

**BIRTH AND RUIN:
THE DEVIL VERSUS SOCIAL CODES IN ROSEMARY'S BABY,
THE EXORCIST AND THE OMEN**

BY

NATASHA LOPUSINA

**A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

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University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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Abstract

In my thesis Birth and Ruin: The Devil versus Social Codes in *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*, I attempted to prove my argument that placing the Devil in the position of offspring in these three films not only visibly changes the balance of the human family unit in these films, but also influences the way we read the usual social codes of family, wife, mother and child in American cinema.

In order to prove my claim, I used articles that examine these three films from a socio-cultural standpoint, as well as film reviews. I used my sources as the basis for a connection between my principal statement, about the meaning of Devil as offspring, and my separate arguments for the films. I compared the ideas of family, wife, mother and child from one film to another, and linked the comparisons to our views of these concepts' usual social codes in cinema.

Using my methods, I found that the human family unit in all three films changes under the influence of the Devil as offspring, and that the Devil's status in each film shifts the Western society's preconceived views of concepts and institutions such as children and family. I concluded that the three films open the door for further study of these issues, and that this exploration is an ongoing cinematic endeavor.

Introduction

Rosemary Woodhouse: I dreamed someone was raping me. I think it was someone inhuman.

Guy Woodhouse: Thanks a lot.

--Rosemary's Baby

My desire to write about representations of the Devil in Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist and The Omen stems from my obsession with Roman Polanski's 1968 cinematic pregnancy nightmare, Rosemary's Baby. Initially, I had wanted to write about the process of transferring Ira Levin's original story about a hellish pregnancy to the big screen, while also looking at the medium that bridged the gap between paper and cinema – the film's screenplay. I was most intrigued by the fact that, while both the novel and film were considered sensationalist fluff by most reviewers at the time of their individual release, Polanski's film had managed to garner some of the most prestigious film awards at the time, even though it literally mirrored the novel at many points. My research on film adaptations of popular horror literature led me to 1973's The Exorcist, a direction some might call natural progression, considering this film's similar thematic elements. William Friedkin's seamless hybrid of uncompromising horror and

human drama led me to explore the portrayal of the family unit in Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist, respectively, and to compare the way the figure of the Devil was represented in these two films. Particularly fascinating to me was the fact that, while part of the effectiveness in Polanski's film is achieved by never showing the Devil child, Friedkin's film's effectiveness lies in its attempts and ability to shock audiences, using a little girl as the Devil's earthly vessel. At this stage, I had already decided that keeping my thesis confined to one film would not do, especially with the wealth of Devil children, single mothers, betrayed wives, career-hungry husbands and supernatural occurrences that I had at my disposal. After adding to my discoveries the popularity of the 1976 Satan fiesta The Omen -- which followed The Exorcist's much-lambasted graphic displays of femininity, and, at the height of feminism, depicted the Devil as a boy -- I decided to delve more into the theme of child as the Antichrist, as seen in the aforementioned three films. I found that the social upheaval of the late 1960's and 1970's America provided a rather unique backdrop for all three films' portrayals of children and gender. Above everything else, the Devil occupying the position of offspring, thereby representing humanity's future in such a turbulent time, was a tempting topic to discuss. Simply put, the social aspects of the three films were staring me

in the face, and I realized that ignoring them would create a huge void in my thesis. Ultimately, I decided to weave my thoughts about the adaptations of Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist into a work about Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist and The Omen's distinct reflections on the changing social currents of the era.

One of the first things that attracted me to Rosemary's Baby was the idea of the entire plotline being based on a lie. When Rosemary realizes she is pregnant, she believes her husband Guy is the father; however, it turns out that Guy has literally made a deal with the Devil, involving Rosemary's fertility. After Rosemary is raped and impregnated by the Devil, Guy's acting career gets a much-needed boost. While carefully watching, re-watching and making notes on The Exorcist and The Omen, I noticed the theme of a lie running through these two works as well. Regan MacNeil's identity in The Exorcist changes while she is possessed, with the Devil even committing a murder while in her body. Robert Thorn keeps Damien's identity a secret from his wife Kathy in The Omen, and soon discovers the ultimate truth about the boy. Still, contrary to the other two films, the evildoer in Polanski's work is Rosemary's husband and not the child; the child is the result of the husband betraying his wife. This idea made me think that creating a comparison between all three films' concepts of

family – the treachery and fake idealism of Rosemary's Baby's pregnancy, the instability of The Exorcist's single parent family and The Omen's secretive adoption -- would provide me with a unique view of American children, as seen through the eyes of one socially charged cinema decade. My comparisons would find their place in my thesis gradually, through a meticulous individual analysis of each film. I would contrast the films' views of family and marriage by looking at the male characters' decision-making authority; the female characters' relationships with their husbands and children, as well as their social position; and the status of feminism during the time of any given film's release. The first chapter contains a detailed analysis of Rosemary's Baby, with only hints at the Devil-oriented films that follow, while the other two chapters contain a more in-depth look at how the three films relate to one another in the thematical aspects mentioned above.

Another aspect of Rosemary's Baby that impressed me was the fact that, besides staying true to Levin's original source – often virtually copying the outfits, color schemes and dialogues from Levin's novel, as stated on The Internet Movie Database – Polanski manages to use cinematography to convey a sense of dread within the context of a pregnancy, a usually happy event in a woman's life. The visual form of all three films is crucial to their symbolism, a fact that greatly influenced

my initial impressions of the films. I was not going to leave this element out of my writing, since I felt it would be helpful to my analysis of the films' Antichrist representations and their perspectives of children. I wanted to play around with Rosemary's Baby's *Pillow-Talk-from-Hell* color tones; I could not ignore Georgetown's dread-shaded autumn in The Exorcist; and I had to "fool around" with Damien in the midst of The Omen's somber tinges of humanity lost. The visual form of each film was going to be one of the most significant parts of my essay, simply because my impressions of these films' themes were closely linked to the visual hues by which the filmmakers have painted the films' stories.

As I stated before, I found gender to be a significant component of all three films. While Rosemary completely relies on her husband and everyone else around her, only to be betrayed, The Exorcist's Chris MacNeil is an independent workaholic, as well as a single mother. On the other hand, The Omen's Kathy Thorn reverts to Rosemary with her emotional dependence on Robert, lack of career and, this time, even with her inability to bear children – after she miscarries, it is Robert who "gives birth", in effect, by secretly adopting Damien and deciding never to tell his wife. I found that the evolution of the second wave of feminism could be seen very clearly in these three films. Polanski's

1968 film, which essentially portrays Rosemary's husband as the Devil and which has Rosemary denouncing her husband, but accepting her baby, was released only two years after the National Organization for Women was formed in the United States. Rosemary's abandonment of the traditional two-parent family occurs, symbolically, in the same year as the First National Women's Liberation Conference, held in Lake Villa, Illinois. The Exorcist, which puts a pre-menstruating girl in the shackles of possession, was released in 1973, the year of the Roe vs. Wade ruling, which gave American women more power over their bodies by legalizing abortion. By putting a prepubescent girl in danger, rendering Regan's single mother helpless and having religious influence save the girl, the film can be seen as patriarchy's anxious response to women's newfound liberties, as well as to the emerging single parent family. Finally, 1976's The Omen's Kathy is oblivious to her husband's decision to adopt, and is portrayed as unstable from the beginning. The female protagonist's powerlessness and her husband's decision-making status arrives on the heels of various feminist landmarks – the already mentioned Roe vs. Wade ruling, as well as the 1975 First United Nations World Conference on Women in Mexico City, to name a few. In light of these milestones, The Omen can be seen as a narrative that tries to give back authority to the patriarch. In conclusion, I found the differences

between Rosemary, Chris and Kathy to be startling, and I intended to explore these differences through the women's relationships with their husbands and through their position in the work force, as well as in the context of each film's era.

The films' perspectives on gender are also an important part of each film's characterization of its Devil child. These characterizations have greatly influenced the initial critics' attitudes toward these characters and the films themselves, which is particularly the case with The Exorcist's Regan and The Omen's Damien. While the gender or physical appearance of the baby has nothing to do with the underlying themes of betrayal in Rosemary's Baby, the appearance of the principal child characters is one of the other two films' central topics for discussion, and has definitely influenced the critics' attitudes towards The Exorcist and The Omen. The Exorcist's prepubescent Regan gets possessed, which causes her to spew obscenities, as well as a great amount of unforgettable green vomit, throughout the film. Most of all, the condition makes her display sexualized behavior, like ripping her hymen in a showy act of masturbation and mixing religion with curse words. These are deeds that the Western society would never imagine children doing, but especially not girls. After all, there is a reason for the invention and continual existence of the phrase "virginally pure" –

preservation of the Western society's stereotype of the wholesome female – and, in her demonized state, Regan is the polar opposite of this popular expression. On the other hand, Damien is an understated character, hiding under the guise of a child, which has always been perceived as society's most innocent and vulnerable figure. However, contrary to Regan, he is not merely possessed; he is the Devil himself. I was very interested in comparing the reviews for these two films, particularly because I was struck by the different perspectives from which the critics saw Regan and Damien. While, in the case of The Exorcist, critics like The New Yorker's Pauline Kael and Newsweek's Paul D. Zimmerman were blinded by the "heaping amount of blood and horror" (Kael) and the sight of "little girls ranting filth" (Zimmerman), The Omen got mostly positive -- albeit not always great -- reviews for being an exciting thriller, while Damien's character was praised for revolutionizing the character of Satan, reversing the audience's expectations of the Antichrist's appearance. In my opinion, the latter critiques could easily have been applied to Regan's transformation, so I wanted to discuss whether the gender of the two children had played a part in the critics' perceptions and conclusions.

