goodman Brown travels into the woods, themselves a symbol of evil and danger in folklore. Perhaps the differences in their destinations foreshadow their different fates. Regardless, we can see that Hawthorne and Blatty use the divided voice similarly in that both evoke a sense of the past versus the present. But, whereas Blatty longed for an atavistic return, Hawthorne is concerned with how to reconcile the past and present to negotiate a better future. As the ending of “Young Goodman Brown” shows, however, Hawthorne was not optimistic about the odds.<sup>220</sup>

Thus, Blatty and Hawthorne address what amounts to the same question of how American society should redefine itself to ameliorate contemporary strife. In Blatty’s eyes, such strife is the decay of traditional structures; in Hawthorne’s it is the new nation’s need to make peace with its past. And just as they construe the question differently, so too do they offer differing answers. For Blatty, the church must be foremost in our concerns; faith is necessary. And certainly “Faith” is necessary for Goodman Brown and for Hawthorne as well, but Hawthorne’s faith is the forgiving faith of looking past other’s imperfections and accepting that the true evil (which Pazuzu and the serpent demonstrate) is within us all.

Hawthorne’s vision of religion’s role in American society likewise takes on a very different form from Blatty’s. As I enumerated in part one, Blatty believes the church must serve as the central societal support pillar. Hawthorne, however, offers a view of religion as de-centralized spirituality. Notably, the only actual preacher in “Egotism” harbors

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. 5.



quite the bosom-serpent of his own, a fact Roderick relishes in revealing to the masses.<sup>221</sup> Such an attack on the clergy would have been very out of place in *The Exorcist*, and counterproductive to its ends.

In Blatty's work, the doubled voice becomes a narrative vehicle for establishing the church and patriarchy as the heroes of the (very conservative) story. In Hawthorne's, however, the doubled voice decentralizes the locus of power from the egotistical individual onto the social structure around him, thereby foreshadowing Hawthorne's concern with humanity's social nature. When one preaches in "Egotism," then, one does so not from the pulpit as does the Catholic priest but instead in the middle of the masses, as one of them, as befitting the de-centralized Protestant faith predominating the United States throughout its history.

Observe, for instance, how we do not see the priest in "Egotism" in the church but, rather, on the street. Observe, also, how the narrator's sententious speech at the end of the story does not come from an authoritative position in-universe. What I mean is, when Karras invokes God or scripture in *The Exorcist*, he does so from the position of a priest, one of God's emissaries. But when the narrator moralizes at the conclusion of "Egotism," he moralizes as merely one of the crowd. Whatever authority he has comes from Hawthorne privileging his voice by giving him the narratorial role. Within the story itself, then, Hawthorne de-centralizes religious and moral authority, distributing it across the crowd and, in fact, emphasizing how the characters can find moral authority only in said crowd.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>221</sup> "Egotism."

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

Hawthorne is as a spider, Blatty a supplicant. That is, where Hawthorne seeks to spread moral and religious authority to the masses, Blatty wants those same masses to subjugate themselves to the Catholic Church's authority. Here, one might notice the authoritarian, anti-Democratic nature of Blatty's position. Blatty sees the answer in submitting to an authoritarian regime (albeit a religious one) whence he believes we can derive structure. Conversely, Hawthorne's answer to this common question is to disperse the issue among the people. Hawthorne's principle is democratic.

On a similar note, we can perceive how Blatty is focused upon the past, Hawthorne upon the future. Indeed, Hawthorne has Roderick himself lambast another sick man's obsession with the "irrevocable past."<sup>223</sup> Of course, such a statement is ironic coming from Roderick's mouth, given how his own obsession dominates (and nearly destroys) his life. Nevertheless, my point here is that Hawthorne criticizes needless worrying about the past while not dismissing the past entirely. Unlike Blatty, who worries about the past to the point of trying to return humanity to a bygone era that probably never existed, Hawthorne strikes a more nuanced pose. For him, the key is awareness of, and reconciliation with, the past. We see this reconciliation manifest when Rosina and Roderick reunite. There, the past (their lapsed union) meets with the present (the diseased and estranged Roderick) to create a unified future. And what a democratic ideal that is.

---

Hawthorne's position is ironic insofar as he is but one man writing this pronouncement about finding moral authority amid the crowd. To charge him with hypocrisy, though, we would need to examine how Hawthorne interacted with people in his daily life. And, if we follow Arner's argument, then it would seem Hawthorne was a pro-social individual generally cognizant of other's feelings (Arner 275).

<sup>223</sup> "Egotism."

Interestingly, Hawthorne invokes the heart in the passage I quoted above, when he has Roderick declare the other sick man's bosom-serpent has, in fact, replaced the man's heart.<sup>224</sup> This connection of a bosom-serpent to a heart strikes me as incisive, for, if the bosom-serpent resembles a human organ, it resembles none so much as the heart. Like the heart, the bosom-serpent dwells in its bearer's breast. And, like the heart, people can feel and hear other's bosom-serpents. Note, for example, how the doctors think they observe wriggling (like that of a snake) when trying to extract Roderick's proclaimed parasite. Note, also, how others hear a hissing coming from Roderick's form (and, apparently, not from his mouth). Finally, observe that Roderick sometimes feels his serpent, as one might a heart beating quickly.

Such a connection of snake to organ is, therefore, natural enough. So too is it symbolic, as popular culture takes the heart to represent human emotions, most notably love, that same emotion Roderick appears to forsake when he becomes estranged from Rosina. Given said estrangement, one need not wonder why Roderick feels a pain in his chest. In a sense, his actions have rendered him heartbroken. This heartbrokenness, moreover, indicates another idea Hawthorne is pondering in "Egotism": the coexistence of judgment and guilt. It is, after all, the most guilty (i.e., Roderick, the man with the bosom-serpent) who casts the most judgment in the story.

Now, to be sure, the other villagers do judge Roderick, but it is Roderick who elevates sanctimonious judgment to a lifestyle when he takes pleasure in seeking out and revealing the sins of others, as I described earlier. Furthermore, Roderick's "guilt" as I have deemed it may, in fact, be largely self-imposed. If nothing else, it sure seems Rosina

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

and Herkimer have no desire to shun him and, instead, actively seek to be with him and save him, respectively. And so, Hawthorne demonstrates, guilt precedes judgment. Roderick's actions, therefore, become an act of mass projection, the psychological phenomenon whereby one attributes to others characteristics one has oneself.<sup>225</sup>

And when Roderick projects his own feelings onto others (including his feeling of guilt), he adopts for himself a sanctimonious sense of having the moral high ground. Such feelings of sanctimony are a key concern for Hawthorne, whose fiction often depicts the danger of sanctimony. In "Young Goodman Brown," the eponymous character dies a miserable old man because he dismisses everyone in his life once he learns of their hidden sins. Put bluntly, when he learns no one is perfect, he decides no one is worthy of his company. And in "The Minister's Black Veil," the eponymous priest likewise dies a lonely death because he refuses to doff the titular veil, a symbol of his scorn for sin. Taken together, these stories and "Egotism" show Hawthorne's critical take toward feigned righteousness. Indeed, "Egotism" is perhaps the most poignant example of Hawthorne's attitude on this subject because its ending is more hopeful than those of the other stories.

Whereas both "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Minister's Black Veil" leave their characters in those "circles of guilt" Punter mentions, "Egotism" lets Roderick leave said circle.<sup>226</sup> And Roderick succeeds where Hawthorne's other protagonists fail because, unlike Goodman Brown or the Minister, Roderick alone reenters society. Recall, too, that Roderick's reentrance succeeds in casting out the snake where medicine and

---

<sup>225</sup> "Projection." Psychology Today, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/projection>

<sup>226</sup> Punter 212.

institutionalization both failed to do so. The balm for the spirit, the cure to an aching heart, is, for Hawthorne, the company of other people, and feelings of moral superiority (which are, by the nature of original sin, de facto misguided) are uncondusive to proper companionship, an idea Hawthorne communicates when has his most sanctimonious characters forsake their family, friends, and neighbors.

The eponymous minister of “The Minister’s Black Veil,” Reverend Hooper, certainly runs afoul of this ideal, just as Goodman Brown does. And because these two characters fail where Roderick succeeds, Hawthorne’s insistence on using their titles (Reverend and Goodman, respectively) becomes ironic, as it sardonically mocks their pretenses toward formality and, thereby, superiority. Reverend Hooper also fails the same test Roderick passes. Toward the end of “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the Reverend’s ex-fiancée asks him one last time to doff the black veil that has alienated him from society (just as Roderick’s bosom-serpent has done to him). But the Reverend refuses and, accordingly, dies without ever casting off his hypocrisy.<sup>227</sup>

In this way, “Egotism” may reflect a glimmer of hope in Hawthorne’s later career, given how “Egotism” is the newest of these three stories, emerging about a decade after the other two. The connection between “Egotism” and “The Minister’s Black Veil” becomes stronger, however, if we consider the importance of the heart in both stories. In the latter, Hawthorne writes, near the time of the Reverend’s death: “All through life that piece of crape had hung between him and the world: it had separated him from cheerful brotherhood and woman’s love, and kept him in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart; and still it lay upon his face, as if to deepen the gloom of his darksome chamber, and

---

<sup>227</sup> Stibitz argues the minister’s preoccupation with one sin blinds him (veils his sight, as it were) to a second sin, which then consumes him (Stibitz 182).

shade him from the sunshine of eternity.”<sup>228</sup> Like Roderick, then, the Reverend’s torment is that of egotistical self-imprisonment, which Hawthorne represents with the symbol of the heart.

Here, Hawthorne associates the heart (the passions) with pride. Their self-preoccupation leads Roderick and Reverend Hooper to forsake the very company that could save them from their torment. This fact, coupled with their sanctimonious sense of their own moral superiority, reveals how the answer to this issue in Hawthorne’s fiction is the brain, the rational mind. Against the vicissitudes of the heart, Hawthorne weighs a measured rationality, one which remains cognizant of its own limitations and its need to stay with the masses.

As we have seen, then, the heart in Hawthorne’s fiction comes to represent passion and the serpent. And, as we have also seen, the serpent is a multivarious symbol, indicating renewal, danger, and knowledge. To this list of possible meanings we can also add Jung’s interpretation of the serpent symbol. For Jung, the serpent or dragon represents danger to the conscious, rational, mind from the unconscious, instinctual, mind.<sup>229</sup> Certainly, Jung’s reading of the symbol further reinforces the association of the serpent with the heart, i.e., the uncontrolled (and, ergo, dangerous) passions.

This variety of associations, this multiplicity, may be part and parcel with symbolic thought.<sup>230</sup> And, if so, such an arrangement is fortuitous for Hawthorne, who,

---

<sup>228</sup> Hawthorne, Nathaniel. “The Minister’s Black Veil.” *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), Boston, 1837. ProQuest, <http://ezproxy.uky.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/twice-told-tales-1837/docview/2138582140/se-2?accountid=11836>. 70-71.

<sup>229</sup> Jung, Carl. *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, 1981. 166.

<sup>230</sup> Oxley, William. “The Imminent Imagination.” *Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature*. Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981. 8-9.

surely aware of this fact, uses it to achieve his characteristic epistemic uncertainty.<sup>231</sup> That is, according to Turpin, Hawthorne's gothic fiction works by establishing unclear epistemologies whereby readers cannot discern definite meanings from his tales.<sup>232</sup> Perhaps such an approach to knowledge seems unusual, even counterproductive, for a writer as moralistic as Hawthorne, one actively opposed to affected self-righteousness. And yet, I argue, it makes perfect sense when one considers Hawthorne's democratic principles.<sup>233</sup> Just as those principles establish Hawthorne's interest, as Turpin sees it, in collective versus individual perception and understanding, they also establish why he is so opposed to sanctimony, as I have argued.<sup>234</sup>

In Hawthorne's stories, sanctimonious characters are invariably socially isolated, and the author often refers to these characters with negative diction, establishing their isolation as self-detrimental and anti-social. Put another way, sanctimony isolates a person from society. And, for Hawthorne, that isolation is dangerous. It is dangerous, partially, because it undermines democracy. Whereas Blatty's affinity for the Roman Catholic Church allows him to vest authority in the Papacy, in a single, male authority figure, Hawthorne's keen interest in democracy, in establishing a nation running on rule by the masses rather than rule by the one, divinely ordained, means Hawthorne cannot grok the hermit, the outlier, or the judger. His characters, therefore, experience pain and punishment when they try to separate themselves from society because Hawthorne

---

<sup>231</sup> Turpin, Zachary. "Hawthorne the Unreliabilist: His Epistemology in 'The Custom-House and Other Prefaces.'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, Vol. 60, No. 41, 2014, 490-494.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> By "democratic" I hereby mean "relating to the principles of a system of government rooted in democracy," not "relating to the Democratic party of the United States." My use of "democratic" should not indicate any reading, on my part, of Hawthorne's political affiliation beyond his apparent interest in democracy as a form of governance.

<sup>234</sup> Turpin 510.

believes he must communicate a moral message about the dangers of such acts. And he believes he must warn against these behaviors because they are antithetical to democracy, a form of government, then nascent,<sup>235</sup> relying on widespread participation.

Hawthorne's concerns, like Blatty's, are intensely political, though they run, in one sense, to the opposite end of the political spectrum. Both authors, however, cast the disembodied voice as an aberration one must cast out. Regan and Roderick both improve markedly once the disembodied voices of outside entities cease tormenting them. In both cases, too, the disembodied voice links itself to another entity, one unseen but implied. It would seem, then, that the disembodied voice is one of those perennial fears to which humanity keeps returning, the very sorts of fears upon which horror relies.<sup>236</sup>

By the same token, Hawthorne's repeated treatment of sanctimony resembles ritualistic returns to that well of our collective unconscious, continually trying to address the issue against which Hawthorne continues to rail.<sup>237</sup> Hawthorne's position, though, is not purely ideological. While, yes, it seems Hawthorne was opposed to sanctimony on ideological grounds, it does not follow he was against confronting others with their sins. More especially, it does not follow he believes hypocrisy and evil are okay. Rather, Hawthorne's position carries with it a strong element of pragmatism. That is, Hawthorne recognizes how behavior like Roderick's, Goodman Brown's, and Reverend Hooper's is likely to be self-defeating. By directly confronting everyone around you with their moral shortcomings, you are more liable to alienate them than educate them, according to Hawthorne. Here, one might object that Hooper, he of the black veil, gains many

---

<sup>235</sup> That is, nascent in the (at the time) young nation of the United States.

<sup>236</sup> King, *Danse Macabre*, 12.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*



converts, that he, therefore, is successful. And yet, even at his death, Hooper declared all those around him had black veils, meaning his effort was for naught upon this Earth.<sup>238</sup>

And so, Hawthorne's fiction tells us, we must find a different path forward, one other than holding a mirror up to society at large, for, if we do that, we will merely chase people away and make ourselves pariahs. But the path Hawthorne provides is, at best, unclear. In "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Minister's Black Veil," the eponymous protagonists find no way past their guilt. In "Egotism," Roderick does, so his is the one example from which we might derive Hawthorne's vision of social salvation. That salvation relies upon submitting oneself to social interaction, upon quelling the fires of one's ego in the cool waters of community. Of course, there is a difficulty with this solution, namely how unrealistic it is. If people were given to submitting themselves thusly, then Hawthorne would feel no need to moralize about it.

Hawthorne is aware, most likely, that he is actively telling people to work against their nature. This awareness, moreover, may explain why Hawthorne is, as scholars have long observed, pessimistic about humanity's future.<sup>239</sup> For Hawthorne, the Fall may have been Fortunate, but it was also Tragic.<sup>240</sup> Both Blatty and Hawthorne see the disembodied voice as a means of manifesting splits in individual psyches via either internal schism or external invasion. They do, however, construe different answers to their shared preoccupation, with Blatty seeing the answer as submitting to authority and Hawthorne seeing the answer as submitting to society. Pivotaly, in both *The Exorcist* and "Egotism," the disembodied voice manifests through the figure of the (possibly) possessed body.

---

<sup>238</sup> Hawthorne, "The Minister's Black Veil."

<sup>239</sup> Swann 8.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 208 & 211.

And, when the voice does so, it often communicates a message less about the individual and their exact psychological needs than about the individual's relationship to society. As we shall see, however, other forms of the disembodied voice offer a view of the individual psyche in turmoil, and while society does not disappear from these stories, it does lose prominence while the concept of the self takes center stage.

There is, though, one last voice for us to explore before we move on to another manifestation of the disembodied voice: that of history's voice echoing through time and across that uncertain divide between fiction and reality. Of the four texts I have discussed in this chapter, only one, "Young Goodman Brown," makes no profession of verisimilitude. As I mentioned in Part One, Blatty based *The Exorcist* on an identifiable account of demonic possession. Similarly, Hawthorne, as Harding, Monteiro, and Barnes observe, based "Egotism" off what he claimed was a true, physical account of a bosom-serpent.<sup>241</sup> And Hawthorne likewise claimed "The Minister's Black Veil" is based on the story of Joseph Moody, a Maine clergyman who wore a black veil as an act of contrition for having accidentally killed a friend of his, the clergyman's.<sup>242</sup>

*The Exorcist*, "Egotism," and "The Minister's Black Veil" therefore find their roots in purported events; they are not wholesale inventions. Existing scholarship has established how horror filmmakers often claim their films are based in reality so they can make their films more affective, i.e., scarier.<sup>243</sup> In reality, then, Blatty finds a warning about the importance of the Catholic faith in guarding against what he sees as very real threats. Given Blatty's history, it seems he would be credulous of the Roland Doe

---

<sup>241</sup> Hawthorne, "Egotism," *Penguin*, 279.

<sup>242</sup> Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Minister's Black Veil." In *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987. 185.

<sup>243</sup> West, *At the Edge of Existence*, 137.

account, that he would believe demonic possessions possible and warning Christian faith a danger to society at large. *The Exorcist* therefore becomes a report fictionalized as necessary to create a compelling narrative. That narrative, though, adheres to a core of truth.<sup>244</sup> In history, Blatty finds his ontology and morality.

Conversely, in history, Hawthorne finds only his ontology. Whereas Blatty makes reality a warning, providing himself but the means for the story's inherent truth to spread, Hawthorne fictionalizes reported reality as a means of discovering a different sort of truth: moral truth. If one accepts, as Blatty probably does, the truth of the Roland Doe account, then the story's moral lesson is relatively clear: God beats the devil; ergo, Christian faith is the answer. Hawthorne, by contrast, seems less interested in the truth of the accounts upon which he bases his tales, perhaps because the moral is less clear from such stories.

Indeed, in reporting the "true story" behind "The Minister's Black Veil," Hawthorne, in effect, distances his story from the "true," historical account of Joseph Moody. That is, Hawthorne takes pains to note that for Moody, "the symbol had a different import."<sup>245</sup> Now, Hawthorne may still be broadcasting his claims of verisimilitude for his fiction to gain for it a greater degree of effectiveness in communicating his morals. But Hawthorne is also clear about his fictionalization in a way many authors, including Blatty, are not. Simultaneously, Hawthorne announces his

---

<sup>244</sup> That is, if one accepts the veracity of the Roland Doe account.

<sup>245</sup> Hawthorne, "The Minister's Black Veil," *Penguin*, 185.

intention to moralize about supposed reality, as he subtitles “The Minister’s Black Veil” “A Parable” and “Egotism” an allegory.<sup>246</sup>

Parables are simple stories intended to communicate morals, and allegories invite interpretation to find hidden morals.<sup>247</sup> For Blatty, then, when the past’s disembodied voice speaks across history, it communicates truths humanity must apprehend. For Hawthorne, by contrast, the past’s voice carries but information out of which humanity must extrapolate truth. Put another way, truth for Blatty is eternal, rooted in God. For Hawthorne, truth is a matter of perception, particularly social perception.<sup>248</sup> Though they agree the voice is there, speaking to us across time and medium, they disagree as to what we should do with it. Blatty would fight history as if he were raising his sword to halt the rising tide; Hawthorne would ride the wave of history, if reluctantly, all the while trying to steer its path, despite his inner doubts about his ability to do so.

---

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

“Egotism” is from an unpublished collection called *Allegories of the Heart* (“Egotism,” *Penguin*, 279).

<sup>247</sup> Ichiko, Teiji, et al. “fable, parable, and allegory.” *Brittanica*, 2019.

<https://www.britannica.com/art/fable-parable-and-allegory/additional-info#history>

<sup>248</sup> Turpin 510.

## CHAPTER 3. SPEAK UNTO EVIL: VENTRILOQUISM, IDENTITY FORMATION, AND THE EVIL DUMMY NARRATIVE

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed at length the topic of the voice in possession narratives. Those narratives, despite their uncanny affects, nevertheless locate the voice in its most typical origin: the human mouth. The uncanniness, then, stems in those narratives from a familiar mouth giving life to an unfamiliar voice, a phenomenon which indicates the corruption of the unified self in these gothic and horror texts. The second iteration of this theme I wish to examine, however, relocates the doubled voice from the possessed body, which, despite its unnerving character is nevertheless corporeal, to the less corporeal and distinctly unnatural ventriloquist dummy.

In this chapter, then, I explore the figure of the animated and malicious dummy, starting with two of the more well-studied evil dummy films, *Magic* and *Dead of Night*. My discussion of these two movies occupies this chapter's first section, where I connect the figure of the evil dummy to these two films' historical settings and to this project's prevailing concern with identity formation. I then take up that thread in section two, where I examine the family's role in evil dummy narratives and the protagonists' ongoing struggle with identity negotiation.

### 3.2 Time's Echo: History and the Evil Dummy

Despite its prevalence within the horror genre, the figure of the evil dummy, puppet, doll, or toy has received relatively little critical attention, a discrepancy I seek to

begin rectifying here.<sup>249</sup> To be sure, this figure's ubiquity likely originates, partially, in the fear of dolls and other inanimate objects: automatonophobia and pediophobia.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, while the exact prevalence of any phobia is difficult to determine, it seems horror fiction responds to the cultural fears of the times, including the phobias of particular objects or beings.<sup>251</sup> And such also appears to be the case for this chapter's first major text: *Magic* (1978, directed by Richard Attenborough). Anecdotal reports from the time of this movie's release feature a recurring trend: that of viewers developing automatonophobia in response to *Magic*'s infamously frightening trailer, in which the dummy, Fats, speaks directly into the camera before rolling his eyes back into his head

---

<sup>249</sup> As proof of this figure's commonness, I submit a (very) partial list of some series in which this type of figure appears:

*Tales from the Crypt* has an episode in which a ventriloquist's abrasive, seemingly dominant dummy turns out to be his conjoined and domineering twin.

*Are You Afraid of the Dark* has the recurring character of Zeebo the Clown, who appears in "The Tale of the Crimson Clown" in the figure of an animate clown doll who punishes the episode's protagonist for his anti-social behavior.

*The Twilight Zone* features an episode about a living doll, aptly entitled "Living Doll," wherein Talking Tina punishes a temperamental stepfather for his actions.

The *Goosebumps* series (which includes books, movies, and a television show) features the recurring character of Slappy, an animated ventriloquist dummy who tries to subjugate the people around him, referring to them as "slave[s]."

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has an episode that implies a student's ventriloquist dummy is responsible for a series of murders only to reveal the dummy is, in fact, alive but is actually possessed with the spirit of a demon hunter who is trying to stop the actual culprit behind the attacks.

A spin-off of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, has an episode entitled "Smile Time," in which a group of malevolent entities possess the puppet characters starring in a local television show.

The show *Monsters* includes an episode wherein an animatronic dummy takes on a life of her own when the actress controlling her considers leaving the program.

And, in a more benevolent variety, *Beyond Belief: Fact or Fiction* has an episode featuring a doll who accurately identifies her owners' murderer, an act which shocks the murderer into a tearful confession.

<sup>250</sup> Automatonophobia refers to the fear of inanimate, person-like objects (e.g., mannequins)

(<https://www.verywellmind.com/automatonophobia-2671847>).

Pediophobia refers to the fear of dolls, particularly their child-like characteristics

(<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22538-pediophobia-fear-of-children#:~:text=Pediophobia%20is%20a%20fear%20of,pediophobia%20may%20also%20have%20pedophobia.>).

Both these fears are immediately relevant to my discussion in this chapter, as fear of the various dummies to which I refer could stem from one or both of these phobias.

<sup>251</sup> Bivins 108.

Folklorist Benjamin Radford, however, points out that it would be folly to attribute causation to this phenomenon without further study, and, because research on specific phobias is often rare, such studies are not readily available (34). Thus, my point here is that fiction reflects existing fears, though it may also create them, making for a self-perpetuating cycle, as Radford also notes (33).

and declaring “We’re dead.”<sup>252</sup> This information about phobias is helpful for establishing one possible reason for the sinister dummy’s prevalence. It is, however, also but a start for the discussion, partially because tracing the precise roots of a phobia is outside the scope of my analysis and because the data necessary for such a study does not yet exist.<sup>253</sup>

Nevertheless, *Magic* is a useful starting point for an examination of this recurring figure because it is not only a famous but also relatively well-studied example of the evil dummy in fiction. And, so, I use it here as my launching point for a broader discussion, which will spend some time on texts that have received little to no scholarly attention. Existing studies of *Magic* yield a number of interesting insights. Heldreth has observed how Fats (the dummy) represents the tough side of Corky (the ventriloquist), thereby becoming, as fictional dummies often do, his ventriloquist’s Shadow (a psychoanalytic term to which I shall return).<sup>254</sup> For her part, Piggott observes how *Magic* depicts the relationship between Corky’s conscious and unconscious minds, with Fats representing Corky’s “repressed ambitious, aggressive and libidinal side,” thus creating a sort of co-

---

<sup>252</sup> For the anecdotal reports of the trailer’s disturbing nature, see: *Primal Screen*  
For the quote from the trailer, see: “Magic-1978 Trailer.” *YouTube*, uploaded by terminallunch.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY1oecVD\\_zI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY1oecVD_zI)

<sup>253</sup> Radford 33;  
“Pediophobia (Fear of Children).” Cleveland Clinic, 2022,  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22538-pedophobia-fear-of-children#:~:text=Pediophobia%20is%20a%20fear%20of,pediophobia%20may%20also%20have%20pedophobia>

<sup>254</sup> Heldreth, Leonard G. “Variations On The Double Motif in Ventriloquist Films: ‘The Great Gabbo, Dead of Night,’ and ‘Magic.’” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 3, no. 2 (10), [Brian Attebery, as Editor, for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts], 1991, 89=91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43308093>.

consciousness between the two characters in the movie.<sup>255</sup> And, finally, Connor notes *Magic*'s evocation of the "vocalic uncanny."<sup>256</sup>

And that uncanniness is essential to any discussion of the evil dummy since one of the prevailing hypotheses about the fear of this character is that dummies, dolls, and puppets evoke the uncanny valley, being just human enough to unnerve a portion of the population.<sup>257</sup> Connor's contribution here, then, is observing how the displacement of voices (including a human voice apparently coming from an inhuman object) likewise achieves an uncanny affect.<sup>258</sup> Yet, while Connor's point is essential for an understanding of the evil dummy archetype, it is not (nor does he intend it to be) the all-encompassing explanation for that archetype. Thus, much ground remains for us to till.

That point brings me to my central contention about this film: that *Magic* portrays meaning as dialectical, and that the film shows dialectical meaning unfolding via attempted self-mindreading. To see the dialectic, we must first turn to the construction of selfhood, where the individual forms through relations with and contrast to the Other.<sup>259</sup> Perhaps the first moment of self-awareness, that is, acknowledgement of one's self as an individual, a single being existing amid a multitude, occurs in infancy, recognizing for the first time that the mother is not a part of the infant's self but, rather, a separate entity apart from them. This moment, moreover, is a fracture, as the recognition of one's own selfhood de facto accompanies a recognition of one's dependence upon the mother, the

---

<sup>255</sup> Piggott, Gillian. "Sonorous Psychopaths: Neo-Victorian Ventriloquists on Screen." *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture*, 2017, 129-131.

<sup>256</sup> Connor 411-412.