The ultimate goal of my thesis is to provide proof that placing the Devil in the position of offspring in Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist

and The Omen influences the way we read the usual social codes of family, wife, mother and child in American cinema, while also changing the balance of the human family unit in these three films. I also want to examine how the figure of the Devil affects the representations of patriarchy and the Catholic church in these three works. The critical articles most important and useful for my thesis are by scholars who examine these three films from a socio-cultural standpoint, such as William Paul, Vivian Sobchack and Gary Hoppenstand. However, since film is first and foremost an art of visual nature and aesthetic purpose, I intend to intertwine my impressions about each of the three directors' artistic vision with my findings on the socio-cultural direction each film is taking. My thesis will serve as a thorough examination of the most important social issues that these films are concerned with, while also providing my impressions of three distinct visual landscapes in which these issues evolve.

Each of the following three chapters will analyze one film's portrayal of the Devil, and the impact of this depiction on the public's social consciousness. Chapter 1 will examine how the main lie in Rosemary's Baby shapes the female protagonist's predominantly non-feminist reality, and how her betrayal by her husband induces the Devil's birth. Chapter 2 will focus on the visual representation of the

Devil in The Exorcist, as well as on the parallels between the idea of a possessed female child of divorce and the changes in the American family structure during the film's era. Chapter 3 will examine how The Omen attempts to bring power back to the father through the secretive adoption at the peak of feminism, while mocking the institution of patriarchy by having the adopted child be Satan in disguise. I will be including comparisons between initial and contemporary reviews, which will show if and how the critical reception of each film has changed over the decades, and how the audience's stance on every film, and its themes, has shifted. I will also be making comparisons between the films' representations of family, gender and children in the context of each film's supernatural symbolism. While Rosemary ponders the "dream" she had about being raped, an event that leads to the very real birth, my study will determine if her baby has grown in American horror cinema of the 1970s and, most importantly, if it has evolved within our society.

Chapter I

Rosemary's Baby -- a woman's reality within a lie

Cinematic lies have the capacity to create an alternate reality for their victims. We can usually find such deception and its targets in films from the thriller and horror genre, which rely on suspenseful, often impossible, proceedings to drive their narratives forward. The alternate reality is often presented in the form of insider knowledge, with the audience being aware of the truth while the protagonist struggles on the edge of an abyss. It can be presented in yet another way, as seen in Roman Polanski's 1968 film Rosemary's Baby. In this film, an ever-present sense of the bizarre turns Rosemary's pregnancy into a cinematic ambiguity, liable to dupe both the protagonist and the first-time audience. Contrary to Rosemary, who is suspicious but never certain of nefarious deeds around her, many 1968 audience members benefited from word of mouth, as well as the film's promotional campaign, which all suggested that the baby would not be a "normal" being. Still, even the advertising helps Polanski play with the first-time viewer. While the audience suspects that something has gone wrong with the pregnancy, Polanski's narrative succeeds in making us question our perception, guiding our own viewing trajectory along the line of the protagonist's doubts. Polanski uses Rosemary's increasing mistrust of people around her to create a distraction from the main truth for the first-time viewer,

who is in turn led to believe what the protagonist believes. The director's technique results in an innovative climax, created by the ongoing interplay between the film's main topics -- witchcraft and religion -- as well as the feminist undertones. Today's scholars often refer to Rosemary's Baby as the best horror film ever made, discussing these topics in numerous articles. This response to the film is a far cry from the initial reactions to it, which have been less informed and even bordering on frivolous. Naturally, three decades of reflection and societal changes have greatly influenced our views of the film's symbolism, as well as the significance of the pregnancy as the central lie. Another key factor in the public perception of this film's meanings has been the 1970's influx of Devil-oriented films, most notably 1973's The Exorcist and 1976's The Omen, which took the Satan-on-Earth topic even further. These films draw parallels with, but also differ from, the element of the lie, integral to the plot of Rosemary's Baby.

From the very beginning of Rosemary's Baby, and even before her pregnancy, Rosemary depends on people around her for her ability to function, not exhibiting one single sign of self-sufficiency. She does not impart knowledge until later in the film; rather, throughout the narrative, she passively soaks up advice and information from her husband and neighbors. This trait particularly refers to her relationship with Guy, which resembles a father-daughter relationship, rather than one between two responsible adults. The scene in which she and Guy discuss the apartment in the exclusive Bramford building, which

they have just visited, confirms this view of their marriage. Rosemary's ardent, excited cry "Oh, please, Guy, let's take it" sounds like a child's plea for candy, rather than part of a discussion between a husband and wife. It makes it clear that Guy is the authority figure. The beginning of Ira Levin's novel also presents Rosemary as a childlike, idealistic individual. When describing her at this point, Levin's writing style resembles a children's once-upon-a-time yarn in its simplicity: "And then Rosemary was busy and happy [...] Rosemary knew that [Guy] would get something good, and quietly she set his coffee before him and quietly took for herself the newspaper's other sections" (Levin 35-36). From the start, it is Guy who finalizes all decisions, playing the traditional role of the male head of household, predicated in an absurdist manner by his first name. For example, even though Rosemary desires to move to the Bramford, it is Guy who has the final word on the subject. The influence of patriarchy is obviously strong in the film, as well as in the novel, and is reflected in other powerful male characters, like Roman Castevet and Dr. Sapirstein. All these men occupy positions of power -- Guy as Rosemary's husband, Roman as the leader of the coven which threatens her, and Dr. Sapirstein as her obstetrician. Ultimately, Guy's power over Rosemary is what seals her fate, since he is the one who betrays his own wife for career success. He makes a pact with the coven for Rosemary to be impregnated by the Devil; in return for the baby, he is going to become an actor in demand. From now on, Guy is not only the head of

household. He also becomes the owner of Rosemary's body. This new relationship -- one which Rosemary is unaware of -- starts even before the rape sequence. In fact, the cinematic lie of Rosemary's Baby starts with the post-dinner conversation at the Castevets'. While Minnie and Rosemary are huddled in the kitchen, talking about Rosemary's big family, and hinting at Rosemary's fertility, the two men -- Roman and Guy -- are out of sight. When Rosemary turns to check on Guy, all she sees, as a result of eerie camera work by Polanski, is cigarette smoke in the Castevets' living room. She does not see or hear Guy at that moment, but what she does not realize is that she will never be able to see or hear him again, not as the husband she thinks she knows. From that moment on, she is alone in her domestic -- traditionally female -- space, while, paradoxically, her life is no longer hers. Unbeknownst to Rosemary, her lack of self-sufficiency has caught on to her, and is about to indirectly consume her whole -- literally, with the pregnancy draining her, and metaphorically, when she finds out the horrifying truth about her baby.

One could say that Rosemary makes herself an easy target for what we later find out are the machinations of the coven. By not challenging her husband's viewpoints and not taking initiative, she sets herself up for betrayal, as well as an emotional disaster, which comes in the guise of a pregnancy, loving husband and caring neighbors. Her unquestioned beliefs in her environment lead to one of the most important sequences of the story -- the rape of Rosemary by the Devil

himself. At that moment, we do not know that it is the Devil raping Rosemary, but we do believe that an act of rape is occurring before our eyes. After all, the last image in Rosemary and Guy's bedroom, before the rape scene, was of Guy taking her clothes off, without giving a valid reason for it – how exactly would he have made her 'more comfortable', as he puts it, by stripping her naked? It is a bungled explanation, particularly combined with what sounds like a command from him to his wife -- "Sleep, Ro". Also, Rosemary had passed out from the mousse; in the 'dream', we see Minnie telling Guy that, as long as Rosemary ate the dessert, she 'cannot see nor hear' and that she is 'as good as dead'. Rosemary's absolute trust in others indirectly brings about this turn of events. She is far from being the culprit, of course; rather, we realize at this point that she should take off the rose-tinted glasses through which she looks at the world. Her optimism is visible from her enthusiasm for the apartment, to her sunny face while watching Guy's commercial on television, to her idealistic assumptions of the best when hearing from Terry about the Castevets' 'compassion'. However, we cannot blame her for seeing the world this way. Even though she is naïve, her constant striving toward happiness, normalcy and stability represents our hopes for the same. She is the "little guy" whom one naturally identifies with. Her desire to see the best in people, as well as her desire for her life to flow uninterrupted, is inherent to human nature -- all of us have a bit of Rosemary Woodhouse within ourselves. Even though she indirectly sets herself up for

catastrophe, no one can even imagine blaming her for later events, since she mirrors our own hopes and ideals.

Rosemary's trust and optimism are not the only factors that define her. Another one is her deep-seated, lapsed-Catholic guilt. In her very first dream we are privy to – an actual dream – she finds herself justifying her actions to a nun, in a place that looks like a Catholic school. In the rape scene, her Catholic guilt is epitomized in the image of the Pope, whom she sees during intercourse. Rosemary's feelings during the rape are shown in both the film and novel. For example, when talking to the Pope, she tries to seem meek, "so he wouldn't suspect she had just had an orgasm" (117). Hence, I would argue that the rape/dream scene, besides its literal meaning, also has a metaphorical significance – it is an exaggerated sum of Rosemary's thoughts. She feels remorseful about her lapsed faith, as shown in the image of the Pope; she had wanted to make love to her husband that night, but he turns into an alien creature in the process; and, in the dream, she finds out that her friend Hutch is not allowed to join the 'party', since the affair is for 'Catholics only'. Hutch had warned her and Guy about the Bramford's history before they moved, and, since they did not listen, it is possible that, in her mind, Rosemary equates him with the faith she gave up on, adding him to her list of *mea culpa*'s. Finally, the scene also represents Rosemary's valid paranoia and the fantastic nature of the story she will tell Dr. Hill near the end of the film – she feels that what is happening to her is reality,

but, when she says it out loud, she gets silenced, as in the dream sequence. She is not only the "little guy" most people can relate to; she is also a minority whose voice is squashed.