<sup>257</sup> --. "The Uncanny." 1919, Available at: <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf> ; M. Mori, K. F. MacDorman and N. Kageki, "The Uncanny Valley [From the Field]," in *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 98-100, June 2012, doi: 10.1109/MRA.2012.2192811.

<sup>258</sup> Connor 411-412.

<sup>259</sup> Silverman, *Semiotics*, 80.



Other, for one's survival. Thus, the moment of self-recognition is unavoidably traumatic, representing to the infantile mind a loss of omnipotence, a fracturing leaving behind a crack which the psychologically incomplete self must always feel some futile need to repair.

Into that gap, however, comes, for many, the voice, for, the voice, Connor argues, makes the speaker his or her own interlocutor.<sup>260</sup> That is, the voice is a natural choice for attempting to reconstruct the wounded self, wounded at the very moment of its emergence: symbolized in birth by the blood-drenched, screaming form of the infant emerging from its mother. We enter the world screaming, announcing ourselves. We use the voice, also, to create dialogues, or, in infancy, to dictate our needs to who must appear, at first, as servant. The dialogue, however, is more essential to my needs here than the mere declaration. The dialogue is so essential, I argue, that characters in gothic fictions fabricate an Other with whom to converse when they lack actual company.

Indeed, this is the most formative move of the gothic ventriloquist, whose psychological turmoil is so great the ventriloquist splits his or her mind into two beings: puppeteer and puppet. Piggott makes a similar observation when she writes that the ventriloquist characters in *Magic* and *Dead of Night* create conversations between their conscious and unconscious minds.<sup>261</sup> What Piggott leaves unsaid, however, is how the conversation between the ventriloquist and his or her dummy is, therefore, an externalized version of thinking: thinking out loud, but thinking out loud with an imagined interlocutor. Put another way, the ventriloquist character, finding his or her

---

<sup>260</sup> Connor 5.

<sup>261</sup> Piggott 129-131.

inner thoughts inadequate for resolving his or her internal conflict, attempts to externalize the process. And, finding his or her social support network lacking (for whatever reason), the ventriloquist imagines or, in the case of the dummy, constructs the other speaker in the ensuing dialogue. The ventriloquist is arguing with his or her self in an attempt, as Piggott and Heldreth establish, to discover some fact about that same self or to resolve some conflict within said self.<sup>262</sup>

And yet, since the dummy is but an extension of the ventriloquist's self, it (really, he, since ventriloquist dummies are typically crass males<sup>263</sup>) can bring no new information to the table, merely repeating what the ventriloquist already knows.<sup>264</sup> The gothic ventriloquist and his or her evil dummy, then, are engaging in attempted self-mind reading as a way to construct dialectic meaning. Of course, ventriloquism is a performance, one a ventriloquist undertakes for an audience. In its most popular form today, ventriloquism is a performance on stage or screen for a paying audience whether in the theater or sitting at home. The performance, however, especially when we consider this act one of attempting to read one's own mind, is also for the ventriloquist his or herself.

Lisa Zunshine has observed how novelists often cast body language as at once an unreliable yet rich source of information.<sup>265</sup> And that dynamic bleeds over into real life,

---

<sup>262</sup> Ibid 131;  
Heldreth 91.

<sup>263</sup> Piggott 130.

<sup>264</sup> There are exceptions to this rule, as some stories include dummies that are indubitably distinct beings from their ventriloquists. For example, *Goosebumps*' Slappy, who appears in various stories from the series, is his own separate person from any of his would be ventriloquists and can, for instance, tell jokes his ventriloquists do not know.

<sup>265</sup> Zunshine, Lisa. "Lying Bodies of the Enlightenment: Theory of Mind and Cultural Historicism." In *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, edited by Lisa Zunshine, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 115-116.

where body language can give subtle clues to an audience. For example, researchers have to plan around the Clever Hans Effect, whereby the ideomotor response can cue research subjects into giving the answer the researcher wants or expects.<sup>266</sup> Thus, the body offers the tantalizing promise of insight into a person or character's thoughts, into his or her self. Ventriloquism, however, adds an interesting wrinkle to this common dynamic by going a step further and doubling the presented body. Typically, to read a person's body language, we, the audience, may examine but one body. But in the case of the ventriloquist and the ventriloquist's dummy we have two bodies to examine, two to monitor for information.

And that is a dynamic into which many ventriloquists have leaned by giving their dummies expressive eyes and mouths. That is, these ventriloquists deliberately emphasize the part of the body their audience will most likely look to for insight into their, the ventriloquists' and dummies', minds. Reinforcing this element is the nature of ventriloquism as a performance, the effort of which seems to offer additional insight into the performer's true thoughts and self.<sup>267</sup> Ventriloquist-dummy acts provide two faces for us to interpret, as if to enhance our (the audience's) ability to mind read.

Coupled with the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic of doubling the ventriloquist, of casting for public viewing and consumption the ventriloquist's Shadow,<sup>268</sup> the ventriloquist's act appears uniquely situated for revealing some truths about the ventriloquist, of revealing some insights into the performer. Certainly, this is the case in

---

<sup>266</sup> Dunning, Brian. "The Horsey History of Clever Hans." Skeptoid Podcast. Skeptoid Media, 24 Jul 2018. Web. 16 Apr 2023. <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4633>

<sup>267</sup> Zunshine, Lisa. *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, Print. 125 & 143.

<sup>268</sup> Heldreth 91.

the horror film's portrayal of ventriloquism, portrayals in which the ventriloquist's self is laid bare, rendered vulnerable to inspection. Such disclosures, moreover, tend to be of the most intimate sort, the secrets dark.

This analysis, however, focuses on the third person perspective, of the outsider looking into the ventriloquist giving air to his or her innermost thoughts and turmoil, when, in reality, ventriloquists in these evil dummy works are airing their innermost thoughts for themselves. A ventriloquist of this ilk looks to the dummy's body language and voice to read his or her own mind. That is, he or she externalizes to solve a problem the solution to which he or she will then need to internalize. In the Jungian scheme, the resulting dialectic might be between the conscious and unconscious minds.<sup>269</sup>

And certainly that seems to be the case in *Magic*, where the repressed Corky relies upon his Shadow, the outspoken Fats, to achieve the success that previously eluded him. As psychoanalysts have long noted, repression catalyzes emergence.<sup>270</sup> So, Corky's repressing his sexuality and confidence yields Fats, Corky's libido made manifest.<sup>271</sup> Corky therefore casts out his Shadow in hopes of unlocking what we might describe as his inner potential to, e.g., succeed as an entertainer and lover. Corky's act (pun intended) is really his therapy; only, it is therapy cast for consumption. In a world where not just the ventriloquist's act but also the act of therapy itself is a commodity for the capitalist market, spectacle is the troubled ventriloquist's natural recourse.

---

<sup>269</sup> Natoli, Joseph P. *Psychological Perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Non-Freudians: a Casebook*. Archon, 1984. 6.

<sup>270</sup> Clemens 202.

<sup>271</sup> Piggott makes a similar remark when she refers to Fats as Corky's libidinous side (129-131).

Pivotaly, Corky's mental health unravels when he is on the cusp of success, of finding a mass audience via a new television show. Corky's voice, ergo, is his only recourse for addressing his mental health; he takes whatever solace he can find in the one bastion of his power: his ability to perform. But that ability is limited, as is his therapy's utility. Fats can only take Corky so far, a fact the movie demonstrates decisively when Corky uses the dummy as a murder weapon. Nowhere else in the film is Corky's impotence so explicitly manifest as when Corky grasps the dummy's arm so that it, the dummy, can stab the husband of Corky's lover. Corky needs a surrogate, an intermediary. He is, in other words, incomplete without Fats, without his Shadow self.

Corky has externalized his thought process in creating the character of Fats. But in so doing he has gone much further than creating a dialogue between his conscious and unconscious. Whether he realizes it or not, Corky has also doomed his project to failure. With the advent of the dummy in ventriloquial history came the attempted containment of the voice; that is, where once the thrown voice was boundless, multiplicitous if not infinite, when attached to the figure of the dummy, the thrown voice becomes but doubled.<sup>272</sup> Now, this doubling is par for the course with gothic fictions like *Magic*, but it also betrays the futile nature of Corky's endeavor.

I have argued that Corky externalizes his thought process by attempting to construct a dialogue with himself so that he might read his own mind and thereby remedy his own mental health issues. As we have seen, however, such an enterprise has numerous pitfalls, being for profit rather than purely for self-improvement and relying on receiving new information from one's self. So, too, though, does this process of self-

---

<sup>272</sup> Connor 399.

mindreading artificially limit the complexity of thought, as it reduces untraceable, somewhat ineffable, neuronal firings to the bareness, the singularity, of a wooden facsimile. In attempting to take charge of his mind, Corky reduces his mind's complexity, so much so he arguably renders moot the entire process.

Of course, a natural counterargument to my position here is to point out Corky's success with his new lover, Peggy. To be sure, Corky's fortunes improve once he constructs Fats and the Fats persona. But, even with Peggy, the division is still there, the threat of ultimate failure following Corky as his shadow. By the time Corky reunites with Peggy, he and Fats have become inseparable, so much so they muse aloud as to which of them will die first after Corky stabs himself. These two halves are not the halves of a reconcilable whole; they are rather as matter and anti-matter, doomed to destruct in their mutual and inexorable attraction. Even in the final moments of his relationship with Peggy, Corky relies on Fats' voice to convince her to run away with him. On his own, Corky is feckless. With Fats, Corky is self-destructive. Either way, his story can only end in tragedy.

Inherent in *Magic* is the pessimism of late 1970s' America, when an energy crisis, a hostage crisis, a financial crisis, and a crisis of confidence all followed on the heels of a missile crisis to convince an entire generation of Americans that the American dream had drowned, whether in Watergate, Agent Orange, or a bucketful of oil. Novelist and screenwriter William Golding's masterstroke, however, is to marry these sociohistorical factors to biological factors, like the inutility of mind-reading and nigh solipsistic talk therapy like the ventriloquial performance.

And if we need more evidence that Corky's mission was absurd from its outset, let us turn to the issue of abjection, a feeling Julia Kristeva establishes as integral to the horror genre.<sup>273</sup> As an affect, abjection arises from an encounter with that which is both Other and self (e.g., feces and vomit).<sup>274</sup> Such forms are not, themselves, the abject but are instead matter that causes one to experience abjection.<sup>275</sup> More to Kristeva's point, however, the monster and its associated forms in the horror film work by arousing feelings of abjection in the viewer, an observation that jives with Wood's assessment that the monster is the central figure of the horror movie.<sup>276</sup> And certainly Fats, despite being comparatively more attractive and better smelling, bears a strong resemblance to feces and vomit. All three (dummy, feces, and vomit) are cast out and then stared at in horror and wonder. The beholder has to ask incredulously: "This came from me?"

To reconnect this discussion with *Magic*, though, consider what happens after we, the beholders, have asked this question. Or, rather, consider what does not happen. We do not typically try to reabsorb the abject; nor can we, for, in the process of casting it out, we also change it. We cannot, in other words, reabsorb the abject once we have expelled it.<sup>277</sup> Fats, then, is not merely a part of Corky. By the time Corky has given form to Fats, Fats has become inexorably Other while paradoxically still being part of Corky's self. It is no wonder, therefore, that Corky fails to reabsorb Fats. His process, as I have established, is doomed to failure from the beginning.

---

<sup>273</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, European Perspectives, 1980. 11.

<sup>274</sup> See also: Creed

<sup>275</sup> Kristeva 10.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid 20;

Wood, "Introduction," 14.

<sup>277</sup> Kristeva 17.

And, here, Corky's troubled relationship to the American Dream reappears as the boogeyman haunting post-50s' middle America: the false promise of a success that remains tantalizingly out of reach. That success, moreover, is financial, first and foremost. Pecuniary success is the benchmark by which American society measures a person's overall worth in its capitalistic system. Therefore, Corky's foray into the entertainment industry is his attempt to achieve said pecuniary success. The measure of his worth becomes the money in his bank account or, more accurately, the promise of future cash infusions into this account. Note, too, how said accomplishment for Corky correlates to attention from others. Now, it would be tempting, consequently, to deem Corky's motives not so much monetary as social. And, to be sure, there is some validity to such a criticism, as Corky appears to get most pleasure from the audience's approving laughs and Peggy's approving touch rather than from any promise of money. But as a performer Corky's monetary success depends on his receiving adulation, and so, we cannot separate neatly the two motives, meaning we must, at all times, consider the economic factors behind Corky's decisions.

Namely, in fracturing his self in an attempt to gain success as a comedian,<sup>278</sup> Corky unwittingly acknowledges how his social standing ties to his economic standing. It is only after he has money that he starts getting the companionship he so desperately desires. And though he seems to prefer Peggy's company over the financial gain of going into television, Corky cannot leave Fats; that is, he has already become but a cog in the capitalistic machine. Thus mired in the American Dream, Corky enacts the violence of economic inequality.

---

<sup>278</sup> Piggott 130.



It is important, ergo, that Corky uses Fats as a murder weapon. Since Fats represents not only Corky's libido<sup>279</sup> but also his monetary success, Corky effectively wields his money and the capitalistic system as a cudgel against the rural world around him. Golding, then, makes the statement that violence is inherent to the capitalistic system, which fractures the participant's self by driving him or her into the desperate pursuit of economic gain that will elude most. And since Corky must murder vicariously through Fats, Golding also implies Corky would not have become so violent were it not for this capitalistic impulse, inculcated through the system into which Corky was born.

And, here, we encounter yet another of the many mismatches in *Magic*. In using his voice for capitalistic gain, Corky eschews the ability to also use the voice for personal therapy because the movement of creating Fats pigeon-holed Fats into that capitalistic mode, a fact we can see when Corky weaponizes the crass wooden figure. Matters get worse for Corky, however, when we consider that, as a phenomenon arousing feelings of abjection,<sup>280</sup> the voice cannot be recaptured. Connor and Dolar both observe that the voice is an effect in excess of its cause, or, as Connor puts it, is irreducible to the body.<sup>281</sup> Once spoken, the voice has permeated the ether, exceeded the speaker's grasp, escaped the speaker's control. In this sense, then, ventriloquism as self-mindreading is an exercise, always, in partial failure. Like all good fictions, it misses its mark.

Throughout this analysis I left undiscussed one facet to which I now wish to turn. Undergirding much gothic fiction as well as many evil ventriloquist dummy narratives is the question of whether the terrors are real, supernatural threats or are merely the

---

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Connor 208.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid;  
Dolar 8.

figments of some troubled imaginations.<sup>282</sup> Piggott, for one, argues that psychological and supernatural readings co-exist in these films, specifically in *Magic* and *Dead of Night*.<sup>283</sup> To now, however, I have largely (and purposefully) eschewed a supernatural reading of these texts.<sup>284</sup> Here, I wish to draw a division between my first text for this chapter, *Magic*, and my second, *Dead of Night*, because, I argue, the first is more clearly psychological whereas the latter is more undeniably supernatural.

One of the few points where I disagree with Piggott is her insistence that one can interpret *Magic* as a work of either psychological or supernatural horror, as I believe the weight of the evidence falls on the side of *Magic* being a work of psychological fiction.<sup>285</sup> Before I support that argument, however, it is incumbent upon me to clarify why I am distinguishing between psychological and supernatural texts. To be sure, the two often overlap, as my earlier footnote about the gothic mentions. And one can glean useful psychological interpretations of texts containing supernatural elements. Returning for a moment to *The Exorcist*, though I have argued the text is clearly supernatural, I have also discussed the text's psychological elements.

My point here, then, is that all fiction arguably presents facets of psychology whereas not all texts present elements of the supernatural. And so, the standard of evidence for justifying a supernatural reading of a text is de facto higher than the standard of evidence for justifying a psychological reading of a text. Following this maxim, I assert, the evidence for interpreting *Magic* as a supernatural text is insufficient. Whereas

---

<sup>282</sup> Hervey 234.

<sup>283</sup> Piggott 124.

<sup>284</sup> To be clear, I have avoided giving a supernatural reading of *Magic* not because I am opposed to such readings in general (see my reading of *The Exorcist*, for instance) but because I do not find such readings as fruitful or textually-supported as more psychological interpretations of the movie.

<sup>285</sup> Piggott 124.

Piggott argues this film, like *Dead of Night*, is apparently a possession narrative, I do not see the backing for such a reading.<sup>286</sup> The closest *Magic* comes to becoming explicitly supernatural is also the one moment that made me question whether Fats was truly alive during my first viewing of the movie: when Corky uses Fats to stab Duke (Peggy's partner).

I keep returning to this point, as if to mirror the repetition of the stabbing motion. And I return to this trodden path once again because this scene is a misdirect. When Fats first triggers his switchblade and plunges it into Duke, it appears Fats is moving under his own power, that he is exercising his own agency, is, in other words, alive. Yet, the scene progressively dispels the illusion it casts. As a dying Duke falls to the ground, Fats falls with him, his face twisted in a grotesque, malicious grin. Pivotal, however, Fats falls to the ground inert. He does not move during the fall, and, upon hitting the ground, remains fixed in his chair. That is, he does not fall as if he were alive. He falls as if he were a dummy whose owner is using him as an intermediary to enact his, the owner's, repressed desires.

And, confirming this supposition, Corky then steps out from behind a curtain hanging behind the chair holding Fats. Corky, in other words, reveals himself as the murderer, the man behind the curtain, so to speak. Given the dearth of evidence outside this scene suggesting Fats is alive, the safe conclusion therefore appears to be that Fats is always inanimate, but an extension of Corky's troubled psyche. Far from diminishing *Magic's* power, this reading reveals the power of the (fictional) human mind in its twisted dimensions. And those dimensions are, perhaps, even more twisted in *Dead of Night* than

---

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. 136.

they are in *Magic*.<sup>287</sup> And in honor of both these films, I adopt here a bifurcated exploration of *Dead of Night*, whereby I focus first on its segment “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy” and second on its frame narrative.

“The Ventriloquist’s Dummy” illustrates well the psychological dynamics of the evil dummy story, concerning the contentious relationship between a troubled ventriloquist, Frere, and his dummy, Hugo. Like the dynamic between Corky and Fats, the relationship between Frere and Hugo is that of a meek performer and an abusive dummy who, scholarship establishes, represents the ventriloquist’s more libidinous, Shadow side.<sup>288</sup> Frere and Corky struggle to control their unconscious minds, which break forth and take shape into their dummies.<sup>289</sup> Thus, like Corky, Frere’s identity is dialectically constructed, using his dummy as the Other.

Frere’s ventriloquially split identity also illuminates the sadomasochistic dynamic common to ventriloquism. As the submissive partner to the more dominant Hugo, Frere faces frequent abuse.<sup>290</sup> This dynamic of a dominant dummy and a submissive ventriloquist mirrors the common relationship between a ventriloquist and his or her dummy on stage.<sup>291</sup> For instance, take British ventriloquist and comedian Nina Conti, whose performances often include her taking verbal abuse from her puppets.<sup>292</sup> As if to

---

<sup>287</sup> *Dead of Night* is a horror anthology film. To maintain thematic consistency, my discussion of the film shall focus on its frame narrative and its most famous segment, “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy.”

<sup>288</sup> Heldreth 88;

Piggott 129-130.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Heldreth 88.

<sup>291</sup> Connor 276.

<sup>292</sup> Conti, Nina. “Nina Conti-Talk To The Hand [Full Stand-up Show]. *YouTube*, uploaded by yo bag, 27 February 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm\\_yFkNM6Wg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm_yFkNM6Wg).

dispel the dummy's unnerving appearance,<sup>293</sup> modern ventriloquist performances typically make the ventriloquist the butt of the jokes.<sup>294:295</sup> This practice is both sadistic and masochistic since the ventriloquist explores his or her sadistic side by mocking his or herself via the safe medium of the dummy (adding plausible deniability for any actual self-loathing) and his or her masochistic side by receiving said mocking. The resulting ventriloquial game is circular, making mocker and mocked practically one in the same.<sup>296</sup>

At the end of "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" Frere smashes Hugo, after which he starts speaking in Hugo's voice. Frere, in other words, has internalized his own oppression, such that he seems to become a prisoner within his own body. As Heldreth notes, the self ceases to be during reunification.<sup>297</sup> In theory, a reunified self should disclose information about itself. Having seen that self's constituent parts, we, the audience, should be able to understand better the whole. And yet, this movement of

---

<sup>293</sup> Shoard, Catherine. "Nina Conti: 'I feel it's not in my film how much I miss Ken.'" *The Guardian*, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/mar/15/nina-conti-ventriloquist-ken-campbell>

<sup>294</sup> Connor 276.

<sup>295</sup> Interestingly, though, Conti's performances offer a more complex view of the interplay between sadism and masochism in ventriloquism. As I already mentioned, Conti makes herself the butt of her jokes when her dummies (e.g., Monkey) mock her. Her shows, however, often feature an interesting twist on this relationship, as Conti is also fond of human puppets. That is, she sometimes invites audience members on stage, whereupon she adorns them with a prosthetic mouth. Conti then proceeds to give said audience members exaggerated voices, as if they were some of her ventriloquist dummies. In one version of this game, Conti uses her projected voice to make the audience member turned dummy proclaim how excited they are to show off their dance moves on stage, the joke being that the audience member is visibly embarrassed at the very thought of dancing in front of the audience. Music comes on, and the audience member eventually dances. This part of the show turns Conti into a pure, though comedic, sadist. Gone is the masochistic part of the performance, as Conti is no longer the butt of the joke. And yet, after she thus playfully humiliates her audience member, she reinverts the dynamic by allowing the audience member to smash a pie into her face. Thus, she becomes the butt of the joke, the masochist, once more. Conti's shows therefore highlight the vacillation between (and co-existence of) sadism and masochism in ventriloquial shows.

<sup>296</sup> I specify "practically" here because, as I have previously discussed, the ventriloquist and the ventriloquist's dummy are not one in the same, being, in some ways, irreconcilable with one another. Certainly they are, however, quite alike, and we audience members have a natural inclination toward trying to combine the two in our mind, to dispel the visual illusion that the two are entirely separate beings.

<sup>297</sup> Heldreth 85-86.

Hugo's persona into the person of Frere, what Piggott describes as the film's element of possession, in fact conceals information.<sup>298</sup>

Consider how the ventriloquial dynamic, in splitting visibly the self (as if via vivisection), reveals additional information for the audience through the two faces of the ventriloquist and their dummy. And consider, consequently, how in moving the dummy's persona into the ventriloquist's body, *Dead of Night* removes interpretive tools from the audience. Not only can we, the viewers, no longer read the different faces of Hugo and Frere, but we can also no longer interpret both their voices; now we have only one face and one solitary, haunting voice. We lack the dialogue between the two characters, and because we lack this rich seam of information, we lack, also, some of the ability we earlier had to gaze into Frere's tormented psyche.

*Dead of Night* is a profoundly pessimistic film whose spiraling structure reinforces its narratological hopelessness. While "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" is *Dead of Night's* most famous section, we would benefit from relating this part of the film with the movie's frame narrative, which bookends the various stories comprising most the plot. Being the last of the major story segments prior to the frame narrative's conclusion, "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" is still fresh in the viewer's mind as he or she approaches the film's final stretch. I suspect that positioning is purposeful, as "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" actually foreshadows the frame narrative's conclusion.

As I have argued, "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" ends on a note of circularity, and, indeed, spirality, for the exchange between titular ventriloquist and eponymous dummy spirals into the former's body. That inward spiral narrative structure for the final

---

<sup>298</sup> Piggott 135.

anthological segment mirrors the spiral narrative encircling the rest of *Dead of Night*. The film's frame narrative concludes with a revelation, as viewers learn this narrative's events have not yet occurred. Instead, they have been a premonition of events to come, a dream that all too parallels the reality the dreamer, Walter Craig, is about to experience.

The moment is supernatural, as Craig has divined the future. And yet, his divination appears futile because the frame narrative opens with Craig arriving at the country home where he meets the tellers of the anthology's segments. They tell their stories, moreover, because Craig recognizes them and insists he has met them before, though none recognize him in return. And the frame narrative ends with Craig embarking toward that same country home, where he will repeat his dreamed events, probably not for the first time. Notice how Craig feels he has met these people before despite having just met them for the first time. In other words, Craig has already completed one revolution of this spiral. And now he is going to do it again.

He is, therefore, trapped in an ontological hell wherein he reiterates the same events, apparently, ad infinitum. Accordingly, *Dead of Night*'s frame narrative deserves more scholarly attention, and not just because it inspired the steady state model of the universe.<sup>299</sup> This frame narrative reflects not merely the cycle of repression but also the cycle of history. And what a gloomy sort of history *Dead of Night* portrays. Just as Frere's repression leaves him stuck in his "possess[ed]" state,<sup>300</sup> *Dead of Night*'s view of history leaves its British characters trapped in a cycle of hopelessness and torment.

---

<sup>299</sup> Gregory, Jane. *Fred Hoyle's Universe*. Oxford University Press, 2005. 36-37.

<sup>300</sup> Piggott 135.

And we can understand that torment, I think, by examining the time period of *Dead of Night*'s release. Entering theaters in 1945, *Dead of Night* graced British audiences with a horror film in the final year of World War II, but days after Victory over Japan Day.<sup>301</sup> The movie followed, therefore, on the heels of the blitz and the Holocaust, coming right after a conflict that killed some 400,000 British soldiers and civilians.<sup>302</sup> And that conflict came but a mere 21 years after the end of the first World War, which killed 6% of Britain's adult male population.<sup>303</sup> Thus, in the course of two decades, Britain suffered two world wars and over a million consequent deaths.<sup>304</sup> To their contemporaries, these wars must have seemed a real-life horror movie breaching the fragile boundary between fiction and reality.<sup>305</sup> Indeed, Tropp and Poole have both connected gothic and horror fiction to the realities of World War I, and James Creel has argued why we should consider the seminal World War II film *Saving Private Ryan* a horror movie.<sup>306</sup>

From 1914 up past 1945, the British Empire experienced a horrific series of catastrophes, tragedies, and losses, the sequence of which must have played out like a real-life horror movie and its ensuing sequels. First, World War I rocked the empire and

---

<sup>301</sup> The exact time gap between the war's conclusion and *Dead of Night*'s release depends on how one decides to date Imperial Japan's surrender. Technically, Imperial Japan surrendered in August of 1945, but the official treaty signing did not occur until September 2, 1945. *Dead of Night*, meanwhile, released on September 9, 1945.

<sup>302</sup> "The Fallen: Military strength and deaths in combat." UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/crime-and-defence/the-fallen/#:~:text=Over%20the%20course%20of%20the,and%2012.5%25%20of%20those%20serving>

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> I discuss this boundary in *At the Edge of Existence*.

<sup>306</sup> Tropp, Martin. *Images of Fear : How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture, 1818-1918*. McFarland & Co., 1990;

Poole, Scott W. *Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror*. Counterpoint, 2018; Creel, James. "Gender, Horror, and War: Reading *Saving Private Ryan* as Horror Film." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 53(1), 2020, 215-234.



devastated Europe. Then, but 20 years later, the fathers lucky enough to have survived that war saw their sons fighting another one that would leave Europe scorched, a new world order taking over, and their Empire crumbling. Thereafter, of course, they had to watch as the British Empire, weakened from decades of devastating conflict, began to disintegrate, permanently lessening British hegemony. These former soldiers, then, saw their hard work and sacrifices amount to little, as the aftermath of their service gave way to another, harsher war, which itself begat a variety of spreading regional conflicts; the powder keg had been lit, and, despite their valiant efforts, the fire continued to spread unabated.

That generational suffering, I argue, enacts itself across *Dead of Night*'s narrative, where the sleep-wake cycle reflects the life-death cycle, both of which likewise resemble the film's spiraling structure. Moreover, the film's focus on the voice, via "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" and its strategic placement as the final anthological segment, directs us to think of the movie as evoking the lost voices of the fallen. Like Frere, many British found themselves lacking a voice during this tumultuous period, and the wars' survivors probably found themselves pondering those lost voices, the ones submerged under the sanguine flood drowning their Empire. *Dead of Night* therefore circles back to the ventriloquist's voice and the ventriloquial exchange, which is central to the film.

When Craig dreams the future, words and ideas seem projected into his mind<sup>307</sup> as the ventriloquist appears to project words into the dummy's mind so they may exit the

---

<sup>307</sup> While *Dead of Night* does not establish the rules for precognition in its universe, it seems to follow that there are only a few possible options for how this magic could work. Craig could be receiving this vision of the future from some external power, be it a divine power, an infernal power, or some other, ineffable source (a la Lovecraft, perhaps). Conversely, if Craig were writing the future by imagining it, he would have the powers of God, powers that would be incongruous with his apparent imprisonment within the

dummy's mouth. His voice thus subsumed, he becomes something of a stand-in for the lost generations of British casualties in what in 1945 were various contemporary and near-future conflicts.<sup>308</sup> Frere's voice is buried, and so is Craig's. Given the powerful connection between agency and the voice (both the figurative and literal voice), Frere and Craig have clearly lost their agency. They are as pawns in a play of cosmic powers, a sensation likely akin to that of many British during this tempestuous period of their history, where the blitz and the wars must have seemed to position the quotidian amid a storm of tragedies in which the individual had little to no control, no ability to shape these events that were, themselves, reshaping drastically that same individual's life. Thus, to communicate this feeling of impotence and helplessness in its contemporary Britain, *Dead of Night* construes two of its most important protagonists as likewise impotent and helpless, caught up in the tides of war, the future, and personal tragedies.

The tide, however, brings us back to the figure of the spiral, as the tide occurs in cycles, much as the two World Wars appear to have done. And so, all these images, the tide, the cycle, the spiral, and the voice attending them, bring us to a new but related image: the spiraling structure of the pinna, or the outer mammalian ear. The mammalian ear has evolved a spiraled shape, which helps it better collect soundwaves.<sup>309</sup> Thus, the very instrument of human hearing reflects *Dead of Night's* narratological structure, an

---

dream cycle. This is my rationale for asserting Craig is receiving projected visions of the future from some outside source: he does not seem to have the ability to wield this predictive power to any significant degree, experiencing it not as a superpower but as a curse or punishment.

<sup>308</sup> The film may also have some predictive power of its own, as Frere's subsumed voice mirrors that of the left in Thatcherite Britain.

<sup>309</sup> "Slide Show: How You Hear." Mayo Clinic,

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hearing-loss/multimedia/ear-infections/sls-20077144?s=2#:~:text=The%20outer%20ear%20is%20composed,them%20into%20the%20ear%20canal.>

Evolution is not goal-oriented. So, the ear did not evolve for this purpose. Rather, the ear's shape happens to do this, and, perhaps, this ability to better gather soundwaves aided in some mammal species' survival, thereby allowing the shape's propagation over time.

observation important for foregrounding the role of the voice (and the lost voice) in the film. The ear's spiraled structure funnels soundwaves into the ear canal, wherein the eardrum vibrates the bones of the middle ear, which, in turn, affect the inner ear, giving us the sensation of sound. Hearing, therefore, relies upon vibration and reverberation. Like history, sound echoes across space and time.

### 3.3 How Families Matter: Ventriloquism and Identity Formation<sup>310</sup>

And no text foregrounds this central idea of echoes in gothic texts as well as my next case-study: Gerald Kersh's 1944 short story "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy." Kersh is the least known of the authors I consider in this study, and so it is incumbent upon me to give some background information on him and this story. Born in England, Kersh served with the British military in World War II, losing several family members to the Nazis. He later moved to the United States and eventually died in New York in 1968.<sup>311</sup> Though a popular author during his lifetime, today Kersh has largely faded from the cultural lexicon, his works languishing in obscurity.<sup>312</sup>

Like many of Kersh's stories, "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy" is something of a rarity. It can be difficult to find a copy of this story, and it is even harder to find scholarship about it, despite its inclusion of the evil dummy figure the year before

---

<sup>310</sup> My title for this part of Chapter Three is inspired by the "Stevil" episode of *Family Matters*.

<sup>311</sup> Duncan, Paul. "A Short Biography of Gerald Kersh." Available at: <http://www.harlanellison.com/kersh/biog.htm>

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

*Dead of Night*'s release and despite its provenance with a successful author whom no less a figure than Harlan Ellison has deemed massively talented.<sup>313</sup>

This underappreciated story follows an unnamed narrator's solitary conversation with a tormented ventriloquist, Ecco, who seems to fear his, Ecco's, own dummy, the bizarre looking Micky. As they converse over coffee late one night, the narrator perceives Ecco's timidity, how the once successful ventriloquist starts at every unexpected noise and seems to believe Micky is alive. Despite his previous success as a professional ventriloquist, Ecco reveals he believes his talent pales in comparison to that of his father Professor Vox.

Vox, Ecco nervously tells the narrator, was a domineering figure who insisted his son would become a successful ventriloquist no matter how much practice it took. Ecco thus lived in his father's shadow until one day when Vox died in a fall. That fall, Ecco all but admits, was no accident. And thereafter Micky began speaking to Ecco with Professor Vox's voice, still insisting that Ecco practice until he can match his father's talent. Ecco's conversation with the narrator then ends abruptly as Micky's voice (possibly Vox's voice) calls for Ecco to come back to their room to continue practicing.

To be sure, this story's summary must remind many readers of most evil dummy stories, especially via the related characters of the psychologically troubled ventriloquist and the tormenting dummy. Indeed, I believe this story's value comes not from stunning originality but rather from the useful way in which it articulates some of the underlying facets of this story type. Of particular interest is the ventriloquist's name, "Ecco,"

---

<sup>313</sup> Ellison, Harlan. "I cannot conceal my annoyance." 1989, Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20121026125246/http://www.lettersofnote.com/2010/02/i-cannot-conceal-my-annoyance.html>

pronounced “echo.” As I contended when wrapping up my examination of *Dead of Night*, echoes and reverberations are essential to hearing and, also, to stories of gothic ventriloquism. Moreover, Ecco’s name serves a second symbolic function of summarizing his relationship with his tyrannical father.

So profound is Professor Vox’s influence over his son’s life that his son’s name betrays it in a remarkable instance of nominative determinism. Ecco is but an echo of his father, and like a yell rebounding through the halls of a spacious gothic mansion, the echo is a pale reflection of the originating sound. Indeed, central to the conflict between Ecco and Professor Vox is not merely Vox’s insistence that Ecco follow Vox’s career path in ventriloquism but also Vox’s incorrigible persistence in forcing Ecco to meet Vox’s exacting standards.

Even as Micky,<sup>314</sup> Vox takes umbrage at Ecco’s failure to properly ventriloquize the sounds of b, f, m, n, p, v, and w.<sup>315</sup> Here, Kersh shows some familiarity with real-life ventriloquism, as these sounds (except “n”) are labial consonants, meaning one cannot say them properly without moving one’s lips.<sup>316;317</sup> Ventriloquists therefore learn to substitute other sounds in the place of these ones.<sup>318</sup> As I wrote a moment before, however, the letter “n” is not a labial consonant, a fact the reader may test his or herself right now. To do so, try to say “n” without moving your lips. This is possible. Now try to

---

<sup>314</sup> That is, if we accept that Ecco’s assessment of Vox now possessing and animating the dummy is correct.

<sup>315</sup> Kersh, Gerald. “The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy.” In *The Horrible Dummy and Other Stories*, Faber & Faber, 50.

<sup>316</sup> Ettliger, Marc. “What Are Ventriloquists Doing With Their Vocal Tracts.” *Slate*, 2013, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/10/what-are-ventriloquists-doing-with-their-vocal-tracts.html>

<sup>317</sup> Conti pokes fun at this limitation during one of her performances, in which she hides in a sack and her puppet, Monkey, tells her to take advantage of the audience’s inability to see her to say any b’s or p’s that she wants.

<sup>318</sup> Ettliger.

do the same with the letter “b.” This is impossible. And so, it seems Kersh was not, himself, a ventriloquist but instead had only an outsider’s knowledge of the practice.

This attention to detail, however, aligns Kersh with the antagonistic Professor Vox. Vox’s attention to, or even obsession with, detail became his primary tool for tormenting his son. Like *Dead of Night*, “The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy” offers the possibilities of supernatural or psychological interpretations of its ventriloquist’s affliction. It is undeniable that Professor Vox cast a long shadow over Ecco’s life. The professor’s death must, therefore, have been a profound loss for Ecco, regardless of how abusive their relationship was. Accordingly, it is but a small leap to think Ecco may have channeled the years of abuse, consequent feelings of inferiority, and guilt over murdering his father all into imagining his dummy speaks with his father’s voice. Conversely, however, hints of the supernatural pervade the story to the extent that the narrator ends it trying to convince himself that Ecco is insane and Micky just a dummy.<sup>319</sup>

Nevertheless, there is little evidence for the supernatural in this story beyond mere implication. For now, then, I adopt once more a psychological lens. Perhaps the first psychological aspect this story showcases is the issue of identity in evil dummy narratives. This issue has, of course, appeared in our discussions of *Magic*, *Dead of Night*, and now “The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy,” and it will continue to appear in some of this chapter’s future texts. Thus, the evil dummy narrative often interrogates the question of identity and the construction of the self.

This story, however, goes further in revealing the “echo” of generational trauma by highlighting it in a way *Dead of Night* does not. Whereas *Dead of Night* leaves

---

<sup>319</sup> Kersh 51.

generational trauma as sub-text, “The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy” makes this issue text. The traumas of the past echo across time in these stories. Ecco’s identity is but a pale reflection of his father’s. Not only has Ecco’s family therefore fundamentally shaped his self, but his father’s voice has been the primary instrument of this control. Whether we interpret this tale psychologically or supernaturally, the fact remains that Vox’s voice dominates Ecco’s life, even from the grave.

Extrapolating from this story, we see that the parent’s voice shapes the child’s identity and resultant concept of self. Imagine, therefore, the mother’s voice echoing around the fetus in the embryonic sac. Those vibrations would seem to likewise shape the fetus’s self such that the parent’s voice has an inescapable effect on self-formation from the beginning of one’s history. On a related point, Massumi observes how sensations ‘echo’ in the body.<sup>320</sup> Those echoes, then, are essential to meaning, partially because they help construct some version of the Self-Other dynamic psychoanalysts have long established as central to the formation of selfhood.<sup>321</sup> Said formation (pun intended), moreover, reoccurs over time as the self constantly strives for reformation.<sup>322</sup>

And these evil dummy stories frequently center on the self in the process of renegotiation. Where Ecco diverges from Frere and Corky is in how his story ends. Whereas Frere and Corky self-destruct under the onslaught of the civil war between them and their dummies, Ecco’s story remains open-ended. To be sure, part of this narrative difference stems from the difference in point-of-view. *Magic* is Corky’s story, and even

---

<sup>320</sup> Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002. 14.

<sup>321</sup> Silverman, *Semiotics*, 80.

<sup>322</sup> Snider, Clifton. “Jungian Theory, Its Literary Application, and a Discussion of The Member of the Wedding.” In *Psychological Perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Non-Freudians: a Casebook*, edited by Joseph P. Natoli, Archon, 1984. 24.

though *Dead of Night* is not Frere's, that segment largely centers on him and comes from his psychiatrist's perspective, a point-of-view ensuring the audience maintains access to Frere's mental state (to such an extent as this insight is possible). "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy," however, centers on the unnamed narrator, Ecco's neighbor. Thus, Kersh strategically limits our access to Ecco so we get relatively limited insight into his character. The resultant ambiguity heightens the story's uncanny affect. Of course, each of these texts does maintain some measure of ambiguity, an affect infusing itself throughout the texts I have considered so far in this chapter. The self, these texts seem to suggest, is an ambiguous, unclear sort of phenomenon, not a monolith. Indeed, these texts attack immediately any notion of the unified self when they visibly divide the ventriloquist and attach the hapless performer's double to his or her hand.

To be sure, attacks against the unified self are not unique to ventriloquial texts, appearing frequently in such places as liminal horror.<sup>323</sup> Where the evil dummy makes an interesting intervention, however, is when it makes the self's divided nature depend on or stem from the voice. Connor is certainly correct when he links the voice to identity and agency.<sup>324</sup> But as these evil dummy narratives show (and as "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy" highlights), your voice is not yours; well, it is not just yours.

To see what I mean, we should examine the mechanisms of language acquisition and the disturbing topic of feral children. "Feral Children" refers to kids who have grown up away from human society and company. As with feral cats, the adjective "feral" hereby connotes a sense of wildness that often accompanies stories of these children. In

---

<sup>323</sup> West, *At the Edge of Existence*, 281.

<sup>324</sup> Connor 4.



the most famous tales, these children appear in the wilderness itself, having apparently grown up among animals, or, in at least one case, even being raised by them.<sup>325</sup> Whatever their relationship to the wilderness may be, however, the point remains that these children have offered humanity the unique opportunity to study the influence of human society upon the human self. And the results have largely shown that those separated from civilization during the first few years of their life are never able to fully integrate with society. Likewise, they are never able to master language, including spoken language.<sup>326</sup>

The mechanisms for language acquisition, therefore, are highly time-dependent, relying on a small window, outside of which the human brain will struggle immensely with the subject. Therefore, without your family and your society, you will lack a voice. The very instruments of our agency, therefore, arise from a communal framework. Our relations are the lattice upon which we graft ourselves, and any declarations of selfhood (the very same we inevitably make when we utter our first warbling cries) are thus something of an absurdity. To make a declaration of independence, one has already betrayed one's dependence to the framework granting one the medium of said declaration.

Nor should we shrink from an understanding of the voice as communal, for evolutionary psychology suggests language evolved for a rather simple purpose: to win mates.<sup>327</sup> Language evolved, in other words, to paradoxically assert the self over and against the multitude. But it simultaneously evolved to communicate with that multitude

---

<sup>325</sup> Jarman, Michelle. "Feral Children." *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feral-children>

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Lange, et al. "Words Won't Fail: Experimental Evidence on the Role of Verbal Proficiency in Mate Choice." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33(5), 2014, 482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X13515886>

and, specifically, to create sub-groups within society. The consequent dynamic is push-and-pull, resembling the give and take of the ventriloquist and the dummy vying for social dominance on stage. Again, we return to the figure of the spiral, this time seeing that we are all, in a sense, echoes.

And while I find “The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy” the most illustrative on this point, it would behoove me to provide a second example. For that, we may turn to the 2021 television series *Chucky*.<sup>328</sup> *Chucky* is a continuation of the *Child’s Play* series of horror films, all of which (save the 2019 reboot) have starred Brad Dourif as the voice of Chucky. The *Chucky* series features an interesting example of generational echoes, as the show’s first season features scenes in which Fiona Dourif, Brad Dourif’s daughter, plays a younger version of her dad’s character. In these scenes, then, we, the audience, encounter an example of ventriloquism in a real-life relationship, as Fiona imitates her dad’s voice, appearance, and mannerisms to convincingly portray him and one of his iconic characters. Such is the illusion that Fiona Dourif essentially facetimes her dad as her dad.<sup>329</sup> Thus, voices echo across generations, ensuring we are all products of reverberations, are ourselves reverberations.

Like the voice, however, the self refuses bondage, seeking instead free reign over space. Thus, this issue of the family and its role in shaping the voice is far from neat and tidy. To examine those intricacies, then, we turn to perhaps the most arcane of my texts for this chapter, 1996’s direct-to-video *Pinocchio’s Revenge*, directed by Kevin S. Tenney. Existing scholarship on this movie is so scant I have only found one mention of

---

<sup>328</sup> While I use *Chucky* here to make a brief point, I shall return to the text in more detail at the end of this chapter.

<sup>329</sup> “How Fiona Dourif Transformed Into a Young Chucky.” USA Network, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9t-wrJjLoM>

it published in a peer-reviewed source. Folklorist and film scholar Mikel J. Koven spares the movie the passing remark that it resembles an adult version of a fairy tale or Märchen.<sup>330</sup> Koven's observation is astute, but it only scratches the surface of what I view as a surprisingly thematically rich film that seems to have missed out on the sustained attention it warrants. And because this film has received virtually no scholarly attention, I will summarize it here to provide necessary context for the reader.

*Pinocchio's Revenge* tells the story of single mother Jennifer and her daughter Zoe. Jennifer is a defense attorney who fails to save the life of her client, a convicted murderer. Jennifer's work even comes home with her in the form of a piece of evidence from this case: a wooden puppet her client had buried alongside his son's corpse. Seeing the puppet in Jennifer's car, her boyfriend David mistakes it for a birthday gift for Zoe, giving it to Zoe at the girl's birthday party that night. And Jennifer, seeing how quickly Zoe becomes attached to the puppet, Pinocchio, declines to tell the truth about its origin.

Already troubled, however, Zoe begins to act out in increasingly disconcerting ways, violence her shadow. Zoe's bully, Beth, gets pushed in front of a bus, and David falls down a set of steps while babysitting Zoe. All this time, Zoe grows more and more attached to Pinocchio, and Jennifer becomes concerned about Zoe's correlating rise in disturbed behavior, especially after David dies in the hospital when his life support

---

<sup>330</sup> Koven, Mikel J. "Folklore Studies and Popular Film and Television: A Necessary Critical Survey." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 116, no. 460, University of Illinois Press, 2003, 183, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137897>.

mysteriously becomes unplugged.<sup>331</sup> Accordingly, Jennifer takes Pinocchio away from Zoe, who blames the puppet for the violent events plaguing the family.

The following night, though, Zoe's babysitter, Sophia, is murdered with a fireplace poker. Arriving home some time later, Jennifer finds the house darkened and herself hunted by a small assailant. At one point, after being struck, she sees Zoe standing above her, holding the poker Jennifer was struck with. Zoe insists she wrested the poker from Pinocchio. Before Jennifer can really determine what is going on, Zoe disappears, and Pinocchio emerges from the shadows, running toward Jennifer, and brandishing a knife. Jennifer manages to toss the diminutive Pinocchio through a glass table, whereupon, on second glance she sees Zoe, not Pinocchio, laying unconscious in the glass. The film soon ends with Zoe catatonic and in psychiatric detention. In this final scene, Jennifer insists to Zoe's psychiatrist that Zoe will recover and come home, to which the psychiatrist responds that, for Jennifer's sake, he hopes not.<sup>332</sup>

Like "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy," *Pinocchio's Revenge* emphasizes the role of the family in shaping the individual and, in the case of *Pinocchio's Revenge*, the individual's sexuality. This connection of family to identity is unsurprising, and here I return again to psychoanalysis so I may apply it to a text into which I believe it can provide significant insight. Indeed, *Pinocchio's Revenge* appears a text especially well-

---

<sup>331</sup> I am being deliberately ambiguous with some of my grammatical subjects in this summary because, as I shall discuss later, the film itself is ambiguous on the question of whether Pinocchio or Zoe is responsible for all these violent acts.

<sup>332</sup> *Pinocchio's Revenge*. Directed by Kevin S. Tenney, Trimark Pictures, 1996.

suiting to a psychoanalytic interpretation, as I shall explain. According to psychoanalysis, the infant forms its identity vis-à-vis the Other, and especially the mother.<sup>333</sup>

Here, we reach the topic of object relations theory in psychoanalysis, whereby the very objects around us help construct ourselves and, indeed, become parts of ourselves.<sup>334</sup> For the latter, consider Heidegger's assertion that our tools are parts of our minds.<sup>335</sup> Certainly this seems the case for the ventriloquist, whose tool, the dummy, speaks part of their mind, those parts the ventriloquist most often represses for polite society; repression will out, and in ventriloquism, it "outs" as the dummy.<sup>336</sup> Family members, then, are an essential part of identity formation via object relations.<sup>337</sup> There in our earliest moments, they immediately and (often) indelibly impress themselves upon the plasticity of our infantile brains. And it is into this gap that Pinocchio, the dummy, also enters, becoming himself an outlet for Zoe's id and nascent sexuality.

To be sure, the connection of the evil dummy to the id is not unique to *Pinocchio's Revenge*. According to Fiona Dourif, the original idea for the *Child's Play* series cast Chucky as the embodiment of Andy's id and would have made for a more ambiguous film, one in which audiences would question whether it was Andy or Chucky responsible for the murders.<sup>338</sup> Returning to *Pinocchio's Revenge*, we can see how such a

---

<sup>333</sup> Chion 61.

<sup>334</sup> Bacal, Howard A. and Kenneth M. Newman. *Theories of Object Relations: Bridges to Self Psychology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. 2.

<sup>335</sup> Harman, G. "Technology, objects and things in Heidegger." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2010, 18.

<sup>336</sup> Piggott 130.

<sup>337</sup> Bacal and Newman 2.

<sup>338</sup> Ortiz, David. "A Friend Till The End—Child's Play—Scene Analysis." Killer Shorts, 2022.

<https://killersshortscontest.com/screenwriting/a-friend-till-the-end-childs-play-scene-analysis/>

Indeed, we can still see the skeleton of this idea in the first *Child's Play* film, as "Aunt" Maggie's murder occurs from a first-person perspective, which occludes the audience's sight of the murderer. And Detective

dynamic would play out in psychoanalytic terms. Silverman describes how the ego fashions itself as an object and then offers itself to the id for the id's satisfaction.<sup>339</sup> And so, Zoe's ego presents the object of Pinocchio to Zoe to satisfy her id. Pinocchio, in this conception, becomes an outlet for Zoe's repressed desires, violent as they are. Yet, there is a second way of reading this dynamic. Perhaps instead of being Zoe's ego fashioned to satisfy vicariously her increasingly deviant id, Pinocchio is, in fact, Zoe's id itself, cast external in an attempt to satisfy its rampage.

It is difficult to side with one of these readings over the other since doing so would also mean aligning with an interpretation of whether Zoe or Pinocchio is responsible for the murders in the film. While I believe the bulk of the evidence aligns with the hypothesis that Zoe is the murderer and Pinocchio inanimate, the fact remains that the film is somewhat ambiguous on this issue. Whereas we could explain the murders occupying the main narrative as Zoe's crimes, it is more difficult to explain away the moment early in the film when Pinocchio appears to relocate himself into Jennifer's office chair.

And though we might explain this moment away as a prank of her co-workers, Pinocchio's connection to Vincent Gotto, the murderer Jennifer is defending, is harder to explain away. The sheer coincidence of the same puppet attending two murderers is unlikely enough to plant the seed of doubt in the viewer's mind. Couple that seed with Jennifer's seeing Pinocchio attack her, and you have plausibility enough to argue Pinocchio is, in fact, animate himself. Nevertheless, since there remain plausible

---

Norris shows suspicion of Andy after he notices, first, two small footprints in spilled sugar on the counter and, second, that Andy's shoes bear some similarity to said footprints.

<sup>339</sup> Silverman, *Semiotics*, 134.

naturalistic explanations for all the events we might otherwise attribute to Pinocchio, the weight of the evidence suggests Zoe is (probably unconsciously) committing all the vile acts for which she blames Pinocchio.

Either way, however, we can agree that Pinocchio stands in for what appear to be Zoe's unconscious impulses. In their conversations, of course, we hear Zoe and (ostensibly) Pinocchio debating the correct course of action, with Zoe arguing against violence and Pinocchio advocating it. Thus, Zoe and Pinocchio's dynamic, whether taking place within one mind or between two beings, resembles that of the Freudian double, wherein the bad self becomes externally projected.<sup>340</sup> More interestingly, though, Pinocchio challenges extant readings of the evil dummy narrative. Whereas Heldreth deems the evil dummy the ventriloquist's Shadow, such a reading seems out of place for *Pinocchio's Revenge*.<sup>341</sup> Since the Jungian Shadow is supposed to be the same biological sex as the subject, Pinocchio, apparently a male, would not fit as Zoe's Shadow.<sup>342</sup> Indeed, as a male part of (maybe) Zoe's unconscious, Pinocchio more aptly fits the description of the Jungian Animus.<sup>343</sup> Not only does this shift in terminology mean we should no longer only categorize evil dummies as their ventriloquists' Shadows, but it also means we need to reconsider Zoe's psyche.

While the Shadow is the Self's repressed side, the Anima and Animus embody the Self's opposite sex qualities.<sup>344</sup> Of course, the idea that the Anima and Animus must be

---

<sup>340</sup> Heldreth 82-83.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Snider 25-27.

<sup>344</sup> Bele, Tiago. "Know Yourself—the Persona, the Shadow and the Anima/Animus Inside You." *Medium*, 2021, <https://medium.com/know-thyself-heal-thyself/know-yourself-the-persona-the-shadow-and-the-anima-animus-inside-you-a9d8b6c788e2>

separate aspects of the Self residing in the unconscious is, I argue, rooted in too monolithic a view of sex and gender. Jung expected one's Shadow self to be of one's own sex, and he expected the Anima and Animus to embody aspects stereotypically associated with the different sexes.<sup>345</sup> In fact, Jung connected the Anima, or female side of the male subject, with stereotypically feminine qualities of creativity and receptivity and the Animus, or male side of the female subject, with stereotypically male qualities of power and action.<sup>346</sup>

Writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jung did have the foresight to believe female and male qualities inhere to the Self, regardless of sex. But he stopped short of breaking down the rigid walls of biological sex dictating cultural constructions of gender. That is, Jung's model still prescribes alignment of gender and sex in ways queer studies has proven problematic. In a couple words, the Jungian model is rigid and heteronormative. To see the film's interrogation of said model, we can turn right now back to Zoe herself.

Notably, Zoe blends male and female aspects in a way the Jungian model might deem troubling. From the outset, she is aggressive and rebellious, characteristics a staunchly conservative model would deem masculine.<sup>347</sup> Early in the movie before she receives Pinocchio, Zoe bites Beth, a bully in her class, on the ear so hard Beth requires stitches. Zoe's aggression therefore predates Pinocchio's presence. Furthermore, here the Jungian model encounters the trouble I have identified. Though aggressive, Zoe is still coded feminine. Note her choice of weapon: her teeth. And though pointed canines may

---

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> To be clear, I am not avowing to such a model but am instead attempting to undermine it.



well seem phallic in shape, the gaping maw containing them is notably yonic.<sup>348</sup> Zoe's application of her teeth, then, becomes her enactment of a feminine sort of power, an enactment that consequently undermines the neat and tidy categorization of power and assertiveness as masculine.

Furthermore, Zoe's mouth remains a potent instrument of her power throughout the film, as she arguably ventriloquizes Pinocchio, and as she speaks and performs persuasively enough to convince Jennifer that Pinocchio is animate and malicious, Zoe herself innocent of the charges she faces.<sup>349</sup> *Pinocchio's Revenge* therefore codes the voice as an instrument of feminine power. On this point, consider also Jennifer's occupation as an attorney. Like daughter like mother, Jennifer and Zoe use rhetoric and their voices to exert their wills on the outside world, albeit to mixed success.

And what is it that Zoe wants? It is possible her aggression is an act of rebellion against her single parent household or that she is trying to tame the monster that is her sexuality (in the film's eyes), or, perhaps, it is both. In what may now appear a callback to this work's first chapter, Jennifer's is a single parent household. Like Regan in *The Exorcist*, Zoe is a young girl struggling with living in a household with her female babysitter and successful careerist mother. Zoe, however, occupies the interesting position of being the very girl Creed interprets Regan to be.

Having lost a cornerstone of her identity matrix, Zoe may be trying to solidify her relationships. That is, because one's family is essential to forming one's sense of self, the

---

<sup>348</sup> Creed 105;  
West, *Revulsion*, 161.

<sup>349</sup> Once again, the movie remains ambiguous on this point. Zoe's psychiatrist films Zoe having a conversation with Pinocchio, the footage showing that Zoe appears to be speaking to herself.

loss of Zoe's father represents a loss of Zoe's self. And what does one do to a bleeding wound? One tries to staunch the bleeding. Her self thus wounded, Zoe is wrapping the injury to prevent further changes to her sense of self. Such action, however, is de facto futile. Changes in the self are inevitable; indeed, such changes accompany the very structure of the narrative arc, save for with flat characters. So, Zoe's behavior suggests some desire to become a flat character, to resist change. By the same token, her behavior suggests a desire to never grow up, a desire for which Pinocchio, a diminutive toy incapable of physical growth, is a potent symbol.