Both Levin and Polanski show Rosemary's reaction to the rape in a realistic manner. In both versions of the story, she is appropriately shocked and incredulous when she learns what transpired during the previous night. In the novel, Levin shows Rosemary voicing her concern -- albeit to herself -- about the night of intercourse:

Was she now, at this moment, actually pregnant? Oddly enough, she didn't care. She was unhappy -- whether or not it was silly to be so. Guy had taken her without her knowledge, had made love to her as a mindless body ('kind of fun in a necrophile sort of way') rather than as the complete mind-and-body person she was. (Levin 121)

In the film, Mia Farrow's body language conveys Rosemary's shock to us in a believable fashion. Her Rosemary cowers, reserved in her movements, not letting Guy touch her. She only says a few words to Guy about the previous night, but he quickly dismisses her suspicions, making her seem paranoid and "silly". In both the novel and film, however, Rosemary is confused about what really happened. She believes that Guy practically forced himself on her while she was passed out, but she also remembers dreaming about someone 'inhuman'. Her hysterical words at the end of the sequence, "This is no dream, this is really happening", show us that her dream is her physical reality, concealed within a

semi-conscious state, meaning that she cannot be perfectly certain about the facts. Anyone inclined toward psychoanalysis may think that Rosemary's religious guilt, already witnessed in her dream about the nuns, could have combined with Hutch's stories and her new experiences at the Bramford, to create a bizarre and all too powerful nightmare; still, the audience knows better. Everything Guy says to her in the morning appears to be a little too convenient, and, as I mentioned earlier, we did see Rosemary getting weaker and weaker right after she had a bit of the 'chalky'-tasting dessert. Proving the validity of Rosemary's complaints about the taste is the already mentioned exchange between Minnie and Guy during the rape scene. Guy also admits that a rape occurred, making Rosemary think it was he who physically did it. In fact, the only question that remains unanswered is the one that concerns the strange-looking creature Guy seemingly becomes. Even though, as we find out at the end, the baby's father is indeed Satan, the idea of Guy turning into him carries important meanings behind it, all of which are linked to the issue of multiple identities in the film – the issue I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter – and to the rape itself.

This act is one thing we, and Rosemary, know for certain. From his own admission, we know that Guy used Rosemary in the most intimate way, and for creating the most innocent being of all -- a baby. The anti-woman undertone of this scene, as well as the rape disrupting what was supposed to be a sacred union

between Guy and Rosemary, finally confirms Rosemary as a figure without a say-so in their relationship. As Fischer states in Birth Traumas: Parturition and Horror in *Rosemary's Baby*:

This warped rape fantasy reverberates with cultural clichés of woman's sexual position. With female eroticism conceived as 'the embodiment of guilt', it is logical that Rosemary seeks the Holy Father's blessing. That she is unconscious during intercourse mocks woman's 'designated' coital stance: passive and undemanding.
(420)

I found the link between the rape and the formation of Rosemary and Guy's own family, or what Rosemary believes to be their family, fascinating. Rosemary gets pregnant -- gets to carry another life inside her -- through, as Guy called it, a "necrophile" way. It does seem that life, represented by the baby, is stronger than the surrealist notion of Rosemary as an inanimate object, because, after their morning-after conversation, "Baby Night" is never mentioned again. Rosemary decides to move on with life; after all, a baby is a baby for her. After getting a confirmation of pregnancy, Rosemary asks Guy to use the opportunity to create a sort of 'new openness'. In Levin's novel, Rosemary debates whether she is justified in leaving Guy at one point, too: "What was she doing there, alone in that cold crummy cabin? [...] He had gotten drunk and had grabbed her without saying may I. Well that was really an earthshaking offense, now wasn't it?" (128-129). The continuation of their marital relationship, and the symbolism of the baby as a newfound purpose to it, shows the significance of traditional values in

1960's America -- a family, or a family in formation, is not to be broken under any but exceptional circumstances. Still, this continuation mocks these values at the same time, thereby hinting at oncoming changes within the family unit, which are seen in many films of the seventies, including The Exorcist and The Omen. Additionally, it is almost certain that any contemporary woman watching Rosemary trying to get Guy to notice her again is rooting for an on-screen divorce. As Sobchack sees it, "the family itself has been exposed as a cultural construction, as a set of signifying, as well as significant, practices. [The family members'] order, meaning, and power are perceived as open to transformation, dissolution, and redefinition" (147). The re-defined family found in Polanski's film, marked by the Devil baby coming into our world and the husband's betrayal tearing the marriage apart, could be a beginning of the family unit's new era, but also of the new era of the feminist movement. The transformation from Guy to the Devil in the intercourse sequence should be our first hint that a socio-cultural change of views of the family unit, and the wife and mother within it, is imminent.

Levin's novel and Polanski's adaptation each presents an ahead-of-its-time feminist vision of the traditional family, by putting an emphasis on Rosemary's forced impregnation through the schemings of her male spouse. However, this kind of reading was not typical for the era of the film's release. One has to remember that both the novel and film came out years before the

second and climactic wave of feminism was to sweep North America. The novel was generally praised either as an amusing read, or a shallow attempt at depth. J.J. Hall of the Saturday Review dismisses it as "just devilish fun and games, just plain bad news", while a more positive review states that the novel is "a tour de force in which pleasant realities [and] witchcraft become entangled" (The Booklist). The film did not fare much better with reviewers. Contrary to today's numerous books and articles, which examine the underlying themes of the story, some of the early reviews failed to see anything remotely symbolic or important in the film, let alone place it in a feminist context, discuss the rape sequence or analyze the film's other metaphors, enveloped in the idea of domesticity. While The New Yorker critic Penelope Gilliatt sums up her review by calling the film "a rather trivial and slaphappy piece of work", The New York Times critic Renata Adler simply states that "it is a horror film, not very scary". Most reviewers describe the film as a silly Gothic-gynecological fantasy, without much weight, while Farrow's character is often described by critics as a "nice birdbrain" and a "birdbrained mooner". The value of the protagonist or principal actress is by no means diminished by the reviewers, but it does look as if they have not bothered to look beyond the surface -- for example, I have not found any comments on Farrow's body language, in the scene following the rape of Rosemary. As opposed to 1968, commentary on the film's feminist slant can be found in many of today's reviews, such as the 2003 Village Voice review by

Jessica Winter. She mentions the Levin/Polanski treatment of Rosemary, stating that they “pose Rosemary as a dead woman walking... her pregnancy a sexually transmitted disease that will breed a plague”. It is also important to mention that today’s reviewers berate the husband more – Winter even compares Guy to Satan – while the 1960’s critics treat his actions with a mere slap on the wrist. As for the pregnancy itself, it is mentioned in some of the sixties’ reviews, but not discussed, contrary to today. Nevertheless, it is my belief that the pregnancy, and the notion of it, is the crux of the film’s main events. Rosemary’s fertility is the reason Minnie and Roman take an interest in her; the baby is the key to Guy’s success; and, lastly, the pregnancy is what drives Rosemary to break out of her dependency shell. Even though the attempt proves to be futile, Rosemary’s meeting with Dr. Hill is one of the rare times she tries to do something on her own.

Rosemary’s pregnancy or its results, as Winter suggests, are not what any mother expects. Even to this day, some women refuse to watch the film, having heard of the husband character’s betrayal, and fearing the very idea of it. This fear is justified. After all, pregnancy directly links two beings -- the mother and the baby -- in a bid for either life or death, which is a scary situation in itself, and when suspicious circumstances involve “the baby growing in your body, we don’t need Aliens-like monster shocks to make things tense” (Brian Webster, Apollo Movie Guide). We can safely say that, by placing Satan in the position of

the father, Roman Polanski did for pregnancies what Hitchcock did for showers in Psycho. The identity of the baby is a far cry from the "Andy or Susan" Rosemary expected to give birth to. I believe Rosemary knows something is amiss from the beginning, but chooses to keep up the pretense of everything being all right. She thinks Guy raped her; she is annoyed by the intrusive nature of Minnie's visits; she is wary of the drinks her jolly neighbor makes for her. The problem is, Rosemary *wants* to believe everything in her life is all right; as mentioned before, she is an eternal optimist. After all, she and Guy are in the 'perfect' apartment, they are healthy, attractive people, so what could possibly go wrong? She will not let a few 'glitches' tarnish her yellow-brick road. One could say that Rosemary carries the idealistic optimism of 1950's father-knows-best America into the 1960s, which backfires in the end. Her ardent desire to actually believe in her "Doris Day" existence, as production designer Richard Sylbert called the beginning of the film, as well as her desire to believe in traditional family values, are echoed in another mother's words almost a decade later, after her child exhibits signs of trouble. "What could be wrong with our child, Robert? We're beautiful people, aren't we?" says Kathy (Lee Remick) to her husband (Gregory Peck) in 1976's The Omen. The notion that nothing can destroy the Americanized notion of a family comes under fire in these two films, and is defeated effortlessly by external forces.