As with Regan, though, this reading runs the risk of erasing sexuality's role in the story. Indeed, there is an undeniable element of sexuality to the dynamic of Zoe and Pinocchio in the family. In an early moment of Pinocchio's rampage, Sophia emerges nude from the shower only to find Pinocchio sitting on her bed, staring at her. Zoe later tells Sophia that Pinocchio was merely curious. This moment couples well with an earlier moment within the film, during which the movie cuts from Jennifer and David initiating sex in the former's bedroom over to Zoe in her bedroom, the cut suggesting Zoe is listening to her mother's lovemaking.

In isolation, this second occasion might suggest Zoe's apparently incestuous interest is possibly a fetishization or displacement of her desire to solidify her family unit and fortify it against change. But notice how the first occasion sees Pinocchio (i.e., probably Zoe) demonstrating interest in Sophia rather than Jennifer. As such, it would be premature to de-sexualize the incestuous element here. It sure would seem instead that Zoe is wrestling with her budding sexuality, which is manifesting as interest in the sexual act and the naked female body. Accordingly, Zoe is likely struggling with jejune

lesbianism, meaning *Pinocchio's Revenge* explores not only the issue of identity formation broadly but also the issue of queer identity formation, specifically.

Growing up in 1990s America, Zoe faces a treacherous journey in defining her sexual identity.<sup>350</sup> Couple the homophobia of 1990s America with Zoe's fractured home life, and it is little surprise she struggles with behavioral issues. Adopting for a moment the societal homophobia she has internalized, Zoe uses Pinocchio's male persona to explore same-sex sexual attraction.

This is not, however, to say that *Pinocchio's Revenge* is a progressive work that liberates queer sexualities from the homophobic, prescriptivist culture around them. Rather, *Pinocchio's Revenge* can be usefully read as a queer text in which Zoe's use of the voice and her Animus (Pinocchio) allows her to challenge, unintentionally, the heteronormative Jungian schema and to further connect ventriloquism and the voice to queer sexualities. Part of the trouble here, part of the reason I refuse to classify *Pinocchio's Revenge* as an allied text, is because, whatever the case, *Pinocchio's Revenge* construes Zoe's sexuality as dangerous and increasingly unrestrained. Likewise, whatever the case, *Pinocchio's Revenge* is a story of Zoe trying to figure out who and what she is.

To that end, Zoe is trying to create a world with only her and her mom, a world in which a male authority is largely unnecessary. The only male here is Pinocchio, whose identity apart from Zoe is debatable. And so, while *Pinocchio's Revenge* does cast Zoe's sexuality as monstrous, especially compared to her mom's (which is not entirely normal

---

<sup>350</sup> While not as socially conservative as other times and places in history, the United States was still inhospitable to queer sexual identities in the 1990s.

since Zoe can hear her mother having sex), it also does not fall into the staunch social conservatism of *The Exorcist*.

To see what I mean, let us look to the ending, when Jennifer accepts Zoe's version of events. What sort of family would Jennifer and Zoe forge were Zoe to be released from the psychiatric facility? Seemingly, this would be a family in which Zoe would get what she wants: her mother's undivided attention. Notice how Zoe's choices of victims align with this goal. David occupies some of Jennifer's time and all her romantic and sexual energy. Thus, killing him removes an obstacle between Zoe and her mother.<sup>351</sup> And killing Sophia clears the table entirely, reducing the family unit to Zoe and Jennifer (and possibly Pinocchio).

Certainly, Zoe's releasing her id is coded as monstrous in that her actions leave a series of bodies in her wake and leave her comatose. Nevertheless, Zoe's unfettering her id may also get her what she wants. We cannot say for sure, of course, since the film's ending is ambiguous on this point. In this sense, then, Pinocchio does correspond rather well to Zoe's id. Pivotal, in perhaps the most aptly metaphoric moment from the movie, Pinocchio persuades Zoe to cut his strings, releasing him to act on his own accord. As a puppet, Pinocchio's strings are the instrument of his control, whereby his owners also become his puppeteers.

In cutting Pinocchio's strings, Zoe releases him from her physical control. In psychoanalytic terms, she is slicing the strings her super-ego has used to bind her id, now embodied in Pinocchio. Thus, she is giving into the infantile desire for pure hedonistic

---

<sup>351</sup> Of course, this means she is removing David as an obstacle in whatever form he may be one, and so we must also consider that Zoe is trying to monopolize her mother in a sexual sense (a clause I apologize for writing).

self-fulfillment, the desire to have all one wants with none of the downsides and none of the restraint society expects of adults. Zoe, therefore, is stubbornly clinging to the breast as her mother threatens to begin the weaning process.

*Pinocchio's Revenge* thus shows how the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic so often re-enacts, in miniature, the maturation process. The puerile dummy<sup>352</sup> represents the part of the ventriloquist that refuses to grow up, to accept society's limitations. The dummy's crude sexuality, then, betrays the ventriloquist's split mind. On the one hand, crass sexuality reveals an adult side to the otherwise childish being, but, on the other, it shows only a distorted sort of sexuality, malformed as befitting the physical appearance of the puppet out of whose mouth spew the vulgarities. And so, these films suggest the path forward to healthy sexuality lies through accepting societal limitations. Though Zoe may prove successful after the ending of *Pinocchio's Revenge*, the film does not appear to approve of her possible success.

The ominous music accompanying Pinocchio throughout the movie suggests the film wants audiences to consider him sinister, to disapprove of the attack on Beth, the murders of David and Sophia, and Zoe's attempts to monopolize her mother's attention. For the lattermost, we should treat the conversations between Zoe and Pinocchio, where Pinocchio's voice gives the game away, noting how removing David from the picture will get Zoe her mother back.<sup>353</sup> At the same time, the movie regrettably sheds negative light on Zoe's nascent lesbianism. If, as I have argued, the movie represents Zoe's sexuality as twisted and monstrous, that monstrosity is difficult, if not impossible, to

---

<sup>352</sup> Piggott 130.

<sup>353</sup> *Pinocchio's Revenge*.

separate from the lesbian elements her sexuality also entails. This is another reason I do not declare the film an ally of the LGBTQ+ community.

Whatever the case, Zoe nearly achieves her goal of a semi-solipsistic existence barricaded against the world, one in which, like a babe in the womb, she might monopolize her mother's attention. And, without David or Sophia in the picture, on this last bit, Zoe has kind of succeeded. She is all Jennifer has left, she and the hope that she is not the twisted murderer the doctors believe her to be. Returning now to the issue of selves as echoes, we can see the problem: voices create echo chambers. The same reverberations that give shape to our beings also limit our growth. If Zoe achieves her goal, then she is stuck in a moment in a time, experiencing, as it were, the same soundwaves *ad infinitum*.

This is the issue with the projection inherent to narcissism. Zoe's fetishization keeps her from individualizing in a way conducive to modern society; instead, Zoe's individuation is monstrous. The narcissist's paradigm, at least in Zoe's case, is to remake the world in their image. That is, Zoe projects her ideal version of reality onto the world and attempts to make of this fantasy a morbid reality. Earlier, I read Pinocchio's spying on Sophia's nude body as a moment of vicarious, voyeuristic sapphic desire on Zoe's part. It is also possible, however, to read this moment as (instead or also) a moment of narcissistic interest.

In other words, Zoe's interest in the adult female body could reflect an interest less in the Other as a sexual object than in Zoe herself. Zoe inspects Sophia's body to better know her, Zoe's, own body. Certainly, such a move would align with Zoe's desire to construct her envisioned semi-solipsistic world. Either way, though, Zoe's

ventriloquial journey is a process of individuation, which extant scholarship of ventriloquism has long connected to ventriloquism in fiction.<sup>354</sup> And like so many other fictional ventriloquists before her, Zoe fails to achieve successful individuation. Rather, like Frere, her self seems lost.

Yet, *Pinocchio's Revenge* has further interventions to offer existing scholarship of evil dummy narratives as well as of ventriloquism itself. For the former, we should consider now how most scholarship of dummy narratives concerns the psychological interchange between ventriloquist and dummy. Of course, this is a natural and rich field for scholars to till, and I have attempted to till it myself. *Pinocchio's Revenge*, however, explores not only this field but also another, the question of group formation.

On this topic, Stewart argues imitation shows a desire to harmonize different minds.<sup>355</sup> Note that language: “harmonize,” as in to put sounds in accord, on the same wavelength. It is my contention here that *Pinocchio's Revenge* depicts a rather unusual harmonization between two separate minds, an alignment the ventriloquial narrative longs for but, as we have seen, seldom achieves. Recall the film’s climax, in which Jennifer sees Pinocchio charging her, knife held aloft. If we accept my argument that the bulk of evidence suggests Pinocchio is inanimate and Zoe disturbed, then this moment appears rather odd. Indeed, earlier I observed how it appears to lend weight toward the supernatural side of that recurring psychological-supernatural scale that so often emerges from gothic fictions.

---

<sup>354</sup> Connor 297.

Individuation is the process whereby, in psychoanalysis, the individual reckons with their unconscious (and, in true Jungian sense, the collective unconscious) and combines it with their conscious mind. Evil dummy narratives often portray attempts at this process.

<sup>355</sup> Stewart, Dugald. *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*. London: John Murray, 1827. 185. Also cited in Connor 300.

Nonetheless, there remains a psychological reading of this moment, one I believe fruitful. For, you see, it is possible for two people to suffer the same delusion. This phenomenon, rare though it might be, is Folie à deux.<sup>356</sup> Kumar et al relate a documented case of Folie à deux in which a mother and son shared the bizarre, persecutory belief that their neighbors were trying to use black magic to poison the mother and son's drinking water.<sup>357</sup> Going through their case studies, the authors observe that Folie à deux tends to flow from a dominant partner to a subordinate partner (in the case above, from domineering mother to meeker son) and, moreover, that Folie à deux tends to arise in situations where the two afflicted have limited contact with the outside world.<sup>358</sup>

It is possible, I argue, that Jennifer sees Pinocchio attacking her because she has succumbed to a shared delusion with her daughter, Zoe, who, we should note, seems to earnestly believe Pinocchio is alive and responsible for hurting Beth, David, Sophia, and, indeed, even Jennifer. Zoe attests to Pinocchio's liveliness and malice to her mother and carries on conversations with Pinocchio even while alone with him, the latter particularly attesting to Zoe's earnestness and, if we accept a psychological reading of the movie, delusion. If Zoe has succeeded in creating that semi-solipsistic world of her and Jennifer alone, she has done so through Folie à deux, through planting the seeds of belief in Jennifer's mind until they flower and actively cloud her vision, warping Zoe's figure into that of Pinocchio in perhaps the single most fitting metaphor for a split mind the film could present.

---

<sup>356</sup> Kumar, et al. "Folie à deux." *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 47(3), 2005, 164-166.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2919794/#:~:text=Folie%20%C3%A0%20deux%20is%20defined,brief%20review%20of%20the%20literature>

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.



Folie à deux operates like a localized version of the more well-documented mass hysteria.<sup>359</sup> And both afflictions reinforce Jortner's astute observation that American horror often features democracy as its monster.<sup>360</sup> Mass hysteria and Folie à deux are contagious mental afflictions that show how influence from others can be dangerous, how ideas from one person (the seed of democracy's sweet fruit) can, in fact, be harmful. And so, it is little surprise that *Pinocchio's Revenge* ends with the Folie à deux at least temporarily thwarted.

American fiction, while exploring the threat of the voting masses to the individual, can rarely countenance a full repudiation of the democratic edifice.<sup>361</sup> Horror, after all, is often an agent of the status quo, as we have seen.<sup>362</sup> And so, just as it does to Zoe's incipient lesbianism, *Pinocchio's Revenge* tries to partially bury this threat to democratic governance, small though it may be. You see, in trying to form her barricaded, two person in-group, Zoe is rejecting wider society as well as the tides of change, the very sorts of change American democracy expects to ebb and flow with the election cycle. To respect the tastes of its time and place (the era of Clinton's "new Democrats," and that party's consequent movement toward the political right), *Pinocchio's Revenge* achieves with its ending plausible deniability about upholding the status quo. Zoe at least appears defeated.

---

<sup>359</sup> For a discussion of mass hysteria's role in the state, see:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7913136/>

<sup>360</sup> Jortner.

<sup>361</sup> I specify "rarely" in this case because horror does not always uphold the status quo. Instead, works such as *The Birds*, *Day of the Dead*, and the films of David Cronenberg (e.g., *Videodrome*) often reject the status quo. Thus, it would be demonstrably incorrect to assert that all horror movies try to respect the existing state of affairs, including democratic forms of governance.

<sup>362</sup> King 41;  
Tudor 18-19.

Regardless of her (arguable) failure, though, Zoe uses psychological deviations to create a form of social bonding and societal formation whereby she monopolizes her mom by seducing her, Jennifer, into a world of shared delusions. Thus, in *Pinocchio's Revenge*, ventriloquism and the voice ultimately explore group psychology in as much depth as they do individual psychology. The voice becomes a means of cultivating a split personality and, down the line, a localized, shared delusion that draws the target, Jennifer, into its grasp, achieving an anti-social, narcissistic, and infantile sort of control over Zoe's immediate surroundings.

This aspect of *Pinocchio's Revenge* also adds a new danger to ventriloquism's repertoire. Certainly danger has always been part of the discussion about ventriloquism. Connor, for instance, notes that the practice is dangerous because it uses sound to make us doubt sight.<sup>363</sup> And he further asserts that vision dictates hearing in ventriloquism.<sup>364</sup> *Pinocchio's Revenge*, however, offers a fictional complication of this phenomenon when Jennifer sees Pinocchio attacking her. For, this film shows that sight can be the source of its own malfunction. Though sound appears to provide the means on ingress for Jennifer's delusion (via Zoe's earnest insistence that Pinocchio is alive), in the moment of Pinocchio's attack, sight does the work itself.

Connor's point relates to the ventriloquial stage performance, where the audience can come to believe (if only for the sake of the show via suspension of disbelief) that the dummy is speaking because they, the audience, can see it appearing to speak.<sup>365</sup> Pinocchio's attack, though, is distinct from Zoe's entreaties, appearing not the result of a

---

<sup>363</sup> Connor 14-15.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid. 14-15.

sequential displacement but, rather, the result of a flowering seed, long planted. Here, therefore, sound alters sight; it does not make Jennifer doubt her sight. It makes her see differently. Sound, ergo, can dictate sight, and ventriloquism can use sound to interfere with vision. In *Pinocchio's Revenge*, then, ventriloquism presents itself as more dangerous (and dangerous in a somewhat different way) than existing analyses allow. And in doing so, the movie resonates with some real-life psychological phenomena, suggesting the dangers are not, perhaps, quite as fantastical as they may appear at first blush.

Similarly, Connor is not alone in, I argue, overstating his case about the interplay between sight and sound. Ong, for example, argues that the evidence of sound unfolds simultaneously while the evidence of sight unfolds sequentially.<sup>366</sup> And yet, sight can unfold simultaneously as well. Certainly a viewer might perceive dummy and brandished knife at once just as they might perceive one then the other.<sup>367</sup> If we are discussing an image the eyes can take in all at once, then vision only appears to be sequential. When the eye glances at the cover for *Pinocchio's Revenge*, the larger images are capable of impressing themselves upon the mind's eye at once, like a sort of psychic rubber stamp.

It is only in the processing of the image, the parsing of the information, that the human mind begins to build a narrative about how one perceived the image. That

---

<sup>366</sup> Ong, Walter J., *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Religious and Cultural History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981. 128. Also cited in Connor 15.

<sup>367</sup> I find Ong's point generally incisive, just as I find Connor's arguments largely persuasive. As such, my point here is merely to demonstrate how there remains more nuance than I have found Ong and Connor's points allow for.

narrative then imposes the illusion of a sequence in the beholder's mind.<sup>368</sup> As such, the sequential nature of the perception is, in fact, an illusion. This is not to say, however, that it is impossible to see in sequence, for, if one looks first at one part of a larger image (say, a broad view of a room full of people) and then at another (say, a person well hidden in the corner), then one's sight will, indeed, unfold in sequence.

All of this discussion about Pinocchio attacking Jennifer (and moving on screen for the first time) brings up a topic I have hitherto largely neglected: on-screen puppetry, surely a topic meriting discussion in a work on ventriloquism and the voice in gothic horror fiction. Interestingly, though, *Pinocchio's Revenge* does not use on-screen puppetry to animate Pinocchio. Rather, it relies on an actor, the late Verne Troyer, in a costume to render its evil dummy. Conversely, *Child's Play* and its television series *Chucky* have repeatedly used on-screen puppetry to achieve the same effect. As promised, I therefore return to *Chucky*.

As I discussed earlier, integral to the affect of evil toy stories is the fear of dolls and other inanimate objects like dummies and puppets. Puppets are scary partially because they blur categories via the uncanny valley. In creating puppets, though, we are trying to gain control (e.g., over a humanoid figure, the likes of which we usually cannot control). When a fictional dummy runs amok, then, it disrupts our control, a control we innately fear is tenuous because of that uncanny valley. That is, though the act of making puppets and dolls, I argue, is an act of attempted, totemic control, we innately know this practice is flawed, our power over these figures weak. The ventriloquist, then, exploits

---

<sup>368</sup> Jonathan Gottschall makes a similar point when he observes how the human mind constructs narratives, even when they are untruthful (Gottschall 103).

this dynamic when they feign a loss of control, first confirming then quelling our paranoia of losing our mastery over such uncanny figures.

After all, we know the ventriloquist's performance is but an act, the ostensibly quarrelsome dummy an inert hunk of wood. The ventriloquial act, therefore, was an early version of the horror film, a chance to ritualistically outpour collective cultural anxieties in a relatively innocuous, relatively controlled setting mediated by an experienced figure acting as a sort of cultural therapist: the ventriloquist in the theater, the director of the film. Furthermore, the use of puppetry to enact the "killer toy" film (e.g., the use of puppetry to move the Chucky doll on camera) offers the same illusion with an added benefit: a visual illustration of the hair's breadth between control and loss of control. Though the Chucky doll is, diegetically, moving under his own power, extra-diegetically we know (and can perceive) he is a puppet (i.e., under control). But the resultant co-existence of control and its lack hints at the ease with which one of these states may pass into the other, or, and perhaps more unnervingly, the possibility that the two may, in fact, co-exist.

The voice augments the uncanny effect of on-screen puppetry by giving life to dummies. When the dummy has its own voice, we have lost power over it. The ambulatory, speaking dummy is no longer bound; it is, in all senses and to all senses, free-ranging. Of course, *Child's Play* and *Chucky* cast their "dummy" as an abusive, sadistic serial killer, one who is not only uncontrolled but who also seeks to control the people around him.

This last aspect of Chucky's personality is clearest in his eponymous television series, the pilot episode of which follows Chucky's attempts to insinuate himself into the

life of teenage protagonist Jake. In one of the episode's strongest moments, Chucky plays the part of a ventriloquist's dummy, pretending Jake is casting Chucky's voice when, in reality, Chucky is doing the talking and running the show. Moreover, the resulting performance sees Chucky intervene in Jake's social life and actively target Jake's bullies. At first blush, Chucky appears protective of Jake. Yet, given how an early scene in the episode shows Chucky surreptitiously reaching for a concealed knife as if to stab Jake, this moment is bound to raise eyebrows in the audience.

After all, it seems Chucky has decided to defend Jake from the toxic people in his life. Naturally, however, that early scene with the knife foreshadows Chucky's always sinister intentions. Even when he seems to defend Jake, Chucky is forcing himself into Jake's life with persistence and veiled threats: "You get that now, don't ya, Jake?"<sup>369</sup> Chucky, as experienced viewers of the *Child's Play* films would anticipate, is himself an abuser. Thus, *Chucky* uses ventriloquism (or feigned ventriloquism) to explore an abusive relationship and particularly the affinity of abusers for monopoly of control.

To be sure, this resembles the age-old, *Dead of Night* style dynamic of the ventriloquist and dummy vying for control, albeit with the twist that the "dummy" in *Chucky* is not trying to replace the human, but merely to mold him. In casting the ventriloquist-dummy relationship in these terms, *Chucky* highlights the control of dummies, tools, and, most importantly, language over their users. Pertaining to the latter, Lacanian psychoanalysis has long acknowledged how language acquisition entails a loss

---

<sup>369</sup> "Dead by Misadventure." *Chucky*. Directed by Don Mancini, Syfy and USA Networks, 2021.

of power for the self.<sup>370</sup> Language, then, tames the uncivilized self, bringing it under yoke and in line with societal norms.

The process of language acquisition is therefore connected to the issue of bodily autonomy (and the lack thereof). Perhaps consciously building on this psychoanalytic model of language, the franchise's 2019 reboot, *Child's Play*, directed by Lars Klevberg, shows this role of language playing out through gory action.<sup>371</sup> Whereas the original films and the *Chucky* series make Chucky explicitly supernatural (Charles Lee Ray uses magic to transfer his soul into the doll), the reboot makes Chucky an artificial intelligence (A.I.).<sup>372</sup> This change is essential for understanding the role of language in *Child's Play* (2019).

While the original Chucky is a wisecracking, foul mouthed man with his own personality, 2019's Chucky is a relatively blank slate. As an A.I., he is supposed to learn from his family. Indeed, we see this in action when Chucky parrots Andy's language, e.g., about the family cat being a "total dick."<sup>373</sup> As a *nig tabula rasa*, this version of

---

<sup>370</sup> Silverman, *Semiotics*, 52.

<sup>371</sup> *Child's Play* is unique among horror franchises in that, aside from the 2019 reboot, the entire series follows a single continuity, spanning from the original film in 1988 to the current series, whose second season wrapped in late 2022. The original franchise follows the decades long reign of serial killer Charles Lee Ray, who, in the 1988 film's opening, transfers his soul into a child's toy doll after being mortally wounded in a shootout with police. From there, the original film series follows Charles (or Chucky)'s attempts to transfer his soul out of the doll. This series included *Child's Play*, *Child's Play II*, *Child's Play III*, *Bride of Chucky*, *Seed of Chucky*, *Curse of Chucky*, and *Cult of Chucky*. The *Chucky* television series is a direct continuation of the franchise's story, picking up a few years after *Cult of Chucky* and following Chucky's new mission and newfound abilities.

Creator of the character Chucky, Don Mancini, is the showrunner for the television series, and Brad Dourif, who has voiced Chucky in all works except for the reboot (when Mark Hamill stepped into the role) also returns.

<sup>372</sup> While I include *Child's Play* (2019) in my discussion, it is, arguably, the least gothic of the texts I consider in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is useful for my purposes here in last pages of Chapter Three, and, as such, I include with the caveat that it is something of an outlier among the texts I analyze in this work.

<sup>373</sup> *Child's Play*. Directed by Lars Klevberg, performance by Mark Hamill, Orion Pictures, 2019.

Chucky absorbs the language and behavior he encounters, emulating without understanding. Language, this film suggests, makes us programmable.

Chucky tries to program Jake when he manipulates him into wanting to murder his bully Lexi. In the 2019 version, Andy inadvertently programs Chucky to consider creatures like the family cat and his mom's boyfriend problems to be eliminated. And in both these cases, the programming comes from the spoken word (i.e., the voice in its communicative role). This all connects to the real world question of linguistic relativity, the idea that one's ability to conceive and understand relies upon (and is limited by) one's language and vocabulary.<sup>374</sup> While there is evidence that linguistic relativity is fungible (i.e., people can express ideas for which their language lacks dedicated words and tenses),<sup>375</sup> the idea remains potent.<sup>376</sup>

What is more, and as I mentioned earlier, spoken language appears to have evolved to help humans win mates.<sup>377</sup> And that means language stems from power and the desire for control, both facts that these ventriloquial texts thus lay bare for us to recognize.

---

<sup>374</sup> Lucy, John A. "Linguistic Relativity." *Annual Reviews Anthropology*, 26, 1997, 291.  
[https://cslc.nd.edu/assets/142525/lucy\\_linguistic\\_relativity.pdf](https://cslc.nd.edu/assets/142525/lucy_linguistic_relativity.pdf)

<sup>375</sup> Curzan, Anne, and Michael Adams. *How English Works*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 229. Print.

<sup>376</sup> Indeed, linguistic relativity forms a cornerstone of Orwell's philosophy behind designing Newspeak in his seminal novel *1984*. (See: "Politics and the English Language" by Orwell.)

<sup>377</sup> Lange et al.



## CHAPTER 4. ACOUSMATIC TERRORS: THE DISEMBODIED VOICE FROM POE TO CRYSTAL LAKE

### 4.1 Introduction

So far in this project, I have examined cases in gothic horror when the voice becomes doubled via cases of possession and self-splitting. Now, however, I turn to the last iteration of this theme I wish to examine: that of the disembodied voice, wherein the voice's origin becomes ambiguous or even indeterminable. To be sure, this version of my central thematic concern may, at times, overlap with the other versions I have hitherto discussed. Indeed, I argue at least one of my central texts in this chapter, Poe's seminal poem "The Raven," can be usefully read as a ventriloquial text. Nevertheless, these texts ("The Raven" and the American slasher film), as we shall see, offer an interesting and destabilizing variation on this central thread that has wound its way throughout these pages. And so, I start with "The Raven" before examining similar effects in the slasher film, wrapping this chapter up with a vignette about those movies. Like a bird, then, let us take flight into this final chapter.

### 4.2 Parroting: The Disembodied Voice and Poe's Agenda in "The Raven"

Existing readings of "The Raven" have long argued over whether the titular bird is a supernatural figure. In Part One of this chapter, however, I argue that the question of the bird's nature is indeterminable and, in fact, risks overlooking the poem's deliberate ambiguity.<sup>378</sup> To demonstrate my point, I contend "The Raven" is a ventriloquial poem that aims to create an oneiric experience for its readers and that, moreover, engages in

---

<sup>378</sup> Heller, Terry. *The Delights of Terror: an Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror*. University of Illinois Press, 1987. 179-180.

questions of absurdism and existentialism by using its ventriloquial elements to question the very nature and existence of meaning. Finally, I conclude by engaging in one of the perennial debates of Poe studies: whether his works are auto-biographical. I end this first part of Chapter Four by arguing Poe's work does, in fact, appear auto-biographical in nature and that, furthermore, Poe himself is perhaps the most useful prism through which one can interpret his fictions, including "The Raven."<sup>379</sup>

Nevertheless, to reach that point, it would behoove us to start with a smaller topic, that of the supernatural in Poe's poem. As Fisher notes, there are a variety of supernatural and natural readings of "The Raven,"<sup>380</sup> which variously cast the bird as the Devil,<sup>381</sup> as mythological,<sup>382</sup> or as an extension of the narrator (or student)'s<sup>383</sup> troubled mind.<sup>384</sup> Evidently, this question about the bird's exact nature has divided critics to date. And, indeed, it probably should, for the gothic so often dwells in that nebulous space betwixt supernatural and psychological readings.<sup>385</sup>

---

<sup>379</sup> Questions of supernatural versus natural terrors, the dream-like nature of Poe's works, and the auto-biographical nature of Poe's works are all recurring throughout the scholarly conversation on Poe. As such, this part of Chapter Four is entering a number of scholarly debates around this cryptic author.

<sup>380</sup> Fisher, Benjamin Franklin. *The Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print. 43.

<sup>381</sup> Granger, Byrd Howell. "Devil Lore in 'The Raven.'" *Poe Studies* (1971-1985), vol. 5, no. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, 53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296623>; Weber, Jean-Paul. "Edgar Poe or The Theme of the Clock." *Poe: a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. 83.

<sup>382</sup> Adams, John F. "Classical Raven Lore and Poe's Raven." *Poe Studies* (1971-1985), vol. 5, no. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, 53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296622>.

<sup>383</sup> Scholarship of "The Raven" has sometimes referred to its unnamed narrator as "The Student" (Freedman 26).

<sup>384</sup> Benjamin Fisher 30.

Nelson, Victoria. "Messages of Black Birds." *Agni*, no. 37, *Agni*, 1993, 239, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23009313>.

Freedman 29.

Wardrop, Daneen. "Quoting the Signifier 'Nevermore': Fort! Da! Pallas, and Desire in Language." In *Critical Insights: The Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by Steven Frye, Salem Press, 2010. 167.

<sup>385</sup> Hervey 234.

As evidence for the former interpretation of “The Raven,” we should look to the mythological references throughout the poem, whereby the narrator refers to “Pallas,” Pluto, angels, fiends, and Gilead.<sup>386</sup> The implication of something supernatural therefore suffuses the poem’s atmosphere. And to these implications other scholars have added significant (and insightful) extra-textual evidence. Granger, for instance, casts the titular bird as at least connected to the Christian Devil, and he further claims the narrator decides the bird is, in fact, itself a demon when he, the narrator, proclaims: “Bird or fiend!”<sup>387</sup> Granger then caps his supernatural reading of the formative poem off by drawing the obvious parallel between the narrator’s selling of his soul to the recurring motif of selling one’s soul to the devil: “And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor/ Shall be lifted—nevermore!”<sup>388</sup>

While Granger has made important headway in drawing connections between Poe’s bird and the character of the Christian Devil, I nevertheless find his reading of the poem too literal. That is, Granger’s search for evidence of his reading leads him to make some unfounded assertions, such as when he claims the books of “forgotten lore” the narrator reads may, in fact, be works of black magic.<sup>389</sup> We must classify this as speculative evidence at best, as the poem never confirms the books’ contents. Moreover, it seems more parsimonious to me for us to read the adjective “forgotten” as referring to the books’ lack of popularity. That is, the books may well be “forgotten lore” merely by

---

<sup>386</sup> Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Raven.” *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 773-775. Print.

This list is inexhaustive by design.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.* 775.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> Granger 53.  
“The Raven” 773.

virtue of their being unpopular and, therefore, remembered by few.<sup>390</sup> To buttress this reading, consider how the narrator likewise describes these books as “quaint and curious,” hardly appellations for powerful magical tomes capable of summoning the devil (or that claim to hold such power).<sup>391</sup>

Similarly, Granger’s reading overrides some of the poem’s nuance when it tries to claim the narrator has decided the raven is a fiend.<sup>392</sup> Since the narrator shouts “bird *or* fiend” (emphasis mine), the narrator is not making the positive assertion that the raven is a demon of some sort but is, rather, showing doubt on this matter.<sup>393</sup> All of this is to say that I find Granger’s reading of the poem insufficiently nuanced. It is not, however, to dismiss his contributions or to argue the poem’s terrors are naturalistic. Indeed, for reasons I shall now make clear, I do not believe it possible to determine whether the bird is a supernatural agent or merely a bird.

This brings me to my assertion that “The Raven,” like *The Exorcist* in Chapter One, may be usefully read as a ventriloquial text whose reliance upon the voice provides in-roads to its deeper meanings. This reading, moreover, is what I believe to be my primary intervention in the scholarship around this noteworthy and oft-studied poem, for I have uncovered some important headway in this direction but no full articulations of my stance. Backer, for example, establishes the importance of sound in the poem when he observes how sound precedes the raven’s entrance into the narrator’s chamber.<sup>394</sup> And Eddings’ statement that the narrator of “The Raven” is Poe’s puppet is certainly helpful

---

<sup>390</sup> “The Raven” 773.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Granger 54.

<sup>393</sup> “The Raven” 775.

<sup>394</sup> Backer, Ron. *Classic Horror Films and the Literature That Inspired Them*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015. 163.

for my purposes.<sup>395</sup> Still, the point remains that these critics have not advanced a reading of “The Raven” as a ventriloquial text, as I now do.<sup>396</sup>

Central to such a reading is the poem’s refrain (“nevermore”), about which scholars have penned numerous arguments.<sup>397</sup> This word’s importance to the overall poem is evident from its repetition, and so, it makes sense that scholars have repeatedly mined its surprisingly capacious depths for meaning. I wish, however, to direct the reader’s attention to a fact the scholarship sometimes neglects and that I believe integral to understanding the poem: that word may not be the bird’s. Indeed, the narrator wonders whether the raven learned its catchphrase from “some unhappy master,” whom it then parrots to the narrator.<sup>398</sup> Such an interpretation, which the poem never dispels, would align with a naturalistic reading of the poem. After all, while not as linguistically adept as parrots, ravens can mimic human speech.<sup>399</sup>

And in such cases, ravens make of themselves living ventriloquist dummies, becoming conduits for another’s language, another’s message, another’s meaning. This fact is not lost in the literature around this enigmatic poem, where Harry Lee Poe argues

---

<sup>395</sup> Eddings, Dennis W. “Mad Ravings or Sound Thinking?: ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ and Poe’s Parodic Raven.” In *Edgar Allan Poe: Beyond Gothicism*, edited by James M. Hutchisson, University of Delaware Press, 2011, 161.

<sup>396</sup> A full examination of Poe’s opus is outside this work’s scope, but for now I observe that I also consider “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” a ventriloquial text. This story therefore shows that ventriloquism has at least some recurrence in Poe’s fiction. I relegate this story to a footnote, however, because I lack the space and time to develop fully this argument and will instead be focusing on “The Raven” and only mentioning Poe’s other works if and when they become relevant to my primary assertions.

<sup>397</sup> “The Raven” 273-275.

See, for example, Renza 33 and Scraba 44.

<sup>398</sup> “The Raven” 774.

<sup>399</sup> “Ravens can talk!” Talons and Teeth, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfsnHVasCjg> Though non-academic, this video shows a raven mimicking a human’s speech. Other videos of this phenomenon are readily available online, and, given our broader knowledge of avian speech abilities, these should suffice as evidence to show ravens do have some ability to speak.

the bird is, in fact, not conversing but, rather, responding.<sup>400</sup> If Lee Poe is correct, and if the bird is parroting a word, then the poem becomes ventriloquial, albeit in an indirect sense. Certainly this form of ventriloquism is less immediately apprehensible than that of the ventriloquist-dummy dynamic with which we have grown accustomed.<sup>401</sup> Yet, it is still recognizably ventriloquial.

Coming into question, then, is the origin of the voice and the exact identity of the speaker. Is the bird supernatural and, therefore, capable of producing its own speech, tailor-made to torture the suffering narrator? Or is the bird a mere raven, having learned this unfortuitous word from someone else? Or is the bird a mere raven some sadistic master (possibly supernatural themselves) taught a word capable of tormenting the narrator? That I have to ask these questions is evidence the poem never confirms the voice's origin. Consequently, we readers are left wondering about the voice's nature, puzzling, that is, over an ambiguity Poe deliberately leaves unclosed.<sup>402</sup>

And, as Michel Foucault says, "The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning."<sup>403</sup> So too is the desire for closure, the resolution of ambiguity. On this point, Terry Heller's work is significant. In *The Delights of Terror*, Heller illuminates Poe's creation of ambiguity in "The Pit and the Pendulum," ambiguity readers and critics alike have long striven to resolve by finding closure.<sup>404</sup> These readers and scholars, he further elaborates, seek the same sort of closure in Poe's stories "The

---

<sup>400</sup> Poe, Harry Lee. *Evermore: Edgar Allan Poe and the Mystery of the Universe*, Baylor University Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.uky.edu/lib/kentucky-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4863636>. 70.

<sup>401</sup> For the history of ventriloquism, see Connor.

<sup>402</sup> I will return to this point later, where I argue Poe's works are often opaque by design.

<sup>403</sup> Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" 230. Available at: [https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Foucault\\_what\\_is\\_an\\_author.pdf](https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Foucault_what_is_an_author.pdf)

<sup>404</sup> Heller 32.

Fall of the House of Usher” and “Ligeia.”<sup>405</sup> Heller concludes with the admonition that we readers and scholars need to give in to the lack of closure in Poe’s fiction, that we have to accept the ambiguity as part of the works, a feature, not a bug.<sup>406</sup>

Now, I wish to extend Heller’s trenchant analysis to “The Raven,” a work Heller does not directly examine but which nevertheless follows the rule Heller identifies. According to Heller, Poe repeatedly bakes ambiguity into his works, and this ambiguity makes readers vacillate between competing interpretations, a vacillation we readers and critics try to fight by finding closure.<sup>407</sup> This is the same sort of closure we try to find in “The Raven” when we argue the bird is or is not supernatural. Some of those proliferating meanings, to paraphrase Foucault, are the seemingly incompatible readings about the bird’s nature and powers.<sup>408</sup>

And so, when we try to arrive at a definitive conclusion about the bird, we do so at the cost of overriding the poem’s ambiguity, its author-designed lack of closure. By applying Heller’s analysis of Poe’s work to this, Poe’s most famous poem, we can see why the question of the bird’s supernatural nature in fact elides a crucial element of the work.<sup>409</sup> Such is the beauty of “The Raven” that it raises a multitude of questions of

---

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. 125 and 145.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. 179-180.

I have added the cliché “a feature, not a bug” to this statement; it does not, to my memory, appear in Heller’s insightful criticism.

<sup>407</sup> Heller 179-180.

<sup>408</sup> Foucault 230.

<sup>409</sup> This is not to say that such questions are fruitless or that scholars are mistaken to ask them. Rather, I wish to point out how these questions sometimes risk ignoring or erasing one of the poem’s most important elements, one which analyses of the poem, I argue, would do well to bear in mind.

whose answers readers can never be entirely certain. We have already visited a couple of these questions, and now I return to that of the bird's singular word, "nevermore."<sup>410</sup>

Not only does that word foreground the poem's ventriloquial nature, but it also reveals the attending importance of the voice to "The Raven." As aforementioned, sounds foretell the raven's arrival,<sup>411</sup> and, thereafter, the raven's word, its<sup>412</sup> voice, whether parroting or independently producing, becomes essential to the poem, which Renza argues descends at its conclusion into "mind-numbing sound."<sup>413</sup> That sound, moreover, is that of the voice, caught, as Freedman asserts, in the dialogue of a single soul.<sup>414</sup>

"The Raven"'s ventriloquial elements go even further, though, than I have thus far allowed. As the narrator falls into repeating the raven's word, a word it may, itself, be repeating, he becomes a puppet, too. For, when the narrator begins to repeat the raven ("my soul... Shall be lifted—nevermore!"), he ventriloquizes the raven, becoming its dummy and accepting the signifier it foisted upon him.<sup>415</sup> In this conception, language and hopelessness operate as viruses, infecting the narrator and dragging him, as it were, into an early grave.

---

<sup>410</sup> "The Raven" 773-775.

<sup>411</sup> Backer 163.

<sup>412</sup> Here, I use the agender pronoun "it" rather than the masculine "he" to refer to the bird, despite the narrator's use of the latter, because, as I argue later in this chapter, the bird's biological sex is yet another facet where the poem remains (arguably) unclear.

<sup>413</sup> Renza, Louis A. "Never More in Poe's Teil-Tale American Tale." *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, Penn State University Press, 2003, 32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41506181>.

<sup>414</sup> Freedman, W. (1996), Poe's "Raven": The Word That Is an Answer "Nevermore". *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism*, 29: 27. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1111/j.1754-6095.1996.tb00080.x>

Freedman's claim that this dialogue consists of a single soul rests on a psychological, naturalistic reading of the poem. Whether we accept this position is immaterial, however, for discerning the voice's central role in the poem, a role Freedman's point showcases.

<sup>415</sup> "The Raven" 775.

Person Jr. also observes how the narrator begins to echo the raven by repeating the word "nevermore" (13).



But if the narrator is a puppet, the question next becomes “who is pulling the strings?” In other words, who is the ventriloquist, the puppeteer? The meta answer, of course, is Edgar Allan Poe himself. As the poet, he puts the words in the mouths of the bird and the student. I contend, though, that this answer is not as trite as it may appear because perhaps the foremost specter haunting Poe studies is the figure of the man himself, as one of the major critical debates about Poe’s fiction has sought to determine the degree to which his work is auto-biographical.<sup>416</sup>

The year after Poe released “The Raven,” he published his essay “The Philosophy of Composition,” in which he relates (supposedly) the steps he took in composing “The Raven.” And like the poem that essay takes as its subject, “The Philosophy of Composition” is a tricky text that seems to raise more questions than it answers. Reading “The Philosophy of Composition” places the reader in the position of watching Poe’s professed meta-cognition. Regardless of Poe’s intentions in penning this supplementary work to his most famous poem, the effect is uncanny.

In attempting (or pretending to attempt)<sup>417</sup> to read his own mind (i.e., recapture and inscribe his own previous thoughts), Poe is, in effect, engaging in an act of self-ventriloquism. He is trying to repeat his past self, becoming something of a mouthpiece for his own past ideas. Or if Poe is fabricating his recollection, then the Poe writing “The Philosophy of Composition” in 1846 is attributing thoughts to, and putting words in the mouth of, the Poe who published “The Raven” in 1845. Meta-cognition hereby becomes a matter of ventriloquism, whereby words and ideas decouple from their sources and

---

<sup>416</sup> Campbell, Killis. *The Mind of Poe, and Other Studies*. Russell & Russell, 1962. 129.

<sup>417</sup> As we shall see, another prevailing question in Poe studies is that of the writer’s veracity.

attribution becomes difficult, even impossible. Indeed, Person Jr. runs with this idea, writing that “The Raven” is about reading and writing “The Raven.”<sup>418</sup> Thus, “The Raven” is a difficult text partially because of the meta-layers surrounding it, whereby the audience has to guess at what Poe is communicating, and, indeed, which Poe to listen to—the one in 1845 or the one in 1846.

This issue of Poe’s maybe ventriloquizing himself in the para-textual elements around “The Raven” raises once again that major question about auto-biographical elements in Poe’s work. On this question, the scholarship is somewhat divided. Wuletich-Brinberg argues Poe’s characters are his doubles, thus aligning herself firmly with the auto-biographical camp.<sup>419</sup> This camp seems to have been the first to arise in studies of Poe, as Marie Bonaparte’s 1934 psychoanalytic treatment of Poe’s life and fiction relies upon the assumption that Poe’s fictions reveal aspects of himself.<sup>420</sup>

And Wilbur has observed Poe’s habit of inserting personal details into his stories.<sup>421</sup> Yet, other scholars, such as Gargano, argue Poe’s narrators are distinct from him.<sup>422</sup> Similarly, Campbell argues that the protagonists of Poe’s short stories do reflect aspects of Poe but that the protagonists of his poems do not.<sup>423</sup> And even Wilbur notes

---

<sup>418</sup> Person, Leland S., Jr. “Poe’s Composition of Philosophy: Reading and Writing ‘The Raven.’” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 46, no. 3, 1990, pp. 7. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1353/arq.1990.0010>.

<sup>419</sup> Wuletich-Brinberg, Sybil. *Poe: the Rationale of the Uncanny*. New York: P. Lang, 1988. Print. 5.

<sup>420</sup> Bonaparte 229 & 232.

<sup>421</sup> Wilbur, Richard. “The House of Poe.” In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. 99. Print.

<sup>422</sup> Gargano, James W. “The Question of Poe’s Narrators.” In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. Print. 165.

<sup>423</sup> Campbell, *The Mind of Poe*, 131 & 141.

the difficulty in attributing auto-biographical impulses to Poe's work because of Poe's secretive nature.<sup>424</sup>

Thus, while the bulk of Poe scholarship has seen parallels between Poe's life and his fiction, there remains debate on the topic, the positions of which show a commendable amount of nuance. Here, however, I must stake my own position on the matter and argue for the utility of reading Poe's work auto-biographically. That is, I contend from now to the end of this chapter, that Poe's person provides one of the most useful prisms for understanding his fiction. Whereas Campbell does not see a strong resemblance between Poe and the protagonists of his poetry, I find their resemblances striking.<sup>425</sup> 1845 was a difficult year in Poe's life, a life which saw more than its share of difficult years.

Poe wrote "The Raven" while his wife Virginia was deep in the prolonged, tormenting death throes of tuberculosis.<sup>426</sup> It seems far too coincidental, then, that "The Raven" features as its protagonist a bookish man grieving his dead wife.<sup>427</sup> For, in that year, Poe was a bookish man grieving his dying wife. And, as anyone who has experienced the slow death of a loved one can attest, grief can precede demise. Thus, when Poe has the narrator declare the narrator's spirits shall never rise again, Poe is grappling with his own grief, grief for a woman there yet not there.<sup>428</sup> For, in the dread

---

<sup>424</sup> Wilbur 99;

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: Criterion Books, 1960. Print. 408.

<sup>425</sup> Campbell, *The Mind of Poe*, 131.

<sup>426</sup> Silverman, Kenneth. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. New York: Harper, 1992. 179. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/edgarpoe00kenn>

<sup>427</sup> The poem does not establish the exact nature of the narrator's relationship with Lenore. While she seems to have been his romantic partner, it less clear whether they were married.

<sup>428</sup> "The Raven" 775.

grasp of terminal illness, Virginia's person must have seemed to Edgar to be on the wane, his wife a living ghost.

Furthermore, when Gargano argues Poe's narrators are distinct from Poe himself, he observes as evidence how Poe does not condone his narrators' attempts at self-justification.<sup>429</sup> While I agree on this second point, I do not see it as incompatible with an auto-biographical interpretation of Poe's fictions. In "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe asserts the narrator of "The Raven" is torturing himself by wallowing in his grief.<sup>430</sup> By the same token, in writing a poem about grief while grieving himself, Poe betrays his affinity with his literary creation. Having his narrator engage in self-torture while himself engaging in self-torture reveals how Poe, in writing "The Raven," is stuck in grief and self-loathing. Poe is castigating himself for failing to overcome his despair, blaming himself for his suffering as if to berate himself out of his depression, the same depression that drove him into the arms of alcoholism.<sup>431</sup>

On a similar auto-biographical note, Scraba points out how Poe poems are often melancholic, and Wisker argues Poe's desire to return to the past motivates his stories.<sup>432</sup> These two points align well, as the melancholia of Poe's works reveals that desire to return to the past that Wisker highlights.<sup>433</sup> Said melancholia, moreover, makes sense in the context of Poe's life, punctuated as it was with loss: the loss of his mother, the loss of his foster mother, the loss of his inheritance, the loss of jobs, the loss of his wife, and,

---

<sup>429</sup> Gargano 171.

<sup>430</sup> Poe, Edgar A. "The Philosophy of Composition." Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69390/the-philosophy-of-composition>

<sup>431</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 183.

<sup>432</sup> Scraba 35;

Wisker 53.

<sup>433</sup> Scraba 35;

Wisker 53.

finally, the loss of his sanity.<sup>434</sup> It hardly, therefore, seems unnoteworthy that the poet who lost the most important women in his life would continually write about dead women and the effects their deaths had on the men in their lives.

Here, we should note how dead women are a major motif in Poe's literature, just as they were in his life.<sup>435</sup> Indeed, dead women feature prominently not only in "The Raven" but also in the poem "Annabel Lee" and the short stories "Ligeia," "The Black Cat," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Oval Portrait," to name but a few. About this motif, Bassein argues Poe is unconcerned with women in his stories,<sup>436</sup> that he reduces them to passive roles,<sup>437</sup> and takes pleasure in their deaths.<sup>438</sup>

Bassein's argument forms an important intervention of feminist studies in scholarship of this influential author. And yet, Bassein's interpretation of Poe is uncharitable in that, while Poe certainly does reduce women to passive roles in his fiction, it seems unfounded and unfair to accuse Poe of taking pleasure in women's deaths, when his wife's failing health drove him to alcoholism and when, by all accounts, Poe cared deeply for his wife, mother, and foster mother.<sup>439</sup> Thus, I find Bassein's argument ultimately unfair. While we certainly should consider the passive role of women in Poe's fictions, we should also be aware that their passive role largely stems from their deaths, which likely stem (as I have argued) from how the most important

---

<sup>434</sup> See Kenneth Silverman's *Edgar A. Poe* for a biography of Poe's life, including these various loses.

<sup>435</sup> Poe lost his mother, his foster mother, and his wife (see Silverman, as above).

<sup>436</sup> Bassein, Beth Ann. "Poe's Most Poetic Subject." In *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poems, Tales, and Essays*, edited by Jared Gardner and Elizabeth Hewitt, Macmillan Learning, 2016, Print. 486.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.* 478.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.* 479.

<sup>439</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 26 & 334.

women (and, indeed, people) in Poe's life kept dying untimely deaths, and from how losing them permanently scarred Poe.

And so, we see the utility of looking to Poe's person to explain his stories. Indeed, doing so occasionally defuses criticism of his works and at other times sheds light into their rather dark recesses. Either way, to understand Poe's work, we must try to also understand the man. Far from providing a panacea, however, biographical interpretations of Poe's fictions are merely a torch for us to wave in the face of that man's opacity, the sheer darkness of his fiction hinted at, perhaps, in the black feathers of his infamous raven.

Consider, for instance, Orvell's interesting observation that Poe may have chosen a raven for his poem because Poe was remembering (if subconsciously) a raven emblem in the home of his despised foster father, John Allan.<sup>440</sup> Even if Orvell is correct in this assessment, such an observation hardly settles the various debates raging around this seminal poem.<sup>441</sup> Conversely, Orvell's dive into Poe's personal history reveals, instead, the remarkable fertility Poe's writings and life both continue to have.

Said fertility also dooms us to forever wondering at whether the titular raven is, in fact, a supernatural entity or a mere avian puppet flitting through the night on invisible strings. Likewise, it dooms us to continue questioning whether the poem is a dream. Here, we reach another recurring question in Poe studies, including dedicated studies of "The Raven." Is this poem's narrator dreaming?

---

<sup>440</sup> Orvell, Miles D. "'The Raven' and the Chair." *Poe Studies* (1971-1985), vol. 5, no. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 54-54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296624>.

<sup>441</sup> Nor do I believe Orvell is trying to settle said debates by pointing out this possibility.

Scraba argues he is and further argues that the action of “The Raven” unfolds like the action of a dream or nightmare.<sup>442</sup> And on a more general level, Fisher observes the similarity of Poe’s stories to dream structures<sup>443</sup> and Wilbur argues Poe’s stories tend to last the duration of a dream.<sup>444</sup> Indeed, so psychological are Poe’s texts that the question of solipsism naturally arises.<sup>445</sup> And so, to interpret “The Raven,” one must contend with the question of whether the poem is a mere dream. But, as I alluded earlier, that question, like the question of the bird’s nature, is indeterminable, the debate unresolvable.

It makes sense to read “The Raven” as a dream. The poem itself invites such a view when it opens with the narrator “nodding, nearly napping.”<sup>446</sup> From there, the poem’s events become increasingly bizarre. There is a knock on the door yet no one there; then there is a sound at the window. And, finally, then there is a bird who appears to mock the narrator’s grief and crush his hopes until he collapses into despair. To be sure, this sounds like a nightmare, the structure of which tends to reflect the dreamer’s fears and anxieties.<sup>447</sup> Moreover, a nightmare would be a fitting choice for a gothic writer like Poe, given the nightmare’s tendency to feature doubles and raise the question of reconciling two halves of a fractured self.<sup>448</sup>

And yet, the question of whether the narrator is actually having a nightmare remains just that, a question. At the end of the poem, the narrator does not wake up.

---

<sup>442</sup> Scraba 42 & 46.

<sup>443</sup> Benjamin Fisher 30.

<sup>444</sup> Wilbur 117.

<sup>445</sup> Person Jr. 11.

Person Jr. does not, however, agree with a solipsistic reading of “The Raven.”

<sup>446</sup> “The Raven” 773.

<sup>447</sup> McNamara 94-95.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

I have discussed this tendency of the nightmare in *At the Edge of Existence*.

Instead, he collapses. And while this collapse could signal the dream's conclusion (or the narrator's lapse into deep sleep) in the same way Wilbur argues the house of Usher's collapse signals the loss of consciousness for that tale's narrator,<sup>449</sup> the fact remains that proof of this is lacking. Far from signaling a conclusion, the ending of "The Raven" implies instead a continued psychological torture of the sort one might encounter in Hell rather than in a nightmare, which, for all its unsettling power, is brief.<sup>450</sup> Then again, maybe the narrator is waking up from a dream at the poem's ending and, in referring to his soul, is metaphorically saying the nightmare has compounded his grief. Whatever the case, the point remains that the poem is ambiguous on this point, and, like the narrator, we scholars appear fated to keep spinning in the same circle.

Then again, maybe not. Here, I think scholars have made a very important observation in connecting "The Raven" to dreams and nightmares, but I also think the more important question is not whether the poem is a dream or nightmare but rather about the effect Poe is trying to achieve in creating such a dream-like work. After all, it sure does seem significant that Poe's works align, as scholars have noted, so closely with dreams and dream structures.<sup>451</sup> Indeed, this alignment might also explain why Poe's fictions are so difficult to interpret. If we examine a work like "Ligeia" through the prism

---

<sup>449</sup> Wilbur 109.

<sup>450</sup> The average dream probably lasts no more than half an hour. See: <https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/dreaming-overview>

<sup>451</sup> Benjamin Fisher 30;  
Wilbur 117.



of dream logic, then such a work starts to make more sense in its apparent senselessness.<sup>452</sup>

When it comes to “The Raven,” however, we should ponder how the poem tries to put the reader into a dream-like state. When the narrator starts the poem at “midnight” as he is “nearly napping,” he is aligning the readers with him in that somnolent state.<sup>453</sup> That is, he starts the poem on a note of sleepiness, which he then propagates throughout the poem.

As “each separate dying ember” casts its “ghost upon the floor,” the reader, already primed to consider sleepiness, already primed, therefore, to feel sleepy, some empathic connection to the sleepy narrator, further feels lulled into a restive, receptive state.<sup>454</sup> This line evokes the image of a fire burning to coals after hours of neglect, burning, ergo, into the wee hours of the night, long after its stoker has fallen asleep. Said image and its attendant sounds have long accompanied people on their nightly passages between the waking and sleeping worlds.

The effect this brief line has on readers would have been even stronger in Poe’s time than it is today, when electricity has replaced fire as our primary source of light in the United States (where Poe wrote) and oil has replaced fire as our primary source of heating. From here, though, we reach perhaps the poem’s most important soporific effect: the monotony of the internal rhyming.<sup>455</sup> While Renza observes the monotonous nature of

---

<sup>452</sup> For a brief discussion of dream logic, see: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sleepless-in-america/202009/dream-logic#:~:text=The%20online%20Urban%20Dictionary%20defines,is%20used%20in%20film%20studies>.

<sup>453</sup> “The Raven” 773.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Renza 33.

Poe's rhyme scheme ("napping," "tapping," "rapping"), we should consider how this monotony augments the poem's soporific effect, established first in the poem's opening line.<sup>456</sup> Like a good lullaby, "The Raven" establishes a predictable routine based in a non-disruptive rhythm. This rhythm, the poem's meter, is therefore well-suited to putting readers in a dream-like state, to creating a dream-like atmosphere.

Considering said state and atmosphere allows us to see how Poe's creative choices in "The Raven" align with his own stated objective of achieving unity of effect.<sup>457</sup> Unity of effect, after all, relies on a work's being short enough for a reader to complete in a single sitting,<sup>458</sup> which "The Raven," despite being long for a poem, is. Thus, once more we see the importance of voice to understanding "The Raven," as the voice is necessary for readers experiencing the rhythm of the poem and falling, accordingly, into its trance. Consequently, I argue, we should be careful to consider this important poem's affect, the way it affects readers, in addition to spending time trying to parse out the poem's action. Indeed, because of the indecipherable nature of the latter, we would be well-served to devote substantial time to the former.

Put another way, deciphering the action of Poe's fictions to make sense of them is something of a fool's errand because Poe is not the sort of author to write tidy stories with tidy meanings or easy storylines to follow. In fact, Freedman goes further, writing that Poe is deliberately obscure, his works resistant to coherent interpretation.<sup>459</sup> And Renza escalates by accusing Poe of writing in bad faith.<sup>460</sup> To this interpretation, we can

---

<sup>456</sup> "The Raven" 773.

<sup>457</sup> Poe "Philosophy of Composition."