The aforementioned idea of openness, with examples ranging from the

Woodhouses' apartment being open to exterior sounds to Rosemary's openness towards others, permeates the film. It is contrasted by the eventual sense of claustrophobia, which is both mental, as experienced by Rosemary in her isolation in the last scenes of the film, and physical, within the confines of the Bramford. At the beginning of the film, the camera traverses the panorama of New York City, finally stopping above the building. With its deep-set courtyard and Gothic design, and in the context of the film's themes, the building resembles a giant womb -- the film begins with one shot of it, preceding Rosemary and Guy's talk of children with the landlord, and ends with another shot, which follows the birth of Satan's baby. The Bramford and its courtyard which we see in the beginning, coupled with a lullaby and the pink lettering of the opening credits, signals that a woman's body and its capacity to bear life will be the main focus of the film. Nevertheless, the dark and haunting nature of the same lullaby, the Gothic architecture and the cavernous courtyard also suggest that this body and this capacity will be misused in some way. These are not the only analogies between spaces and the woman's body and pregnancy that the film offers. After all, one of the first questions the landlord asks Guy and Rosemary is if they have any children; he also mentions the late Mrs. Gardenia's son in the first scene, contrasting his observations with the bizarre image of a closet blocked from use, the significance of which we learn when Rosemary goes to save her baby from the coven, in the final moments of the film. The concept of division of one large

apartment into two smaller ones also parallels the notion of a woman representing and nurturing two beings, her own self and the baby, during her pregnancy:

Rosemary and her apartment share a similar shape, since both are subdivided, the apartment by a partition separating the two halves of what was originally a ten-room apartment and Rosemary by a pregnancy that makes her two people and one person at the same time. (Marcus 123-124)

In both Levin's novel and Polanski's film, the building is inextricably linked to the woman's body. The baby is also linked to the Bramford in a sense, since it is conceived, born, and will probably grow up within the Bramford's walls. It seems that Rosemary cannot escape the building she longed to get into. What she had perceived as a spacious paradise turns into a prison for her, and the idea of a family that she had brought to the space of the building is tainted by the alternate family -- the Devil's family. Polanski shows us this transition by progressively confining Rosemary to the building more and more. While she is freely walking into it at the beginning, the place is her last resort where she can try and hide at the end.

As I noted earlier, Rosemary's openness, enthusiasm and trust are partly what gets her into the predicament, in the first place. She unknowingly initiates her own doom by wanting to move to the Bramford, and is very kind to the Casteverts, who just lost a girl they took in as their own daughter, whilst Guy

does not want to get too close to 'an old couple like that'. However, Rosemary is never responsible for misfortunes that follow. She shows genuine reluctance in befriending the Casteverts, and, after the rape, is in utter disbelief at what took place. While Lucy Fischer claims that Rosemary is the one to blame, calling her "the New Eve" who is "charged with Original Sin" (Fischer 420) by Polanski, I think this reading of the protagonist and her disposition heads in a wrong direction. Rosemary does everything she believes is right. She tries to help the Casteverts get over the tragedy of Terry's death, comforts her husband when he loses a part and takes care of the housework. She is a good person, whose decency inadvertently places her into the ultimate quandary. The fact remains that she is disregarded as a human being, used as a container for the descendant of the ultimate evil, and then basically guilt-tripped by the coven into acting as the child's mother. Her maternal instincts, goodness and childlike naivete are woven into pregnancy as a generally perceived condition of cocooned innocence waiting for its day in the sun. However, her pregnancy, along with the purity which she believes surrounds it, turn out to be mere falsities, created as the major staple of the lie that has become her life for nine months. After all, while Rosemary is expecting, nothing points to a normal pregnancy. The unusual pain, the raw meat she develops a taste for, people around her treating her like the carrier of a baby, rather than a pregnant woman – these factors make the pregnancy resemble a premonition of an event. Adrian Gargett mentions the

special treatment: "Once Rosemary becomes pregnant, everyone begins to treat her strangely [...] All convince her that her baby has become an object of 'special' consideration, for she is treated more as a pregnancy than a person" (Rosemary's Baby – A critical essay). The analogy between an apartment and a pregnant woman comes into play at this point in particular. As we see Minnie obsessing over Rosemary, constantly making herbal drinks for her and even recommending an obstetrician, it becomes harder and harder for us, the audience, to distinguish between the mother and the baby. Even the title of the film does not regard Rosemary solely – from the start, we know that the following narrative will be about her baby, or the concept thereof. Just like we cannot completely divide the apartment and separate the tenants, as we see throughout the film, it is impossible for us to separate Rosemary from her child.

There is one important paradox, though, that envelops Rosemary's motherhood and is verbalized by Roman near the end. When Rosemary asks "You're trying to get me to be his mother", Roman replies "Aren't you his mother?" There is no disputing that the Devil baby is hers, no matter who the father is. Even though, at first, Rosemary is shocked at who the child actually is, her maternal instincts prevail, and she accepts the child as her own, which, in fact, it is. This acceptance is handled in two very different ways in the film and the novel. In Polanski's adaptation, the pure, unadulterated maternal instinct is what drives Rosemary to embrace her child. After she sees neighbor Laura-

Louise rocking the bassinet too fast, she steps in; the film ends with Rosemary's face bearing a resigned expression, and dissolving into the final shot of the Bramford. In Levin's novel, though, the acceptance of the child carries a subconscious ultimatum for Rosemary, with her acknowledging Satan as the father, but also herself as the human mother: "He couldn't be *all* bad, he just *couldn't*. Even if he was half Satan, wasn't he half *her* as well, half decent, ordinary, sensible, human being? If she worked *against* them, exerted a good influence to counteract their bad one..." (Levin 306) In a sense, she vows to herself to make her son good, despite an evil fate that the coven hopes he was born to fulfill. Levin's version of the scene could be interpreted as feminist – after rejecting the father, a newly single mother pledges to do what she can for her baby – while Polanski's version represents a no-way-out situation for Rosemary. Even though it is the purest of forces which drives Rosemary to her son, it seems that the complete absence of any other possibility is also a factor in Polanski's version. After all, the film does end with a shot of the Bramford, as if to state that there is no other place for Rosemary and her baby to go. The novel, on the other hand, ends with the line "The Japanese slipped forward with his camera, crouched, and took two three four pictures in quick succession" (308) -- the idea of the camera linking Rosemary and the baby to the coven's inside world. The literary Rosemary also ponders the option of talking to a priest about the situation, while the cinematic one simply approaches the cradle and starts

rocking the baby. Still, the important question is if and how any kind of solution to Rosemary's predicament fits into a story about the birth of evil. I do not think there is a place for a solution in the narrative – even mentioning something like the possibility of talking to a priest defeats the entire purpose of the novel, and would have done the same with the film. Therefore, I think Polanski makes better use of the paradox, which consists of rejection of the baby clashing with the innate motherly instinct. There is absolutely nothing Rosemary can do in this situation, apart from accepting the unacceptable, and Polanski takes full advantage of her bleak lack of options.

The issue of individual identity is another question which drives the narrative forward and which, of course, is a big part of the lie Rosemary is living. All characters wear masks, deliberately or accidentally. Guy wears many faces as an actor, while the Castevets lie about themselves and Roman's origin. The first neighbor Rosemary meets, Terry, reminds her of the famous actress, Victoria Vetri -- she is, in fact, played by Vetri, under a pseudonym. The identity of Satan wavers during the rape, when Guy turns into him. Even Rosemary, the protagonist we root for in the midst of treachery, wears many disguises. She chooses not to be honest with herself, pretending that everything is all right, pretending that the building is merely another building where accidents happen, and that her husband and neighbours' intentions are nothing but honorable. She is also constantly fluctuating between being a young woman and a clingy child,

mostly behaving like the latter in her marital relationship. The film's spaces are also masked. The division of Rosemary and Guy's apartment suggests that nothing is what it seems in the milieu of the Bramford, and the visuals of the rape sequence are fantasy images that mask literal action. The camera work also provides us with a fair share of uncertainties: "Half-open doorways suggest a hidden reality by the partial views they offer of what is happening behind them, for people and actions are often only half seen" (Wexman 68). One can also say that the narrative itself wears a mask. The pains Rosemary experiences, her talk with her girlfriends and her rape ordeal all suggest that something is awry with the pregnancy itself, not with the baby's actual identity. This sense of multiple and vague identities and spaces reinforces the element of paranoia the story creates within the viewer's, as well as in the protagonist's, mind.