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Freedman 23.

<sup>460</sup> Renza 23.

add Fiedler's observation that Poe often lies about himself<sup>461</sup> and Backer's supporting but more charitable belief that Poe's work is open to interpretation.<sup>462</sup> Similarly, Eddings says we must remember Poe's contradictions,<sup>463</sup> and, in arguably one of the very first scholarly works written about Poe, Baudelaire outright calls Poe a prankster.<sup>464</sup>

Thus, Poe scholars have long deemed the man himself a trickster, one who deliberately leaves his works open to multiple interpretations. Leaving his works open-ended allows Poe to avoid giving his readers closure,<sup>465</sup> forcing them (really, us) to continue grappling with his tales long past their conclusions.<sup>466</sup> Poe, therefore, avoids grounding his works in totalizing meanings. To read Poe's work consequently becomes to search for meaning. As such, I argue "The Raven" is an absurdist poem grounded in a sheer lack of totalizing meaning.

Poe frequently exploits the epistemic instability of sound to confound totalizing readings of his works. To perceive the epistemic instability of sound, consider the uncertain origins of the voice in "The Raven" and Dolar's observation that the voice is an effect in excess of its cause.<sup>467</sup> Sound, then, is an unstable, impermanent source for

---

<sup>461</sup> Fiedler 408.

<sup>462</sup> Backer 165.

<sup>463</sup> Eddings 163.

<sup>464</sup> Baudelaire, Charles. "New Notes on Edgar Poe." In *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poems, Tales, and Essays*, edited by Jared Gardner and Elizabeth Hewitt, Macmillan Learning, 2016, Print. 277.

<sup>465</sup> Heller 179-180.

<sup>466</sup> Poe's inconstancy further makes me wonder if his choice of literary executor in his rival Rufus Griswold was not something of a final prank for the writer gone too soon. It has been well-documented that Griswold abused his position to defame Poe, but Killis Campbell has noted that at least some of Griswold's false statements about Poe were, in fact, based on false statements Poe gave Griswold (Campbell, "The Poe-Griswold Controversy," 453). Given these lies and the strained relationship between the two, it might stand to reason that Poe was aware Griswold would do him a disservice, even in death. That disservice, moreover, augmented Poe's mystique in American literary culture. I relegate these thoughts to a footnote, however, because I do not have solid proof of Poe's intentions, and, whatever the case, they are tangential to my overall argument.

<sup>467</sup> Dolar 8.

information. To hear a sound is not to know its source, either in nature or location. And, indeed, the mind retains the remarkable ability to trick the listener into hearing what is not there.<sup>468</sup> Perhaps Poe's awareness of these unstable properties of sound led him to coin his oft-quoted phrase: "Believe nothing you hear, and only one half that you see."<sup>469</sup>

Consider, for example, the devastating applications of sound in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat," both of which feature sounds driving their narrators to acts of self-destructive confession. It follows, therefore, that Poe's fiction not only makes explicit use of sound but, moreover, codes sound as dangerous. In "The Tell-Tale Heart," we can question the source of the sound haunting the narrator, as Poe raises the issues of whether the narrator is mad or is experiencing some sort of supernatural sound. And while the source of the penetrating wail is clearer in "The Black Cat," that source is questionable when the wail first appears. The narrator believes the source is the wife he murdered when it is really the cat he unwittingly entombed along with her corpse. In each of these three works ("The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Raven"), then, sound appears as nebulous, untrustworthy, and dangerous.

"The Raven" offers the most nuanced view of this topic, as it alone offers a word from the offending source of tormenting sound. "The Raven," in other words, shows both epistemic and linguistic failures, as the bird offers no answers to the troubled narrator.<sup>470</sup> Notably, the bird's singular word is subjective, only gaining some semblance of meaning

---

<sup>468</sup> Perhaps more than a quarter of the population experiences auditory hallucinations, as do those experiencing an array of mental illnesses, including depression. See: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557633/>

<sup>469</sup> Poe, Edgar Allan. "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 269. Print.

See also: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/06/23/half-see/>

<sup>470</sup> Freedman 24-25.

from the narrator and reader's attempts at interpretation.<sup>471</sup> Such a lack of meaning is ironic, given that language ostensibly exists to communicate. When it comes to the raven, then, language fails to communicate. Rather, it exists to torment, a fact which leads Renza to conclude, as I mentioned earlier, that the poem descends from questions of meaning into "mind-numbing sound."<sup>472</sup>

In thus separating language from meaning, Poe rejects the Lacanian Symbolic and destabilizes the reader.<sup>473</sup> The reader, in engaging with "The Raven," ironically confronts the limits of signification while also engaging with a text rooted in word play (e.g., internal rhyme schemes). And so, when the poem ends with the narrator stuck in the raven's shadow, the narrator's position becomes symbolic, as it parallels the position of the reader who must, de facto, use linguistic tools to make sense of a signifier deliberately eschewing such conventions. Here, we encounter Poe's ironic method of playing with the game of meaning creation.

When it comes to this question of why Poe evokes the epistemic and linguistic uncertainties of sound<sup>474</sup> and the uncertainty of meaning more generally, we would benefit, I argue, from considering Poe's most famous poem as an exercise in existentialism, particularly absurdism. That is, in "The Raven," Poe undermines and mocks the search for meaning. Pivotal to this assertion is Punter's piercing remark about Poe being interested in the "irony of human striving."<sup>475</sup> In addressing this topic, Poe's poem becomes existentialist, even absurdist. Whereas existentialism is the philosophical

---

<sup>471</sup> Person Jr. 11.

<sup>472</sup> Renza 32.

<sup>473</sup> Renza observes how, in "The Raven," Poe resists the Lacanian Symbolic Sphere (32).

<sup>474</sup> Freedman 24-25.

<sup>475</sup> Punter 212.

school of thought interested in questions about the meaning of life, absurdism takes the view that each individual must construct their own framework of meaning to make sense of an otherwise senseless universe.<sup>476</sup>

To be sure, “The Raven” is a bleak poem whose hopeless ending has surely helped it leave its stamp on the American collective consciousness. For such a hopeful nation, an upstart against the British Empire, a future superpower, such a grim ending seems out of place, and all the more powerful for it. This grimness may tempt some to deem “The Raven” nihilistic rather than absurdist. Indeed, there is merit in that label. Nihilism postulates that existence is inherently meaningless, all human effort, therefore, pointless.<sup>477</sup> Consider it the bleakest form of existentialism.

It is a natural step, then, to ask whether “The Raven” is a nihilistic work. Referring back to my earlier point about the narrator trying to make sense of the raven’s “nevermore,”<sup>478</sup> we can see that the narrator is trying to find meaning. And not only do his efforts fail, but, as Poe himself notes, they lead him to ruin.<sup>479</sup> As such, “The Raven” depicts the search for meaning as futile and torturous. This is a fair assessment, I think, but it misses the full picture of what Poe tries to accomplish through “The Raven.”

If we turn back to “The Philosophy of Composition,” we can recall how Poe views the narrator as torturing himself by wallowing in his grief.<sup>480</sup> In other words, Poe does not necessarily view the narrator’s collapse as inevitable. Rather, if the narrator

---

<sup>476</sup> “Existentialism.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2023.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>

<sup>477</sup> “Existentialism.”

<sup>478</sup> Person Jr. 11.

<sup>479</sup> Poe “Philosophy of Composition.”

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

relies on reason instead of emotion, he might, in Poe's own view, prevail. Accordingly, "The Raven" is not a nihilistic work because it does not condemn humanity to meaninglessness. Instead, it deems a particular path, that of emotional masochism, bereft of meaning. So, in Poe's formulation, there remain paths toward meaning. The question therefore becomes how to find said meaning.

And, according to Poe, the voice is not where we find meaning. Because the voice is too given over to the machinations of mere sound, it is untrustworthy. By contrast, Poe indulges in the Romantic impulse toward the discovery of truth through the beauty of poetry.<sup>481</sup> While poetry engages with the sense of hearing, we should note the structured way in which it does so and, moreover, how it engages sight before sound.

Because Poe submitted his poems to magazines and journals instead of relying primarily on oral delivery, his poems are foremost visual works of art. By thus connecting his poems' use of sound to the readers' sense of sight, Poe attempts to avoid the worst excesses of unrestrained noise. For, in subordinating sound to sight, Poe tries to bring sound to heel. In true self-conscious fashion, however, he purposefully loosens the leash in "The Raven," allowing sound in that poem to run unchecked. Poe, that is, is well aware of sound's creative and destructive potentials.

Thus, here again we find Poe himself to be a useful entryway into his work. Because Poe likes being secretive,<sup>482</sup> we can read his efforts to leave his works open to multiple interpretations as also an act of building in layers of self-protective irony. Put

---

<sup>481</sup> Stovall, Floyd. "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allan Poe." In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. Print. 177-178.

I have discussed the appearance of a similar idea in the films of Werner Herzog in "Murky Waters: *Incident at Loch Ness*, *Grizzly Man*, and Herzogian Notions of Truth."

<sup>482</sup> Wilbur 99.

another way, Poe's irony and elusiveness give him plausible deniability. Even if Poe were alive today, I suspect it would be difficult to assess the exact degree to which his works reflect his person. That they do reflect it to a useful degree, we have seen. But there remains ground to till there.

Formatively, Punter argues the American gothic finds its roots in a "pathology of guilt."<sup>483</sup> And Poe's work oozes with guilt. "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Black Cat" all deal with this shared issue, which therefore unites some of Poe's most famous works. Even the narrator of "The Raven," though not outwardly a criminal as the narrators of the above three stories are, struggles with his grief, an emotion often accompanying a feeling of survivors' guilt. The point, then, is that guilt pervades much of Poe's significant literature, so much so we would be right to wonder whether this guilt is not Poe's own.

And certainly it seems to be in some measure. "The Black Cat" finds the narrator's guilt entwined with his alcoholism, a malady afflicting Poe in his later life.<sup>484</sup> "The Black Cat" also joins "The Raven" in seeing the narrator struggle with the death of his wife,<sup>485</sup> though the story goes in a different direction than the poem does, the narrator of "The Black Cat" having accidentally killed his wife. Perhaps this darkness (e.g., uxoricide) explains why some scholars deem Poe's work devoid of moral teachings.<sup>486</sup> This strikes me, however, as an unfair criticism. After all, the narrator of "The Black Cat" joins the narrators of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Imp of the Perverse" in paying for

---

<sup>483</sup> Punter 189.

<sup>484</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 132 & 183.

<sup>485</sup> As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, "The Raven" does not establish whether the narrator and Lenore were married. I use the word "wife" in this instance purely for conciseness.

<sup>486</sup> Wuletich-Brinberg 184.



his crimes. With one notable exception, guilt will out in Poe's fiction. The one exception, of course, is "The Cask of Amontillado," a revenge tale wherein the narrator, Montresor, murders his rival and gets away with impunity.

Accordingly, it would be a natural critique of my view of Poe to point to "The Cask of Amontillado" as a detracting work, one breaking the pattern. And while "The Cask of Amontillado" does break the pattern, we can understand why it does so. Namely, this story not only tells of an act of revenge but was, itself, an act of revenge against one of Poe's literary rivals.<sup>487</sup> Rust has charted how "The Cask of Amontillado" responds to Poe's rival Thomas Dunn English, making explicit references to English and his work.<sup>488</sup> And so, while it seems Poe felt guilty about his drinking,<sup>489</sup> the same might not be true about his engaging in literary feuds.

Guilt also gives us a way to understand Poe's seemingly split personality. On the one hand, we have the melancholic Poe writing tortured narratives of grief bemoaning his lost loves. On the other hand, we have Poe alienating most people in his life. Though Griswold unfairly and dishonestly excoriates Poe in the latter's obituary, Griswold still has something akin to a point when he writes of Poe's death: "This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it."<sup>490</sup> To be sure, Poe had his friends, but when we map his life's trajectory, we see a geography of broken relationships and burned bridges. It seems hardly coincidental for Poe to have so many rivals and bitter enemies.

---

<sup>487</sup> Rust, Richard Dilworth. "'Punish with Impunity': Poe, Thomas Dunn English, and 'The Cask of Amontillado.'" *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2001, pp. 33–52. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41508404>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2023.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Some even read "The Cask of Amontillado" as a temperance tale. See: <https://archive.org/details/newessaysonpoesm00kenn/page/101/mode/2up>

<sup>490</sup> Available at: <https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1827/nyt49100.htm>

Many who met Poe ended up despising him. This includes his foster father, John Allan, whose enmity for Poe was so strong he threatened Poe even from his death bed.<sup>491</sup>

The resulting portrait is of a man and artist divided. It appears Poe vacillated between arrogance and self-castigation throughout his life, struggling to find a middle-ground between the two, struggling, that is, to find a healthy self-image.<sup>492</sup> Poe's vulnerability and (likely) self-loathing come across in his writings, where Poe recognizably struggles with his grief and alcoholism. Poe's arrogance, by contrast, comes across perhaps most plainly in his personal life and literary criticism, where we see the pattern of broken relationships I mention above.

The struggle between these two parts of Poe's self comes across in the dynamic between the bird and the narrator in "The Raven." Where the raven's elevated position on the "bust of Pallas" indicates the bird's loftiness (i.e., arrogance), the narrator's sunken position on the floor indicates his loss and pathetic state (i.e., self-loathing).<sup>493</sup> This resulting disparity connects back to the absurdist themes of "The Raven." Notably, in Poe's fiction, ascending motions are positive, showing power and enlightenment.<sup>494</sup>

Eddings further observes how the narrator's tortured state results from his abandonment of reason, meaning, in "The Raven," Poe showcases the dangers of

---

<sup>491</sup> "Death bed" is a figurative term here, as John Allan sat instead of laying down late in his illness. Kenneth Silverman documents this supposed episode, though he also notes the event may not have happened (*Edgar A. Poe* 97).

To be clear, I am not asserting that all of Poe's rivals (or John Allan) had the moral high ground over Poe. When it comes to John Allan, I find myself siding with Poe, since it appears Allan had a cold demeanor toward his foster son even while his, Allan's, wife still lived (Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 13, 19, 169, & 358).

<sup>492</sup> Low self-esteem, possibly the result of his rocky life, could explain Poe's alternating bouts of self-loathing and arrogance.

<sup>493</sup> "The Raven" 775.

<sup>494</sup> Perez-de-Luque 91.

forsaking reason for blind emotion.<sup>495</sup> Given these facts and Campbell's point about Poe possessing a keen analytical mind "but lack[ing] common sense and practical wisdom," we get a clearer picture of Poe's absurdist inclination.<sup>496</sup> Poe wants to exalt in reason, wants to elevate it over the passions, wants to seek refuge there. But he cannot because, first, he is aware of reason's limitations and, second, because of his own turbulent personal life.

When speaking of reason's limitations, we reach the issue of logical Positivism and Post-Positivism. Whereas logical Positivism holds we can find objective truth, Post-Positivism, while not denying objective truth's existence, points to human fallibility to demonstrate the difficulty of finding said truth.<sup>497</sup> And though the debate between these two labels occurred after Poe's death in 1849, Poe's work anticipates the discussion, aligning itself implicitly with the Post-Positivist tradition.<sup>498</sup> Consider Freedman's claim that truth-seeking in Poe's work is inevitably thwarted.<sup>499</sup>

Even though the narrator of "The Raven," as we have seen, abandons reason, he still does so while questing after a truth (i.e., whether he will see Lenore again in the hereafter). Not only do we know this from the narrator's questioning of the raven, but we can also discern his motive from the "quaint and curious volumes of forgotten lore" he was reading before the bird arrived.<sup>500</sup> The narrator is trying to learn. He seeks solace

---

<sup>495</sup> Eddings 162.

<sup>496</sup> Campbell, *Mind of Poe*, 33.

<sup>497</sup> Farrow, et al. "Positivism/Post Positivism." In *Research Methods Handbook*, Oklahoma State University, <https://open.library.okstate.edu/gognresearchmethods/chapter/positivism-post-positivism/>

<sup>498</sup> I have elsewhere advanced a defense of Post-Positivism via the subjective, malleable nature of human perception.

See: *At the Edge of Existence*

<sup>499</sup> Freedman 24.

<sup>500</sup> "The Raven" 773.

from grief in learning. His mistake, then, is trying to ascertain knowledge beyond the human pale. When he asks the raven if there is “balm in Gilead,” he asks a profound, spiritual question.<sup>501</sup> And he asks it of a bird.

The narrator’s folly, therefore, lies not in his quest for knowledge per se, but rather with how he undertakes said quest. He seeks knowledge humanity lacks from a source of questionable credibility.<sup>502</sup> The bird also provides another, possibly more interesting, embodiment of the Post-Positivist dilemma. Immediately after the raven enters the room “with many a flirt and flutter,” the narrator deems the corvid a “he”: “Not the least obeisance made he...”<sup>503</sup>

This is an odd moment. Though it probably appears banal to most readers, it strikes me as Poe operating at his trickiest because birds are notoriously difficult to sex by sight.<sup>504</sup> While male ravens do have some distinguishing physical features, oftentimes, the only way to be sure of a bird’s sex is to perform a blood test, which the narrator clearly does not do.<sup>505</sup> Now, of course, a ready criticism of my statements is to point to the narrator as a reliable source of information. After all, if Poe writes the bird is a male, it is a male, right?

---

<sup>501</sup> Ibid. 775.

<sup>502</sup> How credible a source one considers the raven will vary based on whether one accepts a supernatural reading of the poem. Regardless, the point remains that the narrator’s asking these important philosophical/religious questions of a bird reflects his sheer desperation for answers. He is, therefore, so desperate for answers he has lost any semblance of a sound method.

<sup>503</sup> “The Raven” 774.

<sup>504</sup> Mayntz, Melissa. “How to Tell If a Bird Is Male or Female.” The Spruce, 2022, <https://www.thespruce.com/male-or-female-wild-bird-gender-id-387337>

This source tells advanced bird watchers some tips for identifying a bird’s sex by sight. That bird watchers consider this an advanced technique should suffice to indicate how difficult it can be to achieve.

<sup>505</sup> “Genetic Bird Sexing.” University of Tennessee, College of Veterinary Medicine,

[https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/vmc/dls/immunology/immuno-genetic-bird-sexing/#:~:text=Sex%20identification%20is%20performed%20in.DNA%20binding%20genes%20\(CHD\).](https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/vmc/dls/immunology/immuno-genetic-bird-sexing/#:~:text=Sex%20identification%20is%20performed%20in.DNA%20binding%20genes%20(CHD).)

This source indicates how sexing birds via blood tests is necessary enough that the University of Tennessee sells these tests as a service.

For male ravens’ visual markers: <https://www.birdspot.co.uk/bird-identification/raven>

This reply's weakness lies in its misattribution.<sup>506</sup> Once again, the voice's origin becomes difficult for us to trace in this poem. That is, because Poe writes the poem from a first-person, limited perspective, it is not Poe, the omniscient author creating the poem's world, but rather the fallible, grieving narrator, who sexes the bird, deeming it, apparently without evidence, "he."<sup>507</sup> This moment fits right into the Post-Positivist mold. Whether male, female, or intersex, the bird has a biological sex. Objective truth therefore exists. And yet, we, the readers, cannot access it.

Instead, Poe leaves us to spin our wheels in the mud, asking questions we cannot answer. He leaves us, therefore, to search for meanings, each reader arriving at a separate one. Poe is too aware of flaws in our perceptive and logical methods (e.g., being unable to discern the sex of a bird) to place all his faith in reason alone, despite his apparent desire to do so. "The Raven," then, is a poem about finding meaning, the importance of doing so, and the danger in failing to do so. The narrator's failure comes from his inability to find the meaning he seeks, but maybe the trick here is that he is asking the wrong questions.

The right question, or at least one of them, relates back to Poe himself. Poe's penchant for including doubles in his fictions is well-established,<sup>508</sup> as is the central role attempted reintegration plays in the doppelganger narrative.<sup>509</sup> So, does Poe seek reunification in his doppelganger narratives? On this question, the scholarship is split.

---

<sup>506</sup> I include this potential counter-argument here not as a strawman to represent potential critics so much as because it is a possible counter-argument I have considered to my own argument. As such, I am endeavoring to present a well-rounded form of my argument here by incorporating some of the background thinking I have done on the topic.

<sup>507</sup> "The Raven" 774.

<sup>508</sup> Hoffman, Daniel. *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe*. [1st ed.]. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1972. Print. 206.

<sup>509</sup> See, for example, Halliburton 308.

Lawrence argues Poe is more interested in disintegration than reintegration.<sup>510</sup>

Conversely, Halliburton claims Poe wants reintegration.<sup>511</sup>

Though on their face mutually exclusive, these points are not as disparate as they seem. In fact, I believe Poe wants reintegration even though his work frequently challenges its possibility. In “The Black Cat,” Pluto’s double hastens the narrator’s demise. In “William Wilson,” the double’s death constitutes, as he warns the narrator, a form of self-death.<sup>512</sup> Meanwhile, “The Fall of the House of Usher” ends in collapse,<sup>513</sup> and “Ligeia” ends ambiguously.<sup>514</sup> Even “The Raven” becomes a sort of double narrative ending in a form of self-destruction.

I have argued we can and should read “The Raven” as a ventriloquial text. And in Chapter Two, I noted the alignment of ventriloquist and doppelganger narratives. Consequently, we can interpret “The Raven” as a poem about the narrator and his double. Indeed, such a reading would align with solipsistic readings of “The Raven.”<sup>515</sup> “The Raven” therefore uses the voice as a tool in the process of self-reintegration. And like the ventriloquial texts in Chapter Two, “The Raven” shows that process’s failure.

At the end of the story, the narrator’s reason has left him, perching atop a statue which represents reason itself.<sup>516</sup> So, when the narrator finds himself unable to lift his own soul, he finds himself in a position where he can no longer reach the lofty mantle of

---

<sup>510</sup> Lawrence, D.H. “Edgar Allan Poe.” In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923. 66.

<sup>511</sup> Halliburton 148.

<sup>512</sup> This aligns with Savoy’s point that doppelganger narratives tend to end in death and/or self-destruction (12).

<sup>513</sup> Benjamin Fisher observes how “The Fall of the House of Usher” ends with the collapse of the narrator’s mind (77).

<sup>514</sup> Heller 125 & 145.

<sup>515</sup> Person Jr. mentions such readings in his work (11).

<sup>516</sup> “Pallas” refers to Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom.

reason. Instead, the narrator is doomed to wallow in pure, excessive emotion. While it may not seem like it, reason wins in “The Raven.” It wins, however, by deserting its human element. In this case, the doppelganger narrative represents a split between the rational and emotional selves, with the rational self sitting in an elevated, regal position: “But, with mien of lord or lady...”<sup>517</sup> Poe, therefore, exalts in the power of reason even while acknowledging the (at least occasional) human inability to, well, reason.

The narrator’s failed attempts to converse with his avian compatriot therefore fail, in part, because the narrator has symbolically already left reason behind when he starts the conversation. As with the sex of the bird, here Poe offers us the tantalizing hint of objective truth only to ultimately withhold that truth from disclosure. And yet, the quest for truth does not become meaningless itself as a consequence. Rather, the narrator has to quest for truth if he is to ever reunify these two parts of himself and overcome (to whatever extent possible) his grief.<sup>518</sup> It is the narrator’s own fault that he fails. As is so common in Poe’s works, “The Raven” gives us a troubled narrator whose personal demons consume him by the story’s end.<sup>519</sup>

It is important, though, that the narrator does undertake his quest, does try to overcome his demons by reunifying himself. His narrative arc reflects how Poe’s work often wavers between poles, never returning (unambiguously) to a united center. In this wavering, Poe finds his absurdist impulse. He does not forsake the search for meaning

---

<sup>517</sup> “The Raven” 774.

<sup>518</sup> When I write “overcome...his grief,” I refer to no longer wallowing in grief, to no longer allowing grief to define or consume him. I am not, however, asserting there is a proper or improper way to grieve.

<sup>519</sup> Consider, also, “The Black Cat,” wherein the narrator’s intemperance leads him to violence, culminating in his arrest for murder. Similarly, in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the narrator’s obsession, first, with the old man’s eye and, second, with the phantom sound of his heart beat drive the narrator to confessing his crime to the authorities. And in “William Wilson,” the narrator’s iniquity and hatred of his double (his moral half) leads him to destroy himself by murdering his double/conscience.

but is simultaneously open about (and keenly aware of) the many pitfalls along that path. All this makes sense when we consider Poe, the man, who found himself divided between his penchant for analysis<sup>520</sup> and his weakness for his passions.

And thus we discover why Poe's works feature such strong vacillation (e.g., between despair and reason) and so often lack resolution. Just as Poe's self collapsed with the deaths of his loved ones, his works often end with destruction akin to the destruction he encountered at the end of his life. And all of this, of course, traces back, and ironically finds its voice, all in that one word: "nevermore."<sup>521</sup>

#### 4.3 Kill Them All: The Killer's Voice and The Slasher Film

Key to my discussion of "The Raven" in Part One was sound's destabilizing effect in that seminal poem. This effect, however, has exceeded the classical gothic of Poe and has entered into the modern horror film. Thus, in this Part, I discuss the use of the voice, ventriloquism, and the vocalic uncanny in two important slasher films, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980, directed by Sean S. Cunningham) and *Scream* (1996, directed by Wes Craven). In doing so, I note how the shift from a literary medium to a cinematic one allows for a wide exploration of the effect Poe uses so well in his writings.

Scholarship of the foundational *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* tends to focus, with cause, on its slasher elements and gender politics.<sup>522:523</sup> John Kenneth Muir expands on the film's

---

<sup>520</sup> Campbell, *Mind of Poe*, 33.

<sup>521</sup> "The Raven" 775.

<sup>522</sup> Clover 29.

<sup>523</sup> Some work has also traced *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*'s apparent folkloric origins. For an explanation of these origins in a casual format, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djNwFlzPFAw&list=PLRfe-tMGHuaKeUbNAyBMJs7AkPxAmpqhZ&index=2>

From what I can gather, this YouTuber is the first to attribute *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*'s origins to the Cropsey legend, hence my use of an unacademic source here.



gender politics to further argue about its social politics, particularly its culturally conservative leanings.<sup>524</sup> These are all important, even central, aspects of the film and its franchise. Here, however, I direct our attention to a seemingly innocuous aspect of the movie: its soundtrack. A unique sound motif pervades the original *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. Consisting of two parallel sets of sounds, each repeated twice, these six notes have become part of the original film's enduring legacy.

Their origin, however, is less clear than their impact is. At first viewing, these sounds can easily seem non-sensical, mere atmosphere to highlight the dread in a place as doomed as Camp Crystal Lake.<sup>525</sup> Importantly, though, these sounds are actually truncated words, a fact most viewers probably only learn extra-textually. The repeated sounds are actually “ki-, ki-, ki-, ma, ma, ma.”<sup>526</sup> If we were to write these words out, we would get: “Kill, Kill, Kill, Mom, Mom, Mom.”<sup>527</sup>

Anyone who has seen the original *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* will recognize these words' significance pretty quickly, as the original film famously has Pamela Voorhees, not her son Jason, as the film's killer.<sup>528</sup> As such, the film's main sound motif becomes a repeated invocation for the killer to conduct her murder spree, making “Camp Blood”

---

<sup>524</sup> Muir, John Kenneth. “Happy Friday the 13th [1980].” Reflections on Film and Television. April 13, 2018. <http://reflectionsonfilmandtelevision.blogspot.com/2018/04/happy-friday-13th-friday-13th-1980.html> I have discussed this work and the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* franchise's political leanings in *Revulsion, Repetition, and Revenge*.

<sup>525</sup> The film's harbinger, Ralph, claims the camp has “a death curse” (*Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*). I borrow the term “harbinger” in this context from *The Cabin in the Woods*, a meta film that describes and deconstructs horror film formulae.