The main lie of the film concerns the origin of the pregnancy and the baby's identity. Most first-time viewers do not expect the lie to be what it is -- or for the ending to be so gloomily effective, for that matter -- partly because there are very few people who take witchcraft seriously, and partly because our expectations could well be pre-programmed by the way this film was marketed and critiqued at the time of its original release. If we were to see this film for the first time immediately after reading some of the initial reviews, it is unlikely we would expect a film that uses the maximum potential of camerawork, cinematography and the actors' performances to deliver a punch at its climax;

instead, we would expect a flat scarefest which dabbles in the paranormal, combining it clumsily with the idea of motherhood. After all, back in 1968 it would have seemed hard to look for depth in a film that a reputable publication such as The New York Times had dubbed as "a Gothic-gynecological horror film". Since the horror genre generally deals with the impossible and the far-fetched, it is easy to see Rosemary's Baby as a trivial piece of work, since none of the supernatural events that occur in the film could occur in real life. However, it is one thing to see any film in the context of its genre, and quite another to see it in the context of its themes. Polanski effectively overlaps these two ways of interpretation. He throws the impossible at the audience, only to make us question the improbability of the events unfolding. The "lie within a lie" of the narrative – the lie about the baby's identity wrapped up in a lie about the pregnancy, which is only there to fool Rosemary and the audience – plays with our own convictions and imagination. One is never sure where the natural ends, and the supernatural begins, if it begins at all:

It can be pointed out that each separate suspicion -- the scratches on her back, the actor's blindness [...] Laura-Louise's concern over the milk, the timing of Guy's leaving the flat with possible visits to the Casteverts -- could have a perfectly natural explanation. Each of them, perhaps -- but for all of them to do so entails a string of coincidences as unlikely, as abnormal as anything which Rosemary believes. 'I show people something so obviously impossible as witchcraft', says Polanski, 'and I say to them -- are you *certain* it is not true?' (Butler 164)

Polanski dresses the supernatural in the costume of the ordinary, shrouding yet another truth. He covers up the unimaginable, yet real, facts, by what we are used to believing, as a society, but which is false in this narrative. In other words, Polanski shows us that the impossible can be a reality, and that the term "far-fetched" is only a word on paper, without meaning. The false identities I mentioned exist only to fool poor Rosemary and the audience into consensus that our beliefs still account for something. This idea is shattered by the ultimate identity fraud -- the baby turns out to be the Devil's offspring, and not the future, not the continuation of the world we know and hang on to. The supernatural elements do not constitute the most disturbing thing about the film, though. The film shows that monsters are not found in our ideas about Satan, or even in our nightmares. Delicately weaving issues of trust and betrayal into its narrative about witchcraft, the film shows us that the most dangerous monsters are humans. It is not the image of Satan having sex that scares us; it is the idea of Guy basically selling Rosemary, his wife, in exchange for a blossoming acting career. This issue is what makes Guy turn into the Devil in the rape sequence, and what makes Rosemary spit in her husband's face in front of his co-conspirators, renouncing him as her sacred partner for life. The devastation of trust is the definitive scary element of this film. It is because of this broken link that the Devil baby is born, signaling an oncoming change in the American family -- a change which may shift the balance from the patriarch to the matriarch and,

finally, to the child.

If the offspring of the Devil and Rosemary signifies the possibility of this shift, another film exploring the connection between the Devil and children reads like a warning against the change. 1973's The Exorcist seems to represent a finger-pointing, finger-shaking warning about the danger that single parent families, particularly those with the lack of patriarchal input, pose to their children. Chris MacNeil's single parent status and busy work schedule almost beg for the patriarch, which is where Satan comes in. Additionally, we must not forget that Rosemary's baby, the predecessor of The Exorcist, is one half a child of evil. The numerous identities Chris's daughter Regan exhibits in her demonized state suggest that, after the Devil's offspring was born in Rosemary's Baby, it has grown up to be a schizophrenic individual, due to a crack made in the fundamental societal unit the family has always represented. The dual identity of Rosemary's 1968 son, therefore, trickles into Chris's 1973 daughter; however, the two personalities that constitute the core of a child, the mother's and father's, seem to lose their equilibrium with only one parent remaining. This loss triggers a state of satanic dominion; ultimately, identity becomes absolute control.

While the main lie in Rosemary's Baby centers around, and has, one face only -- that of the baby -- this lie possesses her, just like the Devil takes hold of Regan later. We know that a baby literally occupies the mother's womb during pregnancy. Furthermore, in Rosemary's Baby, Guy and the other members of the

coven relentlessly hover around and consume the domestic space Rosemary is associated with throughout the film, a spatial activity supported by the notion that the apartment used to be larger, and never independent -- just like Rosemary herself. The typical example is the scene in which Minnie drops by with Laura-Louise, just when Rosemary intends to read and relax in her new apartment. I have already mentioned the parallel between Guy and Rosemary's apartment being divided in two smaller ones, and Rosemary as one person nurturing two. Her space, as well as her body, are infested, but she does not know it; neither her body, her baby, nor her apartment belong to her. The difference between Rosemary and Regan's possession, however, is that Regan emerges from the flames, while the flames for Rosemary are only just beginning to ignite. The Exorcist director, William Friedkin, offers us hope, while Polanski does no such thing. Even though Rosemary decides that she will be her son's mother, again, we cannot forget the part of the child that is impossible to erase from his genetic make-up, or his bodily appearance. Consequently, we cannot be at all sure that Rosemary's good intentions from the novel will actually translate into a future she imagines for the child. The ending suggests that, ironically, the very reason Rosemary wanted to move into the building -- starting a family -- becomes the means of her own possession.

Whereas the lie in Rosemary's Baby revolves around misinforming the wife about the husband's success, the lie in Richard Donner's film The Omen

revolves around a husband accidentally fulfilling a prophecy through best intentions. The first line in The Omen is "The child is dead", which, as we soon find out, refers to Robert and Kathy Thorn's baby, which died at birth. The arrangement Robert makes with hospital officials -- to adopt another baby -- and his decision not to tell Kathy about it are desperate acts. Hence, we can say that Donner's film offers an interesting twist on the patriarchal rule. Contrary to the husband's lie in Rosemary's Baby, the lie in The Omen is told to protect the wife and mother from the shattering truth. Unlike Guy, who only thinks of himself, Robert thinks about his entire family, and tries to do the right thing, with fatal consequences. In the context of The Omen, the first line turns out to be apocalyptic. As we discover the real identity of Damien, the Antichrist's son, we realize that his birth signals the death of children as the innocents of the world. In other words, the child, as we know it, is dead; in its place steps the Devil's son. Just like in Rosemary's Baby, The Omen's Devil infant will be nurtured, as we see at the end, when Damien is shown in the company of the First Family of the United States. Protecting the family has a boomerang effect -- in the process, both the patriarch and matriarch die, and the child of the Antichrist remains, hinting that there will be no offspring of men anymore. The child is dead, indeed, while Rosemary's baby lives on.

With its underlying themes of trust and its betrayal, Roman Polanski's cinematic rendition of parenthood clashes with traditional societal views of a

family. As I will show in greater depth, Friedkin's film paints a picture of a single parent unit as one plagued by problems, and Donner's work presents us with a post-feminist vision of patriarchy. Of all three visions, Polanski's is the most horrifying one. With Guy's disloyalty to Rosemary, the identities of her neighbors serving as masks, and Rosemary's paranoia-turned-reality, she is truly unable to escape. However, it is her treatment during the film, and her final decision, which propel the horror genre into a new direction, incorporating the new American family into it. Rosemary defies her husband by stepping into her role as a mother, aiming to raise her own child while contending with the betrayal of the traditional two-parent family.

Chapter II

The visual terror of *The Exorcist's* daughter

Cinematic experiences are often engaging, sometimes poignant, and sometimes entirely visceral. No matter what impression a film leaves on the individual, one cannot dispute that film is always a visual adventure. Even the very first cinematic works, which lacked sound and most of today's technological wonders, consisted of moving images that the viewers watched and judged for themselves. A film's imagery can be used to convey a spectrum of feelings and ideas, all of which differ from one story to the next. Derek Jarman's 1993 documentary Blue, for example, uses only a sterile blue background to relay the director's experiences in his battle with AIDS. On a completely different note, the sprawling urban visuals in Ridley Scott's 1982 science fiction epic Blade Runner convey a bleak, dehumanized future, with darkness as humanity's only companion. Just as it can be used to show a notion of era, place, or an individual's life experiences, a film's imagery can also be used to affect societal concepts and institutions like childhood, gender, religion and family. William Friedkin's 1973 film The Exorcist, based on William Peter Blatty's novel of the same name, accomplishes this task by having the Devil possess an eleven-year old atheist girl.

Regan MacNeil's mind and body are tortured and ravished by a sinister force, her ordeal presented in a graphic and uncompromising manner. When the film was first released, audiences and many reviewers were repulsed by the gruesome nature of the possession scenes, and cinemas even employed paramedics to assist weak-hearted patrons. However, the shock value of The Exorcist does not only consist of the general potential of demonic possession. By turning a pre-adolescent female virgin into an agent of Satan, The Exorcist becomes a fair test of our society's ingrained views of female sexuality as subdued, and of children as the world's innocents. Besides questioning these beliefs, the film also questions the religious faith of its characters, as well as of the viewers themselves, through the fight between good and evil that the possession brings about. It is important to note that Regan comes from a broken home, the absence of a father figure often seen by critics as a possible reason for her ordeal. Her gender and family circumstances play a big part in our view of The Exorcist as a commentary on femininity and the traditional American two-parent family unit.