<sup>526</sup> Petsko, Emily. “The Real Story Behind Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>'s Iconic Whisper Sound Effect.” Mental Floss, 2018. <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/562144/friday-the-13th-jason-voorhees-whisper-sound-effect-story>

This source references the film's composer discussing how he created the effect.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Thus far, the only other film in the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* franchise to not feature Jason as the killer is *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part V*, in which an ambulance driver, Roy, dons a hockey mask like Jason's and, like Pamela, embarks on a murder spree driven by a desire for vengeance over his son's death.

live up to its name once more.<sup>529</sup> Pivotaly, the invocation adheres to the folkloric rule of three,<sup>530</sup> whereby the repetition of the motif makes it a sort of spell. It is as if some spirit is compelling Pamela to undertake and then continue her murders.

Furthermore, the abbreviations are like those a child would use: “Ki-” as if the child cannot articulate “kill,” “ma” as if they are still calling their mother “mama.”<sup>531</sup> Because *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*’s plot runs on Pamela’s desire to exact revenge for her son Jason’s death, and because Jason drowned in Crystal Lake as a child, this sound motif evokes the idea that Jason’s spirit is speaking to Pamela, driving her forward (ultimately to her own death). And the film’s final scare, where Jason rises from the lake to attack Alice,<sup>532</sup> reinforces this reading, as does Jason’s actual appearance in the sequel to avenge his mother’s death.

The case, however, is not so clear cut. While it may, at first glance, seem straightforward that Jason is the speaker, it is possible Pamela is the speaker. Indeed, we see her intoning, in a mock child’s voice: “Kill her, mommy. Kill her.”<sup>533</sup> That moment seems to make Pamela the speaker, in which case she could be ventriloquizing her dead son’s voice. In that case, she would be pretending to have access to Jason’s will so she can vindicate her attempts at revenge. Then again, this moment could also show Jason

---

<sup>529</sup> *Friday the 13th*. Directed by Sean S. Cunningham, performance by Betsy Palmer, Paramount Pictures, 1980.

<sup>530</sup> Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968. 74. In this work, influential folklorist Vladimir Propp notes the presence of the rule of three in folklore.

<sup>531</sup> *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*.

<sup>532</sup> *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*’s ending is a little ambiguous here. Alice awakens from the attack to find herself safe in the hospital, surrounded by police. When she asks the police about “the boy” (Jason) who attacked her, the police are visibly confused and tell her they found no boy (*Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*). Alice then says “Then he’s still there,” thus setting up the film’s sequel, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part II*.

<sup>533</sup> *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*.

using his mother as a living ventriloquist dummy, using her to voice his own thoughts (or, rather, commands for her).

It is entirely unclear which of these is the case. While we might dismiss Pamela as a distraught mother whose grief has driven her mad, the film franchise seems to undermine this reading. After Alice has killed Pamela, she pushes a canoe out into the middle of the lake, where she falls asleep. There we get the film's only appearance of Jason the killer, when he rises out of the lake and pulls Alice into the water, as if to punish her with the exact manner and location of his own death. Alice soon awakens, however, in the hospital, where the police inform her they did not find or see any boy.<sup>534</sup>

Alice's waking up right after the attack, bearing no injuries from said attack, and the police (who were at the lake shore during the attack scene) having no idea what she is talking about when she asks them about Jason, all suggest Alice merely dreamed the attack. And yet, Jason shows up in the film's sequel (albeit as an adult) and murders Alice to avenge Pamela.<sup>535</sup> Thus, the film's direct sequel implies Alice's dream in the original film was prescient. Indeed, the editing at the end of the original film reinforces this interpretation because, as Alice says her closing line about Jason ("Then he's still there"),<sup>536</sup> the shot dissolves into a long shot of the lake, hinting Jason is not only still in the lake but is also dangerous (i.e., animated), as we see him be in the film's sequels.<sup>537</sup>

---

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> The franchise never explains how Jason returned to life or why he did so in an adult body.

<sup>536</sup> *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*.

<sup>537</sup> On an extra-textual level, we can explain some of these issues by appealing to the realities of film production. In truth, the creative team behind the first *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* probably did not expect their small budget movie to receive a sequel, let alone an entire franchise. And so, they may have just thrown in the canoe scene with Jason as a fun scare for the film's ending without considering the logic of how such a scene would fit into a broader story spanning multiple decades.

And if we accept the sequels as occupying the same canon as the original movie, then it would seem Jason is, in fact, speaking through his mother in the original film. After all, for the sequels to follow, Jason would need to still be around in the woods. But this does not seem to work, logically. If, as Paul speculates in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part II*, Jason survived to adulthood in the woods outside camp,<sup>538</sup> then why would he be speaking through his mother with a child's voice? Also, why would he be speaking at all when Jason is infamously silent?<sup>539</sup>

My point here is that the voice is remarkably untraceable in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, both the original film and its franchise. This elusiveness also makes the voice untrustworthy. We, the audience, cannot tell who is speaking to whom. The effect is somewhat reminiscent of the effect Poe achieves in "The Raven," but, perhaps owing to its cinematic medium, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* takes this effect in a direction "The Raven" does not. Namely, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* uses ventriloquism to breach the diegetic/non-diegetic barrier.

That is to say, the motif of "ki-, ki-, ki-, ma, ma, ma," represents how Pamela's sentence of "Kill her mommy" is actually existing on multiple levels, both where the film's characters can hear it (diegetic) and where they (presumably) cannot (non-diegetic).<sup>540</sup> The main sound motif, then, complicates *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*'s presented reality. Not only does it make it unclear who the speaker is, but it also makes it unclear wherefrom the voice originates. Since "ki-, ki-, ki-, ma, ma, ma" repeats throughout the

---

<sup>538</sup> *Friday the 13th Part II*. Directed by Steve Miner, performance by Amy Steel, Paramount Pictures, 1981.

<sup>539</sup> Jason does, in fact, speak in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan*, when he calls for his mother in a surprisingly child-like voice. Then again, Jason also transforms (inexplicably) into a child immediately after this, as a wave of toxic waste ebbs away from him. The transformation back into child form may imply Jason's child-like voice is somehow connected to the transformation. Once again, it becomes difficult to make sense of some aspect of this franchise.

<sup>540</sup> *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*.

sound scheme, it becomes part of the movie's atmosphere.<sup>541</sup> That atmosphere, however, pervades not only Camp Crystal Lake but also the viewer's ontological space, moving the implied threat of Pamela and Jason's shared propensity for violence out of the film and into the real world the audience occupies.<sup>542</sup>

This is an interesting movement "The Raven" does not complete (and, indeed, one which it seems film is more adept at than literature is). *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*'s iconic sound design centers on the voice and its importance in the narrative. Moreover, it returns us to our discussion in Chapter Three by reinvoking the connection of the voice to the formation and continuation of the family unit. In this case, the voice forms an undying connection between mother and son. His identity formed, in part, by the reverberating sounds of Pamela's voice in the womb,<sup>543</sup> Jason adopts this tool and (arguably) reverses it after his untimely death.

Regardless of which Voorhees is speaking, the voice joins Pamela and Jason throughout the franchise. And here, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* comments on the lingering effects of sounds in the human memory. This is why Pamela's voice continues to sway Jason throughout the film's sequels even when the voice is not really hers. We see this in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part II* when Jenny uses her physical similarities to Pamela to imitate her, convincing Jason, if momentarily, to lower his weapon and leave himself vulnerable. We see it, also, in *Freddy Vs Jason*, in which Freddy shapeshifts into Pamela to invoke Jason into renewing his rampage, thus casting a sort of spell that resurrects the dead Crystal Lake slasher. The voice in this franchise therefore underscores the connection between

---

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> West, *At the Edge of Existence*, 230.

<sup>543</sup> Chion 61.

mother and son, a connection lasting as long as one of the two survives, no matter the form.<sup>544</sup>

Like “The Raven,” *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* introduces some possibly supernatural elements. As such, its use of the voice falls under some of the same constraints as that of Poe’s in “The Raven.” Namely, supernatural elements might explain the voice’s ability to transcend the diegetic/non-diegetic barrier. Conversely, however, *Scream* lacks the implication of supernatural elements, meaning, with it, we can get a completely naturalistic text. *Scream* is therefore helpful here for rounding out this vignette about the slasher film’s use of the voice.

Scholarship of *Scream* has focused, with good reason, on the movie’s meta elements.<sup>545</sup> An interesting aspect for my purposes, however, is the killers’ diegetic use of a voice modulator. *Scream* places technology front and center in its narrative, as the killers, Billy and Stu, harass their victims through menacing phone calls. The then relatively nascent technology of cell phones thus forms an essential weapon in the killers’ arsenal. The voice modulator becomes important because it allows Billy and Stu to disguise their voices, just as their mask disguises their faces.

And so, when either of the killers harasses a victim over the phone, his voice comes through as a third voice distinct from either Billy’s or Stu’s voice. Extra-textually, the production team achieves this effect by casting a separate, third actor to deliver the

---

<sup>544</sup> Jason explicitly becomes undead in the ironically named *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VI: Jason Lives*, wherein a lightning bolt revives a dead and decaying Jason. From there into the next few sequels, Jason’s body visibly rots, such that in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VII: The New Blood*, his ribs become visible from his back.

<sup>545</sup> See: Wee, Valerie. “The Scream Trilogy, “Hyperpostmodernism,” and the Late-Nineties Teen Slasher Film.” *Journal of Film and Video*, 57, no. 3 (2005): 55-57; West, *At the Edge of Existence*; Phillips.

threatening dialogue during the phone call scenes.<sup>546</sup> On the surface, this element may appear unnoteworthy. And yet, it involves an interesting use of the voice. In particular, the voice modulator separates voice from identity in *Scream*.

In real life, we can recognize people from their voices. And yet, the modulator precludes this possibility in *Scream*.<sup>547</sup> As such, the audience and characters lose one of their tools for assigning identity to speakers. On the one hand, this, of course, aids Billy and Stu in staying anonymous, which they must as serial killers. On the other hand, though, this plot element and prop evokes the vocalic uncanny,<sup>548</sup> undermining the audience's comfort, especially toward the film's conclusion.

There, Stu uses the modulator to alter his voice as he reveals himself to Sidney as one of the two killers. That moment is paradoxical. While seeing Stu speak in the modulated voice connects that character and that voice in the viewers' mind, there remains an uncanny, unnerving affect, whereby the voice does not quite fit the speaker. Indeed, the voice instead becomes a tool like any other, divorced as it were from the very concept of personhood or, further, any biological particulars.<sup>549</sup> We see this play out when Sidney uses the modulator herself to taunt Billy and Stu. Sidney therefore co-opts the voice the same way she co-opts the tools of taunting phone calls and the Ghostface costume.

Thus, in *Scream*, there is a certain fluidity to personal identities, one suiting the film's whodunit plot. This plot element aligns *Scream* with reality, where we do not

---

<sup>546</sup> "Scream (1996 Film)." *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scream\\_\(1996\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scream_(1996_film))

The *Wikipedia* page lists the cast, including the voice of Ghostface, Roger Jackson.

<sup>547</sup> This appears to be the intended effect, at any rate. I always found the third voice similar to Billy's.

<sup>548</sup> Connor 411-412.

<sup>549</sup> That is, one's anatomy modulates one's voice, but this is not the case with the modulator.

know everyone's motivations and thoughts. And so, *Scream* undermines audience stability and perception by evoking the uncanny. While the voice modulator is a less conspicuous version of this affect, we can see it, too, in the doubling and uncertainty inherent to the two killer format. When Stu reveals himself as a killer, Sidney and the audience must reconsider the preceding narrative, realizing how their preconceived notions (e.g., of there being one killer) have misled them.<sup>550</sup>

Sound, then, sits beside the knife on the masked killer's toolbelt in the slasher sub-genre of horror films. At least, it often does. I would be remiss, after all, to conclude this part of Chapter Three without considering the inverse. While *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *Scream* show sound's disorienting power, an earlier slasher movie, the classic Italian horror *Suspria* (1977, directed by Dario Argento), subverts the dynamic I have traced.<sup>551</sup> Indeed, Damien Pollard has pointed out how hearing becomes a source of "insurgent" power in this influential horror film.<sup>552</sup>

*Suspria* tells the relatively simple, folkloric story of an American ballerina, Suzy, who goes to study at a German dance academy. Said academy, however, is run by a coven of witches, who target Suzy with their black magic. Suzy, however, manages to listen to the witches' footsteps at night and thereby find the way into their lair under the

---

<sup>550</sup> I have examined *Scream*'s destabilizing effects and focus on surprising the audience in *At the Edge of Existence*.

<sup>551</sup> Technically, *Suspria* belongs to the giallo sub-genre of Italian horror films. The giallo, however, shares a number of striking similarities to the American slasher film, including the narrative conceit of a masked killer murdering victims one-by-one in brutal fashion, typically via bladed instruments. In *Suspria*, such tools as razor wire, a straight razor, and a knife parallel the arrows, hunting knife, and machete of Pamela Voorhees. As such, *Suspria* shares enough stylistic similarities to justify its inclusion in this section. Moreover, its notoriety marks it as an important touchstone in the history of horror cinema, adding further credence toward my including it in this discussion.

<sup>552</sup> Pollard, D. "'I'm Blind, not Deaf!': Hegemonic Soundscapes and Resistant Hearing in Dario Argento's *Suspria* and *Inferno*." *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 7 (1), 68. 2019. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jicms.7.1.55\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jicms.7.1.55_1) S



school, where she slays the head witch, Helena Markos, consequently destroying the entire academy. Suzy manages to escape, though, and leaves the ruined school with a smile.

Pollard, then, gestures to Suzy's hearing as a source of her power.<sup>553</sup> And he is right to do so. Indeed, he also notes how other characters, such as the school's piano player Daniel, likewise use their hearing to their advantage.<sup>554</sup> Thus, for Daniel, Suzy, and even Suzy's friend Sarah, hearing becomes a well of strength from which the characters can draw power to battle the witches who target them.

And so, here we have a subversion of the destabilizing sort of soundscape from *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *Scream*. But *Suspiria*'s soundtrack offers a destabilizing effect of its own. *Suspiria*'s original score comes from the rock band Goblin, who has composed a discordant theme pervading the film. It would seem, therefore, from the chaotic soundtrack, that *Suspiria* tries to use sound to disconcert and destabilize its audience. Pollard does not consider this aspect of this important film. But there is also another side to this.

While the soundtrack does seem destabilizing, it also opens a door for the audience. Namely, the theme song declares "Witch!" in between clashing instrumentals,<sup>555</sup> tipping the film's hand to the audience by letting viewers know what movie monster to expect. Thus, sound becomes a source of power for *Suspiria*'s audience as well as for the movie's characters. This is an important countervailing point to

---

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>555</sup> *Suspiria*. Directed by Dario Argento, performance by Jessica Harper, Seda Spettacoli, 1977.

Pollard's astute analysis of the film. And it demonstrates how horror movies can also use sound to empower their audiences, at least to a degree.

We should be clear, of course, that the horror film's oneiric space does preclude the audience from a large degree of action. It does not, however, rob viewers of their agency. Even as *Suspiria* unfolds, the audience largely passive, viewers can still piece together the mystery as Suzy does. They can also control their gaze.<sup>556</sup> Like Suzy, then, the audience can represent a form of insurgency,<sup>557</sup> to borrow Pollard's term, against the movie monster's power. It is not clear to me, though, that *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* accomplishes the same effect. While it does forecast the killer's motive, it also does so in an indirect, even abstruse, fashion, one most audience members, including myself, will miss even on repeated viewings.

Conversely, *Suspiria* declares its villain clearly and forcefully in such a way it would be difficult for audiences to miss. And because *Suspiria*'s storyline is relatively straightforward, "Witch" is most the information the audience needs to understand the movie's narrative.<sup>558</sup> Crucial here is *Suspiria*'s emphasis on atmosphere over logic. A surrealist nightmare, *Suspiria* invites its audience to adopt a passive position, to ride the current of its narrative. But, simultaneously, it leaves the door open for viewers to swim rather than float. By contrast, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* expects them to drown. *Scream*, on the other hand, provides a life raft even as it throws viewers into a river it expects to be turbulent. That is, *Scream* tries to hide its hand, but it does not conceal all its information either.

---

<sup>556</sup> Pinedo 54.

<sup>557</sup> Pollard 68.

<sup>558</sup> *Suspiria*.

As we have seen, ergo, horror films, particularly slashers, sometimes use sound in ways similar to Poe's use of it in "The Raven." The effects of the gothic therefore echo throughout the slasher, a connection that warrants further exploration elsewhere. In all of these texts, the uncertainty surrounding the speaker, the speaker's identity, and/or the speaker's location destabilizes the viewer and creates a driving question in the discerning audience's mind. "The Raven" uses its doubled and unclear voice as well as the phenomenon of ventriloquism to raise questions about the nature of meaning. *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* undermines the diegetic/non-diegetic boundary. *Scream* gets viewers to doubt their own views. And *Suspiria* uses it to offer the viewer a choice between remaining passive or accepting the quest, between submitting to the speaker's power or of using hearing to undercut that power.<sup>559</sup>

#### 4.4 Conclusion

It is, perhaps, a trite observation these days that unitary conceptions of the self crumble under scrutiny. From psychoanalysts' delineation of the conscious and unconscious minds<sup>560</sup> to neuroscientists' revelations about the split brain<sup>561</sup> to even the odd young film critic's jejune analysis,<sup>562</sup> academics have long pointed out how the self is far from the monolithic entity we would like to believe it is (even if only to make ourselves feel better). Rather, the self, these and many more have pointed out, is a nebulous, multifaceted concept, a construct instead of a being. Such an acknowledgment

---

<sup>559</sup> Pollard 68.

<sup>560</sup> Natoli 6.

<sup>561</sup> Sperry, R.W. "Hemisphere Disconnection and Unity in Conscious Awareness." *American Psychologist*, 23, no. 10 (1968): 723-733.

<sup>562</sup> West, *At the Edge of Existence*.

is, however, so damaging to our self-assessments we would prefer to ignore it, as we are wont to do with so many uncomfortable truths.

Those uncomfortable truths, though, are the very same upon which the horror genre (gothic or not) thrives. And the gothic horror texts I have explored tend to divide the self through a two-fold move. In step one, the protagonist's self becomes visibly divided (e.g., through the doppelganger). In step two, this division's psychological roots become clear, revealing that the true division lies not without but, rather, within the protagonist's psyche. This second step, moreover, often allows the gothic horror text to point an accusatory finger at the audience, highlighting how the reader or viewer's self is likely internally divided as well. And so, gothic horror texts push their audiences toward introspection but in such a way as to couch uncomfortable truths in a still palatable coating (i.e., that of an entertaining story).

The divided self is, in fact, central to gothic horror, including those texts featuring the ventriloquial voice. Take, for instance, *Pinocchio's Revenge*, which illustrates this dynamic I describe. Recall how, at the beginning of the film, Pinocchio is presented as the monster, the external Other to contrast with the ostensibly innocent Zoe. Yet, as the movie progresses, various elements imply Zoe is herself the monster, responsible for all the crimes she has blamed on Pinocchio. Though the resulting dynamic is ambiguous (i.e., we cannot be sure whether Pinocchio or Zoe is responsible), the viewer of *Pinocchio's Revenge* must wonder about the power of the human mind, including the power of their own mind, the divisions within them, not merely those within Zoe.

Furthermore, *Pinocchio's Revenge* depicts this division, this conflict, as inevitable. Zoe's young age marks her. She is on the precipice of puberty, and so, is

undertaking a journey of individuation, the same journey everyone has to undertake when entering young adulthood.<sup>563</sup> In other words, Zoe is defining herself, just as every individual needs to do. And the process of doing this occurs via the social construction of the self. That is, Zoe's self construction occurs via dialogue, and it is the unhealthy, solipsistic way she performs this dialogue that proves dangerous. Thus, *Pinocchio's Revenge* highlights humanity's social nature and, thereby, the integral role of proper socialization for healthy self image and identity negotiation.

But, and this is key, the self in *Pinocchio's Revenge* is not a monolithic construct, but rather a moving target. Whereas the wooden, inert Pinocchio symbolizes the breakdown of the individuation process, the motile, animate Zoe symbolizes the self's true, dynamic nature. That is, because the unified self is a myth, the healthy self (that same self Zoe fails to find) is not a goal but, rather, an ideal toward which the healthy person must journey. After all, Zoe's failure results in her catatonic state at the movie's conclusion.

And so, the healthy self is constructed, where possible, through conversation (i.e., stereotypically through sound). If we may expand on the notion of sound "waves," let us consider, then, the self as a wave in a pool of water, constructed by colliding currents and then fading, gradually, back into the seamless mass. The self, a focus on the voice reveals, is not a unity, not a being, but, rather, a moment. Now, of course, any "moment" is temporally bound. But notice how the wave crashes in upon itself. So, too, does human identity. The return of the past, therefore, is the folding of the wave over and upon itself. The dissolution of a wave, the process by which it disappears into the undifferentiated

---

<sup>563</sup> And, in Jungian psychoanalysis, thereafter as well. The point here is that Zoe is clearly at the threshold of an important maturity rite.

waters around it, relies upon two factors: self-collision and collision from without. In other words, the wave disappears because it buckles upon itself (as in the gothic quest of self-discovery) and because other waves slam into it (as in the horror movie's monster narrative).

Zoe's mistake, then, comes when she tries to arrest the wave's movement, tries to monopolize her mother's attention, tries to freeze time, as it were. In resisting the natural need to grow up, Zoe fights the tide of selfhood, and, thus, she loses. *Pinocchio's Revenge* therefore pushes us to think of the voice as the waters moving us along the journey of individuation, a journey that requires movement and that, like sound, is ephemeral, not constant, made up of moments creating a messy, amorphous whole rather than a definite singularity.

Of course, on this topic, we should note how individuation tends to fail in the gothic horror texts I have considered. As aforementioned, Zoe ends up catatonic, after all. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that texts focusing on the darker aspects of the human experience would feature the failure of such a pivotal process. In highlighting the pitfalls of individuation, the ways it can fail, these texts aid us, however, by pointing out some unfortunate psychological realities. As I have explored throughout this work, the psychological pitfalls in these texts align with real life counterparts. Zoe and her mother Jennifer, I argue in Chapter Three, possibly fall into folie a deux (i.e., a shared delusion). These texts are, in a very broad way, instructive, gesturing toward the path of individuation, explicitly demonstrating the journey's necessity (note what happens when Zoe, for example, tries to avoid it), but also highlighting the journey's difficulty. The divided self, these texts argue, is inevitable, an uncomfortable truth everyone must face.

As such, though an attack against the notion of a unified self is hardly original, it remains useful, if only for disabusing readers of an idea as ubiquitous as it is flawed. Therefore, continued exploration of the doubled (even multiplied) self in all its variations is a worthwhile endeavor. Academia may have long since recognized the self's splintered existence, but the task remains to fully taxonomize<sup>564</sup> this amorphous being at once so close to and so distant from us, so close at hand yet so far from our apprehension. To do that, of course, is far beyond my work's more modest scope or my own divided self's capabilities.

My philosophical waxing aside, the point remains that this exploration of the voice in gothic horror opens many doors for us, some of which I have enumerated above and some of which I cannot see with my myopic, transitory eyes, faded as they are with my ongoing self-reconstruction. So, what is next? Well, much remains to be done. Future projects should consider, for example, the use of chronological doubles in narratives featuring parallel time lines. They should also consider the A.I. revolution's role in our evolving conception of the uncanny valley, and how changes in this revulsion might affect ventriloquism and the evil dummy narrative. They might also move into the territory of the unsaid, those times and places where the voice fails entirely. Perhaps we have as much to learn from the voice's absence as from its presence.

---

<sup>564</sup> If, indeed, a full taxonomy of the self is even possible.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

- “The Battered Doll.” Directed by Steve Anker, *Beyond Belief: Fact or Fiction*, 2002.
- The Bible*. New International Version. Available at:  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201&version=NIV>
- The Cabin in the Woods*. Directed by Drew Goddard, performance by Kristen Connolly, Lionsgate, 2011.
- Child’s Play*. Directed by Lars Klevberg, performance by Mark Hamill, Orion Pictures, 2019.
- Conti, Nina. “Nina Conti-Talk To The Hand [Full Stand-up Show]. *YouTube*, uploaded by yo bag, 27 February 2017,  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm\\_yFkNM6Wg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm_yFkNM6Wg).
- “Dead by Misadventure.” *Chucky*. Directed by Don Mancini, Syfy and USA Networks, 2021.
- Dead of Night* [frame narrative], directed by Basil Dearden, Ealing Studios, 1945.
- The Exorcist*. Directed by William Friedkin, performance by Linda Blair, Warner Bros, 1973.
- Freddy vs. Jason*. Directed by Ronny Yu, performance by Monica Keena, New Line Cinema, 2003.
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. Directed by Sean S. Cunningham, performance by Betsy Palmer, Paramount Pictures, 1980.
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part II*. Directed by Steve Miner, performance by Amy Steel, Paramount Pictures, 1981.
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part V: A New Beginning*. Directed by Danny Steinmann, performance by John Shepherd, Paramount Pictures, 1985.
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VI: Jason Lives*. Directed by Tom McLoughlin, performance by Thom Matthews, Paramount Pictures, 1986.
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VII: The New Blood*. Directed by John Carl Buechler, performance by Lar Park Lincoln, Paramount Pictures, 1988.
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan*. Directed by Rob Hedden, performance by Jensen Daggett, Paramount Pictures, 1989.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. “Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.” In *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987. 279-294.
- . “Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.” *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Wiley & Putnam, 1846. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/512/512-h/512-h.htm#egotism>.
- . “The Minister’s Black Veil.” In *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987. 185-199.



- . "The Minister's Black Veil." *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), Boston, 1837. ProQuest, <http://ezproxy.uky.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/twice-told-tales-1837/docview/2138582140/se-2?accountid=11836>. 53-74.
- . "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux." 1832.
- . "Young Goodman Brown." 1835. [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/fl1124y-001/resources/Young\\_Goodman\\_Brown.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/fl1124y-001/resources/Young_Goodman_Brown.pdf)
- "Holly's House." Directed by Theodore Gershuny, *Monsters*, 1988.
- The House of the Devil*. Directed by Georges Méliès, Star Film Company, 1896.
- Kersh, Gerald. "The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy." In *The Horrible Dummy and Other Stories*, Faber & Faber, 48-51.
- Last House on the Left*. Directed by Wes Craven, performance by Sandra Peabody, American International Pictures, 1972.
- "Living Doll." Directed by Richard C. Sarafian, *The Twilight Zone*, 1963.
- Magic*. Directed by Richard Attenborough, performance by Anthony Hopkins, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1978.
- "Magic-1978 Trailer." *YouTube*, uploaded by terminallunch. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY1oeoVD\\_zI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY1oeoVD_zI)
- Pinocchio's Revenge*. Directed by Kevin S. Tenney, Trimark Pictures, 1996.
- Poe, Edgar A. "The Black Cat." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 203-210. Print.
- . "The Cask of Amontillado." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 231-231-236.
- . "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 99-106. Print.
- . "The Fall of the House of Usher." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 171-184. Print.
- . "The Imp of the Perverse." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 211-216. Print.
- . "The Philosophy of Composition." Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69390/the-philosophy-of-composition>
- . "The Raven." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 773-775. Print.
- . "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 267-278. Print.
- . "The Tell-Tale Heart." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 199-202. Print.
- . "William Wilson." *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*. Castle Books. 555-568. Print.
- "The Puppet Show." Directed by Ellen S. Pressman, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 1997.

- Saving Private Ryan*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, performance by Tom Hanks, Paramount Pictures, 1998.
- Seed of Chucky*. Directed by Don Mancini, performance by Brad Dourif, David Kirschner Productions, 2004.
- “Smile Time.” Directed by Ben Edlund, *Angel*, 2004.
- “Stevil.” Directed by Richard Correll, *Family Matters*, 1996.
- Stine, R.L. *Night of the Living Dummy II*. Scholastic Corporation, 1995.
- Suspiria*. Directed by Dario Argento, performance by Jessica Harper, Seda Spettacoli, 1977.
- “The Tale of the Crimson Clown.” Directed by Ron Oliver, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*, 1994.
- “The Tale of Laughing in the Dark.” Directed by Ron Oliver, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*, 1992.
- “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy.” *Dead of Night*, directed by Alberto Cavalcanti, Ealing Studios, 1945.
- “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy.” Directed by Richard Donner, *Tales from the Crypt*, 1990.