A peculiar thing about both the literary and cinematic version of The Exorcist is that neither work introduces the audience to the hero first, with the villain appearing later. Instead, we are immediately introduced to what we later recognize as the crux of the film – the battle

between good and evil. This conflict is shown effectively through Father Merrin's encounter with the statue of demon Pazuzu in Iraq. In the film, actor Max von Sydow's drained facial expressions and body language signify a huge mental burden Merrin seems to be carrying, which is only heightened by the appearance of the stone demon. The novel explains Merrin's feelings as a premonition of sorts: "He knew. It was coming [...] He hastened toward Mosul and his train, his heart encased in the icy conviction that soon he would face an ancient enemy" (Blatty 8). The editing and lighting in Friedkin's encounter sequence emphasizes Merrin and Pazuzu as opposites. Both are lit by the ancient sun, while each seems to be staring at the other, akin to warriors in a battlefield. The music in the scene adds to this contrast, as well as to the threat that the demon poses. Its dark tonal shading resembles a simmering thunder, ready to erupt into warfare. One could say that the very style of this sequence is an indicator of how important the film's imagery will prove to be, particularly within the context of the film's social commentary. While the priest looks uncertain and scared, the demon statue seems to be laughing; it is certainly more imposing and threatening than the figure of the human being in the encounter. Just like Merrin, we know a significant event is eventually going to take place, and we know it purely from the dark, visceral effect the style of the sequence leaves in our

minds.

The mythologically colored tension between Merrin and Pazuzu, and the harsh isolation of the archeological dig in the film's opening, are contrasted by the next image in the film – the quiet, almost rustic Georgetown panorama – as well as a series of events that occur in the MacNeil household. We meet Chris MacNeil, a hard-working actress and single mother, and her daughter, eleven-year old Regan. Their relationship is close and loving. Regan seems to be a happy little girl, well-adjusted and used to her mother's long absences from home. However, she is also lonely, which we see from her 'friendship' with an entity she calls Captain Howdy, who she communicates with using a Ouija board. Even though she openly shares this information with her mother, it does not seem coincidental that Captain Howdy is male. As we soon find out, Chris's ex-husband and Regan's father is not only physically gone from their lives; he is practically a ghost. Chris cannot even reach him for Regan's birthday, and he evidently does not care about the child. In Blatty's novel, Regan's invisible friend instantly makes Chris anxious about her father's absence:

The child had loved her father deeply, yet never had reacted visibly to her parents' divorce. [...] Chris was fearful she was repressing and that her emotions might one day erupt in some harmful form. A fantasy playmate. It didn't sound healthy. Why 'Howdy'? For Howard? Her father?

Pretty close. (41)

In the cinematic sequence, actress Ellen Burstyn's facial expressions clearly depict Chris's worries regarding her daughter and her 'friend'. Nevertheless, contrary to the novel, Regan's father's absence in the film is not presented as a cause for concern, or a symbolic cause of things to come, through Chris's thoughts and actions. It is solidified in a direct and even more poignant way. It is also important to note that the novel offers what could be seen as a counterbalance to the father's behavior, whereas the film does no such thing. In the novel, Chris makes excuses for Howard to Regan when she fails to reach him for the girl's birthday. Later on, it is revealed that Howard had called his daughter on her birthday, but that she swore at him, calling him 'cocksucker' and hanging up. One could interpret Regan's use of a swear word in this instance as counteracting her father's negligence, particularly when we remember her age – it is not unusual for sensitive pre-teens to learn and repeat such words. The film, however, provides no counterbalance. Regan overhears her mother's unsuccessful phone call to her father, and, even more importantly, hears Chris say that 'he doesn't give a shit'. There is no mention of the father's later call in the film, either. While the novel makes Regan guess about her parents' relations and her father's attitude toward her, she knows all about it in the film. Both the novel

and film have Chris protecting Regan from the truth, but, in the latter, Regan finds out directly. One can safely say that, at this point in the film, a part of Regan's innocence is shattered and, contrary to the novel, we see the breakdown of her emotions through her eyes, not through the narrator's point of view. It is again the film's imagery that hints at forthcoming events, similarly to when we were first introduced to Father Merrin and Pazuzu. The camera that slowly tracks back, in order to reveal Regan eavesdropping and turning away, lets us in on her feelings. Contrary to the literary Chris making excuses and Regan seeming sad, the film shows us first-hand the knowledge that Regan receives, and its effect, as seen from her disappointed expression. The film, for which the screenplay was also written by Blatty, seems to be a harsher critique of the single parent family so far. It shows us the consequences of the birth of Rosemary Woodhouse's baby, five years earlier. Yes, 'Andy or Susan' had paved the way for a single parent family, but, with one parent missing, the evil half of the child prevails in The Exorcist, at least for a certain period of time.

It is not by accident that, soon after the phone call episode, Regan's bed starts shaking, an occurrence that takes place in both the novel and film. It is one of the first external signals of Regan's emotional turmoil. Both media depict the father's absence as one of the

metaphorical causes of the possession. However, even though it is the mother who is the primary caregiver, and even though Chris and Regan have a very close relationship, Chris is also often missing from her daughter's life. Simply put, Regan's home life does not seem stable enough for a pre-teen. Even though she is used to the type of work her mother does, and all the sudden and drastic changes that accompany it, her subconscious is reacting to it. A good example is her 'relationship' with Captain Howdy – the name may come from her father's, but the very idea of a friend comes from her loneliness, which concerns both parents. In his essay, "Exorcising the Devil Babies", Gary Hoppenstand sees Regan as the archetypal victim of early 1970s parental prioritizing, stating that she is a "moral symbol warning of the dire consequences of an evolving family structure that places more emphasis on parental identity [than on] the child's emotional stability" (38). While it is one of the first external indicators of Regan's troubled psyche, the bed shaking is also one of the first signs of her oncoming isolation, alienation, and even the disappearance of the real child, under the influence of an invisible force. The very beginning of her ordeal is almost prophetic. When she appears at a dinner party Chris is throwing, Regan urinates onto the carpet and states to a guest, who just happens to be an astronaut, 'You're going to die up there'. The proclamation can freely refer to

Regan herself -- for the period of time she is possessed, Chris's daughter is gone. Therefore, when she predicts the astronaut's death, her subconscious is actually predicting her own disappearance, one that can also be interpreted as a fade-out of every remnant of her emotional stability. In other words, if parents do not pay enough attention to their child, he or she can fall victim to any possible kind of bad influence, losing their own self in the process.

The idea of gender and the theme of parent-child relations both play a huge part in the significance of the film's visual onslaught, especially in the film's second half. In the novel, Blatty briefly mentions Jamie, a child who would have been Regan's brother, and who died when he was three years old. While there is no mention of a son in the film, both the literary and cinematic versions bring in a male figure that Chris instantly feels drawn to in a spiritual, almost parental way -- Father Damien Karras. The first time Chris sees him in the film is right before we first meet Regan. Chris sees him as she is walking home from the set and, in the novel, she remembers seeing him earlier that day; Burstyn's face in the film also shows a hint of recognition. The novel's examination of their short relationship is often accentuated by Chris worrying about Karras and nearly reverting to the time when her son was alive: "Chris watched from the doorway. As he crossed the street, it

occurred to her that he'd probably missed his dinner. Then briefly she worried that he might be cold. He was rolling his shirt sleeve down." (245). In fact, the novel and film parallel Chris and Regan's bond with Karras's relationship with his mother, his guilt over her health and subsequent death, and his worries over his loss of faith. The most graphic displays of possession – Regan masturbating with a crucifix while uttering obscenities, and the physical transformation of the girl -- both take place soon after Karras suffers a breakdown following his mother's death, and his reassignment as a lecturer. They also take place right before Chris meets with Karras for the first time, to discuss Regan's condition. Since Chris has felt a certain connection to the priest from the first time she saw him, and since, at this point, she loses her daughter – albeit temporarily – one could say that she gains, or re-gains, a son. The onset of the bond she shares with Karras parallels the onset of Regan's general transformation; the ending of Chris and Karras's friendship, as well as Karras's life, comes at the exact moment of Regan's return. In the same vein, Regan's mental and physical collapse can be interpreted as jealousy over this substitute son, since the Devil tries to play up on Karras's deepest fears and insecurities by mentioning his mother and teasing Karras about his lack of faith. Ironically, the spiritual connection between Chris and Karras literally brings out the

Devil in Regan.

Although paralleling the relationship between Regan and Chris, the one between Karras and his mother is a polar opposite. While Chris and Regan are close, the relationship between the priest and his mother has disintegrated. He had left to finish his studies and start a career, and they were never close again after his childhood. When Karras's mother is basically discarded in Bellevue Hospital after her mental health deteriorates, the priest's guilt comes to a fever pitch. For Hoppenstand, Karras is an allegory for the American society's conduct toward its elderly. Hoppenstand states that Karras "blames himself for not taking better care of [his mother] as she grew older [...]" Such guilt is, no doubt, a common experience in a contemporary society that has lost touch with its elderly" (53). This lack of respect is also seen in the film, in the Bellevue nurses' general indifference, but also in Karras's brother's lack of effort to do something more for their ailing mother. Throughout it all, Karras is vainly looking for God, as seen in his desperate prayer, which the novel intersects with his mother's last moments. The last thing he wants is for his mother to suffer, but God is not there to prevent it. The priest is not spared of his emotions even in his sleep -- after his mother's death, he dreams of literally losing her in the hostile Manhattan streets. In the cinematic version of the dream, a demon's face flashes throughout

the vision, signaling the faithlessness creeping upon the priest and weaving itself into his grief. Hoppenstand notes how the Devil turns Karras's emotions against him later, during the exorcism. Interestingly, just like Karras's guilt over neglecting his mother is the main factor that led to his loss of faith, Regan's angst over her parents' divorce is the main cause of her ordeal. In the former case, neglect comes from the offspring; in the latter, from the parents. Even though the background and cause is different, the effect is the same – a son and daughter in emotional and, in Regan's case, physical pain. Therefore, from this point of view, Karras is the ideal person to help Regan, being that both he and the girl have been affected by psychological changes brought on by family distress. However, Regan's predicament is about to become even more complicated by Karras entering the picture. His arrival shifts the balance of familial turmoil they share, signaling the appearance of a missing link in Regan's life – a male authority figure.

The fact that Karras is a male figure in touch with Chris can be a possible motive for her daughter's verbal rampage. At one point in the novel, Chris tells her secretary Sharon about her husband having been 'Mr. Chris MacNeil', saying that "[Regan] was in and he was out. Always me and Rags together on the magazine covers; me and Rags in the layouts; mother and daughter, pixie twins" (116). The girl copes with

the divorce, but is also used to being the most important person to her mother, and now tries to drive the male figure of Karras out of their lives. She would feel guilty if she tried to do so as Regan – she is very timid and curious when, earlier, she asks Chris about her relationship with Burke Dennings, but says that ‘it’s okay’ – so the Devil guise proves to be perfect for taking action. She kills Dennings, and tries to get rid of Karras as well. In this sense, Regan’s actions again go back to her parents’ dysfunctional relationship. Chris is still feeling regret over Jamie’s death and slight guilt over the divorce possibly being due to her own fame; however, bringing in a male who comforts her and tries to help with Regan is exactly what sends Regan over the edge. The family legacy of remorse is a vicious cycle, which not only affects Regan, but also turns her into something else.

Blatty’s novel and Friedkin’s film both examine the single parent family and its repercussions on children. Still, it was the graphic nature of Regan’s possession that first caught the eye of many book reviewers, upon the novel’s release in 1971. The novel’s reviewers were sharply divided into two groups -- fans and haters. The former praised the work for its storytelling techniques, vivid characterizations and, occasionally, its metaphorical depictions of a guilt-ridden child’s psyche; the latter mostly dismissed it as vile, exploitative trash. Charles Dollen of Best

Sellers states that Blatty's novel is "one that is difficult to put down, so gripping is the plot, so real the characters" and that it can be "recommended highly for all adult public library collections". P.S. Prescott's review praises the novel for its level of suspense, but does not believe the psychological aspect of it is up to par with the novel's raw excitement, stating that Blatty "discourses, a bit bookishly, on the history of possession and the relation of autosuggestion to masked guilt" (Newsweek). Yet another reviewer, R.Z. Sheppard of Time magazine, slams the work by calling it a "pretentious, tasteless [pastiche] of superficial theology, comic-book psychology, Grade C movie dialogue and Grade Z scatology", finally concluding by saying that the scare factor "will depend pretty much on whether [the reader] still insists on sleeping with a light on or not". In general, the novel was regarded as a good suspense novel, with vague attempts at psychoanalysis.

If book reviewers were divided over the literary Exorcist, with some praising the work and others seeing it as just another pulp novel, the film itself absolutely infuriated film reviewers. The obscenities and images were not only in literary audiences' minds anymore. They were now on celluloid for all posterity, very real and extremely visual. The sight of then twelve-year old Linda Blair as Regan masturbating with a crucifix and yelling out the infamous words 'let Jesus fuck you' was too

much for the majority of film reviewers, who condemned the novel's cinematic adaptation. Unlike a number of book reviewers, they failed to grasp the range of emotions the film was presenting, as well as the critique of the single parent family within the psychological subtext. Pauline Kael was merciless, saying that the film was "too ugly a phenomenon to take lightly", then asking how to "exorcise the effects of a movie like this? There is no way" (The New Yorker). She is primarily enraged by the beastly behavior and look of possessed Regan, even criticizing the mothers who took their daughters to audition. As for the idea of a social commentary on divorce and single parent families, Kael does not take it seriously in the context of this film, stating that William Friedkin "confuses blatancy with power". The shock offered by the possessed girl's appearance seemingly put its reviewers off the film as a whole, even making them take Friedkin's work personally. Newsweek, which gave a relatively positive review to Blatty's novel, rotates in its opinion of the film -- not unlike Regan's head in the film, one could say -- making a distinction between shock and scares, claiming that Linda Blair's Regan "engages our sympathy -- but only as a freak would", and finally calling the entire film "a very expensive, very elaborate freak show" (Zimmerman). Vincent Canby of The New York Times calls the effects "grotesque" and dubs the film as a "chunk of elegant occultist

claptrap". Similarly to reviewers' reactions to Rosemary's Baby five years earlier, it is the surface of The Exorcist – the 'desecrated' Regan and her demonic actions -- that got the most attention. On occasion, even the audience's reactions got more attention than the film:

The focus of [the New York Times article 'They Wait Hours – to Be Shocked'] was entirely on the audience: for four days the shocked reporter stood in line at the Cinema One trying to figure out why so many people would be willing to wait so long for such a dubious experience [...] The audience had become a spectacle equal to the film. (Paul 291-292)

I was surprised to see the majority of negative reviews for the film at the time of its original release, with none whatsoever praising the complexity of the characters and the unique blend of drama and horror. Ultimately, it is the well-defined relationships between characters, particularly between Chris and Regan, which make the audience care for them when the horror of the story starts taking over their lives. Ironically, the aspects of the film that the 1973 and 1974 reviewers disregarded, such as the broken home and the psychological shocks, are considered the most important aspects of the film by today's reviewers. Many of them discuss The Exorcist as a commentary on the changes in the American family post-Rosemary's Baby, not forgetting the emotional confusion of the 1973 film's characters. Roger Ebert calls Friedkin's film timeless, stating that "because it is founded on

characters, details and a realistic milieu, the shocks don't date". Nitrate Online reviewer Joe Barlow also recognizes this element of the film, declaring that "despite the movie's supernatural elements, the story itself revolves largely around inner turmoil". Still, it is surprising to find that, even today, not many reviewers link the possessed girl's appearance to the film's social commentary on single parent families. It is also surprising that many contemporary reviewers fail to see the possession's visual aspects as more than just special effects. The demonized girl's appearance and actions epitomize the clash of innocence with Satan, which is the most frightening part of The Exorcist. The child's soul is taken over by a sinister energy, which threatens to take her life as well; furthermore, all of these events are triggered by the broken home she comes from. The most terrifying aspect of the film for me personally was the contrast between the Regan who greets her mother with hugs and kisses, and the Regan who turns into something ravaged, coarse and contemptuous of life: "She becomes more and more animal-like in the film [and in the novel]: she howls; she barks; she mews [...] The emphasis is on the destruction of the body" (Schober 43). The combination of girl and Devil was also very disturbing to me; the sequence with the words 'HELP ME' appearing on Regan's body stands out in this respect. Basically, the look of possession is more symbolic

than reviewers of either era believed. It gives the film's evil a face by taking away a child's; along with the concept of possession, it gives evil a definitive form, making it tangible. In The Exorcist, the appearance of evil is important in understanding the film for what it truly is – not a cheap scare fest, but an exploration of the effects of society's actions on children, its most innocent and vulnerable members. Undoubtedly, the film is also a critique of effects that the combination of the missing father figure and advancing feminism can have on young, impressionable females, as we can see by the fact that Chris is a workaholic, and that the exorcism involves a daughter, not a son.

The gender of the possessed child greatly affected the 1970's American audiences' reactions to the supernatural spectacle playing out on screen, especially within the framework of social instability and changes that the country experienced during this decade. Blatty's novel was based on an alleged case of exorcism from 1949, which involved a boy from Mount Rainier, Maryland. According to William Paul, Blatty has said that he made the gender change to protect this boy's identity. Still, I agree with Paul's opinion that this reason "seems an ingenuous explanation at best." (296). One can guess that the possession scenes -- particularly those considered most shocking, such as the masturbation sequence – would not have been as effective if the person in question

had been a male child, and Blatty was aware of it. This approach stems from our ingrained views of male sexuality and masculinity as commanding and uninhibited, versus our views of female sexuality and femininity as restrained: "It would hardly be an unusual thing in Western culture to say that a boy has a bit of the Devil in him [...] A girl with a bit of the Devil in her is another matter entirely" (Paul 296). These cultural beliefs have more or less withstood the test of time, which is why certain scenes in Blatty's novel, as well as the visuals in Friedkin's film, still have a potent effect on audiences: "Chris stood rooted to the ground in horror, frozen, her hands pressing tight against her cheeks as again the demonic, loud laugh cackled joyously, as Regan's vagina gushed blood onto sheets with her hymen, the tissues ripped" (Blatty 215). Film reviewer Norman Short believes that this film "simply could not be made today; it would be picketed all over as child abuse and would certainly have gotten the rating of death: NC-17" (DVD Verdict). Any overt display of female sexuality – in this film's case, emerging sexuality – resonates even nowadays, considering our long-established views of a wholesome female. In the case of the masturbation scene in the novel, the destruction of the virgin parallels the Gothic in its drama and dark imagery, with words like 'gushed', 'blood' and 'ripped' used to heighten the effect. In the film, the Devil's actions, as well as

bloodstains on a virginally white nightgown worn by Regan, make for the most disturbing aspects of the scene. Given the fact that the same scene in the film is so faithfully translated from the novel, we can guess that this scene was one of the reasons why paramedics were employed by cinemas showing the film in 1973.