#### Secondary Sources

- Adams, John F. “Classical Raven Lore and Poe’s Raven.” *Poe Studies* (1971-1985), vol. 5, no. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 53–53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296622>.
- Altman, Rick. “Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism.” *Yale French Studies*. 60, 1980, 67-79.
- Arner, Robert D. “Hawthorne and Jones Very: Two Dimensions of Satire in ‘Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.’” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1969, 267-275.
- Bacal, Howard A. and Kenneth M. Newman. *Theories of Object Relations: Bridges to Self Psychology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Backer, Ron. *Classic Horror Films and the Literature That Inspired Them*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015.
- Bagus, et al. “COVID-19 and the Political Economy of Mass Hysteria.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7913136/>
- Barber, Nicholas. “Is horror the most disrespected genre?” BBC, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180614-is-horror-the-most-disrespected-genre>
- Barnes, Daniel R. “‘Physical Fact’ and Folklore: Hawthorne’s ‘Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent.’” *American Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1971, 117-121.

- Bassein, Beth Ann. "Poe's Most Poetic Subject." In *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poems, Tales, and Essays*, edited by Jared Gardner and Elizabeth Hewitt, Macmillan Learning, 2016, Print.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "New Notes on Edgar Poe." In *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poems, Tales, and Essays*, edited by Jared Gardner and Elizabeth Hewitt, Macmillan Learning, 2016, Print.
- Bele, Tiago. "Know Yourself—the Persona, the Shadow and the Anima/Animus Inside You." *Medium*, 2021, <https://medium.com/know-thyself-heal-thyself/know-yourself-the-persona-the-shadow-and-the-anima-animus-inside-you-a9d8b6c788e2>
- "Believe Nothing Your Hear, and Only One Half That You See." Quote Investigator. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/06/23/half-see/>
- Benshoff, Harry. "'Way Too Gay to be Ignored': The Production and Reception of Queer Horror Cinema in the Twenty-First Century." In *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning. 2012. 131-144.
- Bivins, Jason C. "By Demons Driven: Religious Teratologies." In *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning. 2012. 105-116.
- Bonaparte, Marie. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, a Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. [1<sup>st</sup> English ed.], Imago Pub. Co., 1949.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. Routledge, 1996.
- . *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008. Print.
- Braudy, Leo. "The Form of the Sentimental Novel." Duke University Press, 1973. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1345049>
- Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends & Their Meanings*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981.
- Burton, Neel. "The Symbolism of Snakes." *Psychology Today*, 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-see/202105/the-symbolism-snakes>
- Butler, Kristen. "'Exorcist' author sues Georgetown for not being Catholic enough." *UPI*, 2013. [https://www.upi.com/Odd\\_News/2013/06/10/Exorcist-author-sues-Georgetown-for-not-being-Catholic-enough/7351370874926/](https://www.upi.com/Odd_News/2013/06/10/Exorcist-author-sues-Georgetown-for-not-being-Catholic-enough/7351370874926/)
- Campbell, Killis. *The Mind of Poe, and Other Studies*. Russell & Russell, 1962.
- . "The Poe-Griswold Controversy." *PMLA*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1919. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/456891>
- Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- "Catechism 2283." Catechism of the Catholic Church. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P7Z.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P7Z.HTM)

- Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema*. Translated by Caludia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Cisco, Michael. "Cosmic Horror and the Supernatural in Poe and Lovecraft." In *The Lovecraftian Poe: Essays on Influence, Reception, and Transformation*, edited by Sean Moreland. Lehigh University Press, 2017.
- Clemens, Valdine. *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from the Castle of Otranto to Alien*. State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Cline, John. "Dream Logic." Psychology Today, 2020.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sleepless-in-america/202009/dream-logic#:~:text=The%20online%20Urban%20Dictionary%20defines,is%20used%20in%20film%20studies>
- Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, NJ: BFI, 1992.
- Colwell, James L., and Gary Spitzer. "'Bartleby' and 'The Raven': Parallels of the Irrational." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia by and on Behalf of the University of Georgia and the Georgia Review, 1969, pp. 37–43, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41396522>.
- Connor, Steven. *Dumbstruck—A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Cowan, Douglas E. *The Forbidden Body: Sex, Horror, and the Religious Imagination*. New York: New York University Press, 2022. Print.
- . *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008. Print.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 1993.
- Creel, James. "Gender, Horror, and War: Reading Saving Private Ryan as Horror Film." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 53(1), 2020, 215-234.
- Curzan, Anne, and Michael Adams. *How English Works*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Print.
- Davies, Helen. *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
- Derry, Charles. *Dark Dreams 2.0 : a Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century*. McFarland & Co., 2009.
- Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice And Nothing More*. The MIT Press. Short Circuits, 2006. Print.
- The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, University of Texas Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.uky.edu/lib/kentucky-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3571889>.
- Duncan, Paul. "A Short Biography of Gerald Kersh." Available at: <http://www.harlanellison.com/kersh/biog.htm>

- Dunning, Brian. "The Horsey History of Clever Hans." Skeptoid Podcast. Skeptoid Media, 24 Jul 2018. Web. 16 Apr 2023. <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4633>
- Eddings, Dennis W. "Mad Ravings or Sound Thinking?: 'The Philosophy of Composition' and Poe's Parodic Raven." In *Edgar Allan Poe: Beyond Gothicism*, edited by James M. Hutchisson, University of Delaware Press, 2011, 161-171.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "Beyond the Shot." In *Film Theory & Discussion*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Leo Braudy and Mashall Cohen, Oxford University Press, 2016. 12-40.
- Ellison, Harlan. "I cannot conceal my annoyance." 1989, Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20121026125246/http://www.lettersofnote.com/2010/02/i-cannot-conceal-my-annoyance.html>
- Ettliger, Marc. "What Are Ventriloquists Doing With Their Vocal Tracts." *Slate*, 2013, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/10/what-are-ventriloquists-doing-with-their-vocal-tracts.html>
- Evans, Walter. "Monster Movies and Rites of Initiation." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 4, 1975, 124-142.
- . "Monster Movies: A Sexual Theory." In *Sexuality in the Movies*, edited by Thomas R. Atkins, Indiana University Press, <https://publish.iupress.indiana.edu/read/sexuality-in-the-movies/section/09683833-c0dd-4bcb-8d3b-c2013269bda9#rch7>
- "Existentialism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2023. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>
- "The Exorcist." *Wikipedia*, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Exorcist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exorcist)
- Farrow, et al. "Positivism/Post Positivism." In *Research Methods Handbook*, Oklahoma State University, <https://open.library.okstate.edu/gognresearchmethods/chapter/positivism-post-positivism/>
- "The Fallen: Military strength and deaths in combat." UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/crime-and-defence/the-fallen/#:~:text=Over%20the%20course%20of%20the,and%2012.5%25%20of%20those%20serving>
- Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: Criterion Books, 1960. Print.
- Fisher, Benjamin Franklin. *The Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge, UK :: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.
- Fisher, Mark. *The Weird and the Eerie*. Repeater Books, New York, 2016.
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" Available at: [https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Foucault\\_what\\_is\\_an\\_author.pdf](https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Foucault_what_is_an_author.pdf)

- Freedman, W. (1996), Poe's "Raven": The Word That Is an Answer "Nevermore". *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism*, 29: 23-31. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1111/j.1754-6095.1996.tb00080.x>
- Freeland, Cynthia. "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films." In *Film Theory & Discussion*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Leo Braudy and Mashall Cohen, Oxford University Press, 2016. 563-579.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press.
- . "The Uncanny." 1919, Available at: <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>
- Fritscher, Lisa. "What is Automatonophobia or Fear of Human-Like Figures? Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment." *VeryWellMind*, 2022, <https://www.verywellmind.com/autatonophobia-2671847>
- Gargano, James W. "The Question of Poe's Narrators." In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. Print.
- "Genetic Bird Sexing." University of Tennessee, College of Veterinary Medicine, [https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/vmc/dls/immunology/immuno-genetic-bird-sexing/#:~:text=Sex%20identification%20is%20performed%20in,DNA%20binding%20genes%20\(CHD\).](https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/vmc/dls/immunology/immuno-genetic-bird-sexing/#:~:text=Sex%20identification%20is%20performed%20in,DNA%20binding%20genes%20(CHD).)
- Godden, Richard. "Poe and the Poetics of Opacity: Or, Another Way of Looking at that Blackbird." *ELH*, vol. 67 no. 4, 2000, p. 993-1009. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/elh.2000.0032.
- Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.
- Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. New York: Mariner Books, 2012. Print.
- Granger, Byrd Howell. "Devil Lore in 'The Raven.'" *Poe Studies* (1971-1985), vol. 5, no. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 53-54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296623>.
- Gregory, Jane. *Fred Hoyle's Universe*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Griswold, R.W. "Death of Edgar A. Poe." *New York Daily Tribune*, New York, Vol. 9, No. 156, 1849. Available at: <https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1827/nyt49100.htm>
- Groom, Nick. *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Halberstam, Judith (Jack). "On Pronouns." 2012, <http://www.jackhalberstam.com/on-pronouns/>
- . *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995.
- . "Seed of Chucky: Transbiology and the Horror Flick." In *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning. 2012. 145-152.

- Halliburton, David. *Edgar Allan Poe; a Phenomenological View*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. Print.
- Hand, Richard J. *Terror on the Air!: Horror Radio in America, 1931-1952*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.
- Harding, Walter. "Another Source for Hawthorne's 'Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent.'" *American Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1969, 537-538.
- Harman, G. "Technology, objects and things in Heidegger." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2010, 17-25.
- Heldreth, Leonard G. "Variations On The Double Motif in Ventriloquist Films: 'The Great Gabbo, Dead of Night,' and 'Magic.'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 3, no. 2 (10), [Brian Attebery, as Editor, for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts], 1991, pp. 81–94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43308093>.
- Heller-Nicholas, Alexandra. *Rape-Revenge Films: A Critical Study*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2021. Print.
- . *Suspiria*. Auteur. Devil's Advocates, 2015. Print.
- Heller, Terry. *The Delights of Terror: an Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror*. University of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*. BasicBooks, 1992.
- Hervey, Benjamin. "Contemporary Horror Cinema." In *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, Routledge, 2007. 234-241.
- Hill, Annette. *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Violent Movies*. University of Luton Press, 2005.
- Hoeveler, Diane Long. *Gothic Feminism: the Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.
- Hoffman, Daniel. *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe*. [1<sup>st</sup> ed.]. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1972. Print.
- Hogan, Patrick Colm. "Literary Universals." In *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, edited by Lisa Zunshine. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. pp. 37-59.
- The Horror Film*. Edited by Stephen Prince. Rutgers University Press. 2004.
- Horror, the Film Reader*. Edited by Mark Jancovich. In Focus-Routledge, 2002.
- Howard, June. "What is Sentimentality?" Oxford University Press, 1999. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/490077>
- "How Fiona Dourif Transformed Into a Young Chucky." USA Network, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9t-wrJjLoM>
- Hughes, William. *Key Concepts in the Gothic*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018.
- Hutchings, Peter. *Historical Dictionary of Horror Cinema*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2008. Print.

- Hutchisson, James M. *Edgar Allan Poe: Beyond Gothicism*, University of Delaware Press, 2011. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.uky.edu/lib/kentucky-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1767220>.
- Ichiko, Teiji, et al. “fable, parable, and allegory.” *Brittanica*, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/fable-parable-and-allegory/additional-info#history>
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981.
- Jancovich, Mark. “‘Psychological Thriller’: *Dead of Night* (1945), British Film Culture, and the 1940s Horror Cycle.” In *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning, 2012. 39-52.
- . *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester University Press, 1996.
- Jarman, Michelle. “Feral Children.” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feral-children>
- Jones, Darryl. *Horror: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Jortner, Adam. *American Monsters*. The Great Courses, Audible, 2021. <https://www.audible.com/pd/American-Monsters-Audiobook/B0979G9GJF>
- Jung, Carl. *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, 1981.
- . *The Undiscovered Self*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Signet, 2006.
- Kermode, Mark. *The Exorcist*. British Film Institute. BFI Film Classics, 2020. Print.
- Keyser, Samuel Jay. “Reversals in Poe and Stevens.” *Wallace Stevens Journal*, vol. 35 no. 2, 2011, p. 224-239. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/wsj.2011.0038.
- King, Stephen. *Danse Macabre*. New York: Gallery Books, 2010.
- . “That Feeling, You Can Only Say What It Is in French.” In *Everything’s Eventual*, Scribner, 1998.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, European Perspectives, 1980.
- Koven, Mikel J. “Folklore Studies and Popular Film and Television: A Necessary Critical Survey.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 116, no. 460, University of Illinois Press, 2003, pp. 176–95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137897>.
- . “The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film,” *Scope: An Online Journal*, 2003. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2003/may-2003/koven.pdf>.
- Kumar, et al. “Folie à deux.” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 47(3), 2005, 164-166. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2919794/#:~:text=Folie%20%C3%A0%20deux%20is%20defined,brief%20review%20of%20the%20literature>
- Lange, et al. “Words Won’t Fail: Experimental Evidence on the Role of Verbal Proficiency in Mate Choice.” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33(5), 2014, 482–499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X13515886>
- Lawrence, D.H. “Edgar Allan Poe.” In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923.



- Lervolino, Stephen. "The Exorcist' named the scariest horror movie of all time." ABC Audio, 2022, <https://digital.abcaudio.com/news/exorcist-named-scariest-horror-movie-all-time>
- Litwa, M. David. "Self-Sacrifice to Save the Life of Another in Jewish and Christian Traditions." *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 6, 2009, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2009.00516.x>
- Lovecraft, H.P. "Supernatural Horror in Literature." 1927. Available at: <https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx>
- Lowenstein, Adam. *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Lucy, John A. "Linguistic Relativity." *Annual Reviews Anthropology*, 26, 1997, 291-312. [https://cslc.nd.edu/assets/142525/lucy\\_linguistic\\_relativity.pdf](https://cslc.nd.edu/assets/142525/lucy_linguistic_relativity.pdf)
- "Ludwig Wittgenstein." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/>
- "Magic." *Primal Screen*. Directed by Rodney Ascher, 2017. <https://www.shudder.com/movies/watch/primal-screen/cc1ef0db07d6601c>
- Maligec, Christopher F. S. "'The Raven' as an Elegiac Paracausithyron." *Poe Studies: History, Theory, Interpretation*, vol. 42, 2009, pp. 87-97. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/j.1947-4697.2009.00015.x.
- Margau, Paul. "Changes of Perception in Gothic Literature. An Inquiry into the Effects of Reading Gothic." *British and American studies: B.A.S 21.21* (2015): 31-38. Print.
- Marshall, Bridget M. *The Gothic Tradition in Literature*, University of Massachusetts, Lowell, 22 January 2015, <https://faculty.uml.edu/bmarshall/romanticismandgothicartlit.html>, Accessed 15 October 2021.
- Marks, Hedy. "Dreams." WebMD, 2021. <https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/dreaming-overview>
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002.
- Mayntz, Melissa. "How to Tell If a Bird Is Male or Female." The Spruce, 2022, <https://www.thespruce.com/male-or-female-wild-bird-gender-id-387337>
- McNamara, Patrick. *Nightmares*. Westport, CN: Praeger, 2008.
- Metz, Christian. "Aural Objects." Translated by Georgia Gurrieri. *Yale French Studies*. 60, 1980, 24-32.
- . "Some Points in Semiotics of Film." In *Film Theory & Discussion*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Leo Braudy and Mashall Cohen, Oxford University Press, 2016. 54-60.
- Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. SUNY Press, 2001. Print.
- Mishra, Vijay. *The Gothic Sublime*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. Print.

- “Monster Hunt 2: Fears in the Woods.” Night Mind, *YouTube*, 2017,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djNwFlzPFAw&list=PLRfe-tMGHuaKeUbNAyBMJs7AkPxAmpqhZ&index=3>
- Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Monteiro, George. “A Nonliterary Source for Hawthorne’s ‘Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent.’” *American Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1970, 575-577.
- M. Mori, K. F. MacDorman and N. Kageki, "The Uncanny Valley [From the Field]," in *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 98-100, June 2012, doi: 10.1109/MRA.2012.2192811.
- Natoli, Joseph P. *Psychological Perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Non-Freudians: a Casebook*. Archon, 1984.
- Nelson, Victoria. “Messages of Black Birds.” *Agni*, no. 37, Agni, 1993, pp. 239–43,  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23009313>.
- Nightmares in Red, White, & Blue*. Directed by Andrew Monument, Lux Digital Pictures, 209. <https://tubitv.com/movies/15641/nightmares-in-red-white-and-blue?start=true>.
- Oldridge, Darren. *The Devil: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Ong, Walter J., *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Religious and Cultural History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981.
- Opsasnick, Mark. “The Haunted Boy of Cottage City: The Cold Hard Facts Behind the Story That Inspired ‘The Exorcist.’” *Strange Magazine*, 20, 2000,  
<http://www.strangemag.com/exorcistpage1.html>
- “Original Sin.” *Britannica*, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/original-sin>
- Ortiz, David. “A Friend Till The End—Child’s Play—Scene Analysis.” Killer Shorts, 2022. <https://killersshortscontest.com/screenwriting/a-friend-till-the-end-childs-play-scene-analysis/>
- Orvell, Miles D. “‘The Raven’ and the Chair.” *Poe Studies* (1971-1985), vol. 5, no. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 54–54,  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296624>.
- Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." *Trans. Array A Collection of Essays by George Orwell*, Anchor Books, 1954. Print.
- “Ouroboros.” *Britannica*, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ouroboros>
- Oxley, William. “The Imminent Imagination.” *Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature*. Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981. 3-16.
- “Pediophobia (Fear of Children).” Cleveland Clinic, 2022,  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22538-pedophobia-fear-of-children#:~:text=Pediophobia%20is%20a%20fear%20of,pediophobia%20may%20also%20have%20pedophobia>

- Pérez de Luque, Juan L. "Descending Spirits: Ideological Implications of the Vertical Movements in Poe and Lovecraft." In *The Lovecraftian Poe: Essays on Influence, Reception, and Transformation*, edited by Sean Moreland. Lehigh University Press, 2017.
- Person, Leland S., Jr. "Poe's Composition of Philosophy: Reading and Writing 'The Raven.'" *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 46, no. 3, 1990, pp. 1–15. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1353/arq.1990.0010>.
- Petsko, Emily. "The Real Story Behind Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>'s Iconic Whisper Sound Effect." *Mental Floss*, 2018. <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/562144/friday-the-13th-jason-voorhees-whisper-sound-effect-story>
- Phillips, Kendall R. *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter, and the Modern Horror Film*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Piggott, Gillian. "Sonorous Psychopaths: Neo-Victorian Ventriloquists on Screen." *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture*, 2017, pp. 124–41.
- Pinedo, Isabel Cristina. *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Poe, Harry Lee. *Evermore: Edgar Allan Poe and the Mystery of the Universe*, Baylor University Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.uky.edu/lib/kentucky-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4863636>.
- Poole, Scott W. *Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror*. Counterpoint, 2018.
- Pollard, D. "'I'm Blind, not Deaf!': Hegemonic Soundscapes and Resistant Hearing in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* and *Inferno*." *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 7 (1), 55-73. 2019. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jicms.7.1.55\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jicms.7.1.55_1)
- Pramaggiore, Maria. "Queer from the Horse's Mouth: Francis and Mr. Ed as Mid-Century Man Whisperers." In *Media Ventriloquism: How Audiovisual Technologies Transform the Voice-Body Relationship*, edited by Baron, et al., Oxford University Press, 2021.
- "Projection." *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/projection>
- Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Longmans, 1980.
- Ra, Aron. *Foundational Falsehoods of Creationism*. Pitchstone Publishing, 2016.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Radcliffe, Ann. "On the Supernatural in Poetry." 1826. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230108110659/https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KMg2AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA145#v=onepage&q&f=false>

- Radford, Benjamin. *Bad Clowns*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016. Print.
- “Raven.” Bird Spot. <https://www.birdspot.co.uk/bird-identification/raven>
- “Ravens can talk!” Talons and Teeth, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfsnHVasCjg>
- Read, Jacinda. *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity, and the Rape-Revenge Cycle*. Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Renza, Louis A. “Never More in Poe’s Teil-Tale American Tale.” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, Penn State University Press, 2003, pp. 22–40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41506181>.
- Richards, Eliza. “Women’s Place in Poe Studies.” In *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poems, Tales, and Essays*, edited by Jared Gardner and Elizabeth Hewitt, Macmillan Learning, 2016, Print.
- Russell, David. J. “Monster Roundup: Reintegrating the Horror Genre.” *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, edited by Nick Browne, University of California Press, 1998.
- Rust, Richard Dilworth. “‘Punish with Impunity’: Poe, Thomas Dunn English, and ‘The Cask of Amontillado.’” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2001, pp. 33–52. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41508404>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2023.
- Savoy, Eric. “The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic.” *American Gothic*. University of Iowa Press, 1998. 3–. Print.
- Sbriglia, Russell. “Feeling Right, Doing Wrong: Poe, Perversity, and the Cunning of Unreason.” *Poe Studies*, vol. 46, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, pp. 4–31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48599395>.
- Scarborough, Dorothy. *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*. Octagon Books, 1967.
- Schechter, Harold. “The Bosom Serpent: Folklore and Popular Art.” *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Spring 1985, 93-108.
- Schneider, Steven Jay. *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare*. E-book, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004, <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.uky.edu/2027/heb.07680>.
- Scraba, Jeffrey. “Repetition and Remembrance in Poe’s Poetry.” In *Critical Insights: The Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by Steven Frye, Salem Press, 2010.
- “Scream (1996 Film).” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scream\\_\(1996\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scream_(1996_film))
- Shoard, Catherine. “Nina Conti: ‘I feel it’s not in my film how much I miss Ken.’” *The Guardian*, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/mar/15/nina-conti-ventriloquist-ken-campbell>
- Silverman, Kaja. “Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects.” In *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, NYU Press, 1999.
- . *The Subject of Semiotics*. Oxford University Press, 1983.

- Silverman, Kenneth. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. New York: Harper, 1992. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/edgarpoe00kenn>
- Silverman, Kenneth. *New Essays on Poe's Major Texts*. Cambridge University Press, 1993. Print.
- Silyn Roberts, Siân. *Gothic Subjects: The Transformation of Individualism in American Fiction, 1790-1861*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2014. Print.
- Skal, David J. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. Revised Edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. Print.
- “Slide Show: How You Hear.” Mayo Clinic,  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hearing-loss/multimedia/ear-infections/sls-20077144?s=2#:~:text=The%20outer%20ear%20is%20composed,them%20into%20the%20ear%20canal.>
- Snider, Clifton. “Jungian Theory, Its Literary Application, and a Discussion of *The Member of the Wedding*.” In *Psychological Perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Non-Freudians: a Casebook*, edited by Joseph P. Natoli, Archon, 1984.
- Sperry, R.W. “Hemisphere Disconnection and Unity in Conscious Awareness.” *American Psychologist*, 23, no. 10 (1968): 723-733.
- Spooner, Catherine, and Emma, McEvoy. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*. Routledge, 2007.
- Stewart, Dugald. *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*. London: JohnMurray, 1827.
- Stibitz, E. Earle. “Ironic Unity in Hawthorne’s ‘The Minister’s Black Veil.’” *American Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1962, pp. 182–90. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2923108>. Accessed 17 Apr. 2023.
- Stovall, Floyd. “The Conscious Art of Edgar Allan Poe.” In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. Print.
- Suits, Bernard. “What Is a Game?” *Philosophy of Science*, volume 34, no. 2, 1967. 148-156. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/186102>
- Summers, Montague. *A Gothic Bibliography*. The Fortune press, 1941.
- . *The Gothic Quest; a History of the Gothic Novel*. The Fortune press, 1938.
- Swann, Charles. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Thakur, Tanu and Vikas Gupta. “Auditory Hallucinations.” National Library of Medicine, 2023. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557633/>
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, transl. Richard Howard. Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973. Print.

- Tropp, Martin. *Images of Fear : How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture, 1818-1918*. McFarland & Co., 1990.
- Tudor, Andrew. *Monsters And Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*. 1989.
- Turpin, Zachary. "Hawthorne the Unreliabilist: His Epistemology in 'The Custom-House and Other Prefaces.'" *ESQ A Journal of the American Renaissance*, Vol. 60, No. 41, 2014, 487-520.
- Twitchell, James B. *Dreadful Pleasures : an Anatomy of Modern Horror*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Varma, Devendra P. *The Gothic Flame; Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England, Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966. Print.
- Vermeule, Blakey. "The New Unconscious: A Literary Guided Tour." *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, edited by Lisa Zunshine, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 463-481.
- Waugh, Robert H. "The Fiery Eye: The Black Cats of Poe and Lovecraft." In *The Lovecraftian Poe: Essays on Influence, Reception, and Transformation*, edited by Sean Moreland. Lehigh University Press, 2017.
- Weber, Jean-Paul. "Edgar Poe or The Theme of the Clock." *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- Wee, Valerie. "The Scream Trilogy, "Hyperpostmodernism," and the Late-Nineties Teen Slasher Film." *Journal of Film and Video*, 57, no. 3 (2005): 55-57.
- Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women*. Fordham University Press, 2008. EBSCOhost, doi:10.5422/199ordham/9780823229857.001.0001.
- Wardrop, Daneen. "Quoting the Signifier 'Nevermore': Fort! Da! Pallas, and Desire in Language." In *Critical Insights: The Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by Steven Frye, Salem Press, 2010.
- West, Brandon. *At the Edge of Existence: Liminality in Horror Cinema since the 1970s*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2021. Web.
- . "Murky Waters: *Incident at Loch Ness*, *Grizzly Man*, and Herzogian Notions of Truth." *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 2023.
- . *Revulsion, Repetition, and Revenge*. Forthcoming.
- Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." In *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, NYU Press, 1999.
- Wisker, Gina. *Horror Fiction: an Introduction*. Continuum, 2005.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations (PI)*. 4th edition, Edited and Translated by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 2009.

- Wilbur, Richard. "The House of Poe." In *Poe; a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Regan, Robert. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1967. 98-120. Print.
- Wright, Elizabeth. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*. Methuen, 1984.
- Wood, Robin. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Regan...And Beyond*. Columbia University Press, 2003.
- . "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *American Nightmares: Essays on the Horror Film*. Festival of Festivals, 1979.
- . "Return of the Repressed." In *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, Wayne State University Press, 2018. 57-62.
- Wuletich-Brinberg, Sybil. *Poe: the Rationale of the Uncanny*. New York: P. Lang, 1988. Print.
- Yang, Maya. "Boy whose case inspired The Exorcist is named by US magazine." *The Guardian*, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/20/the-exorcist-boy-named-magazine>
- Zillman, D. and J.B. Weaver. "Gender-Socialization Theory of Reactions to Horror." In *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions*, edited by James B. Weaver and Ron Tamborini, Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Zillman, D. and R. Gibson. "Evolution of the Horror Genre." In *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions*, edited by James B. Weaver and Ron Tamborini, Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *How to Read Lacan*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- Zunshine, Lisa. *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, Print.
- . "Lying Bodies of the Enlightenment: Theory of Mind and Cultural Historicism." In *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, edited by Lisa Zunshine, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

## VITA

1. Educational institutions attended and degrees already awarded: Wake Forest University, Bachelor of Arts and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Master of Arts
2. Professional positions held: Visiting Assistant Professor of Humanities and Communication, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Fall 2022-Spring 2023), Assistant Professor of Humanities and Communication, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (position starting Fall 2023)
3. Professional publications: *At the Edge of Existence: Liminality in Horror Cinema Since the 1970s* (monograph with McFarland), “Murky Waters: Incident at Loch Ness, Grizzly Man, and Herzogian Notions of Truth” (article in *New Review of Film and Television Studies*)
4. Name of Student: Brandon West