Besides individual images, The Exorcist's cinematography, by Owen Roizman and Billy Williams, also greatly contributes to the audience's unease during the events unfolding on screen. Just like William A. Fraker's cinematography for Rosemary's Baby, which uses bright, pastel hues to hint at a menacing side of Rosemary's domestic bliss, Roizman and Williams use their cinematography as a tool against the grain. The Exorcist's brooding shades of autumn imply dread lurking beneath the idyllic Georgetown panorama. Things are not what they appear to be in either film, visually or otherwise. The light hues of Rosemary's Baby seem perfectly suited for a romantic comedy, a genre that could not be further from Polanski's film, while Friedkin's colorful Georgetown autumn is tainted by a sense of disquieting anticipation. It is also important to note that The Exorcist's cinematography slowly constricts the film's action, paralleling the escalation of the film's terror. The action moves from a sunny and spacious archeological dig to a claustrophobically dark room, where Regan is suffering, and back to the

open space, with the M Street stairwell in the final frame. Never during the course of possession do we see the sun shining, which corresponds perfectly with Blatty's description of the ordeal's onset: "What looked like morning was the beginning of endless night" (49). The backdrop of the exorcist's arrival at the MacNeil house – the final and most unpredictable phase in the battle between good and evil – is a pitch-black night, barely lit by the moon and occasional lamppost. Once Regan is back to her old self, it is daytime, with a renewed sense of hope in the now warmer, approachable autumn hues. In both Polanski's and Friedkin's film, the cinematography becomes an integral part of the narrative, adding a visceral third dimension to the story. The darkness of The Exorcist's cinematography is one of the main reasons why Regan's possession has become so deeply engraved in the pop culture's psyche, the other reasons being the already mentioned circumstances of emerging female sexuality and the single parent family in the film.

Combining Regan's age, gender and ordeal with the colors and contrasts provided by Roizman and Williams – blood on a white nightgown, hopeless nighttime versus hopeful daytime, space versus limits – achieves the effect only a liminal figure can have. Regan is floating in between several different worlds during the possession, her temporary Devil guise undeniably defined by her gender, as well as her

status as a child. By putting a female child in the predicament, Blatty addresses the slow but steady rise of the feminist movement in the early 1970s, since one could undeniably read Regan as patriarchy's answer to growing changes in gender hierarchy. One of these changes was the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in the Roe vs. Wade case, the ruling which legalized abortion in the United States, thereby allowing women to have more power over their bodies. In light of such landmark decisions, Regan can be seen as analogous to the figure which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar would call "the madwoman in the attic" only a few years later, in 1979, and which refers to stereotypes male writers have created for female characters. Regan represents both sides of the stereotype coin. She is a wide-eyed, playful angel; however, she is also the Devil, the ultimate in corruption. One must not forget that she is also a child, a figure that is generally regarded as the image of innocence itself, most notably in Western society. The blend of childhood and innocence gives a universality to the character: "We care less for Regan as a child than for Regan as the symbolic representation of Child. Her possession represents a gross violation of the innocence of the Child and this is what is most disturbing and which earns our empathy" (Schober 42). The possession defies our society's preconceived notions of children, more than any other cultural belief we hold precious.

Blatty also uses the combination of Regan's gender and tribulation to reinforce the film's firmly rooted beliefs in patriarchy, the two-parent family system and religion's role in maintaining this system. Try as they may, none of the female figures can save her. Chris takes Regan to a barrage of doctors, all of them male, who end up torturing the girl with science and technology: "The physical and mental hardship of the tests that she undergoes to identify her dysfunction early in the narrative are as terrible in their own fashion as are the effects of her demonic possession" (Hoppenstand 54). On the other hand, Father Karras and Father Merrin are the ones who perform the exorcism, and, as discussed earlier, the negligence of Regan's father is what causes the child to snap. Ironically, it is the tape that Regan had made for her father which provides one of the proofs that the child does need an exorcism. The irresponsible father causes the ordeal; yet, in an indirect way, the girl gets the help she needs because of her loving message to him. The film links the patriarchal family to Catholicism, paralleling the religion's real life conservative views of the family unit. This connection is also obvious in the celibate status of the male priests, both of whom act as representatives of the Catholic church – their sexuality is restrained to the point of being non-existent, and each of them has earned the title of Father, with a capital F. Contrary to the priests, Regan and Chris are

both atheists, just like everyone in their surroundings seems to be. While Chris's secretary Sharon attempts to become a Buddhist in the novel, and is the only one from Chris's milieu to be affiliated with any religion, she is not depicted as subscribing to any religious tenets in the film. By having the female characters devoid of any religious beliefs, and by having the male agents of the Catholic church save the demonized Regan, Blatty's screenplay blurs a line between the contemporary, feminist reality that Chris epitomizes, and the Church's conventional views, represented by Karras and Merrin. Still, it is not necessarily relevant whether, at the end of the ordeal, Chris or Regan start to believe in God, nor does the event mean that they will. What matters is a possibility of religious influence on a female child growing up in a climate of social changes, notably those that threaten the authority of the Church and patriarchy for the sake of female rights, as is the case with legalized abortion. Judging by Regan kissing Father Dyer's collar at the end of the film -- even after Chris claims that her daughter does not remember anything -- that influence is possible. It is, however, also debatable, since the MacNeils do go on with their lives, with no indication that religion, or patriarchy for that matter, will have a long-term impact. While the film links the patriarchal family to the Catholic church, the ending shows their influence in an ambiguous manner. The

ending does not show either institution as omnipotent, thereby signifying that the American family can still go in one of two directions – it can remain the traditional, two-parent unit, or it can turn into the emerging single parent family, with atheism as a possible side effect.

Besides making a point about the future of the American family, the ending mainly portrays the climax of the film's fight between good and evil, by revisiting the meaning of the first sequence between Merrin and Pazuzu. As I mentioned in regard to the opening sequence, the scene presents the demon as powerful, and the human as defenseless. Regan's possession is the ultimate test of this concept for the priests who are called in to try and save her. Karras feels that his religious faith and love of humanity have been replaced by nothing but contempt for others, all the while coping with his mother's death and his strong feelings of guilt. Father Merrin, though still secure in his faith, is plagued by heart problems, as we see when he takes his medication in a Mosul café, and while resting during the exorcism. Thus, each of the priests is weighed down by a weakness -- Karras's being of emotional and spiritual nature, and Merrin's being physical. This characteristic is what they have in common with Chris and Regan, two people from very different backgrounds, but, naturally, with the same human traits. Chris is questioning her mothering abilities and the impact her divorce has had

on Regan, while Regan is simply a helpless child, reeling from the repercussions of a missing parent. Bringing the four characters together under the dire circumstances of possession reflects the statement made by Merrin during the exorcism: "I think the point is to make us despair, Damien... to see ourselves as animal and ugly, to reject our own humanity... to reject the possibility that God could ever love us". In other words, the Devil preys upon weaknesses of the human race, trying to take away our souls, the essence of Self. He finds his target in the four characters, each with their own Achilles heel. In the end, Regan and Chris survive, but neither of the priests does. The Devil manages to kill them; however, he fails to defeat them and their purpose, since killing them is what saves Regan. Merrin risks his life to help her, while Karras offers himself to the Devil, immediately committing suicide when the Devil enters his body. As in the scene in which Merrin encounters the statue of Pazuzu, where the camera work conveys the impending battle between good and evil, so the frantic camera work communicates the final conflict within Damien Karras's soul in the suicide sequence. Once possessed, he is about to kill Regan, but his last thoughts are those of compassion. The shaky camera and the long, first person P.O.V. shot are the audience's link to the priest's last moments. The film's craftsmanship creates a parallel between Karras's and Merrin's torment,

uniting them in a common quest for salvation of another human being. Both priests sacrifice themselves for the girl. Consequently, the victory at the end is that of human goodness, which prevails over evil to save a child, a symbol of our future. We can conclude that The Exorcist associates the Devil with awakening female sexuality and the broken home, as seen earlier, but also with the lack or presence of empathy and values.

The significance of The Exorcist extends far beyond its cinematic value. Its examination of the single parent family, through demonic possession and subsequent physical devastation of the young daughter, makes the film important within a social context, particularly considering the feminism-charged era of its release. The visuals painting the agony of the child at the center of the proceedings are linked to our cultural beliefs, testing them with every frame. The torture of Regan's mind and body plays upon our perceptions of children as generally carefree, making us see them more as products of their parents' lifestyle decisions, rather than independent of these choices. The demonic possession of human offspring in Friedkin's film also makes us question the future of humanity, bringing in thematically the possibility of Rosemary's Baby's adulthood. The Exorcist tells Regan MacNeil's story, but it is ultimately the film's visuals – the religious and sexual

imagery, color contrasts and moody cinematography – that convey the central clash between good and evil to the viewer. By linking its visceral aesthetics with a sociological meaning, The Exorcist not only manages to shock audiences, but also manages to shock them into questioning the cultural and social politics of Western society.

Chapter III

The Devil as *The Omen* of the American family

The term "family" is relative for each and every one of us. It can signify one's biological relatives -- so-called flesh and blood -- or it can signify a family one creates for oneself during a certain period in one's life, such as a unit comprised of friends and other like-minded individuals. For many people, however, the term represents a unit they were brought into and made part of, or one they are about to create themselves, by taking in a child -- an adoptive family. Many adoptive families thrive in real life, with children adjusting and loving their new parents as their own, and vice versa. However, the art of film is capable of turning these social entities from a parents' and children's dream come true, to a virtual nightmare for either one of the two parties involved. Richard Donner's 1976 horror entry *The Omen* considers the worst case scenario in a couple's quest for children, by having Robert and Kathy Thorn unknowingly adopt the literal Antichrist. The deed is done with the best intentions. After the loss of their own child at birth, Robert decides to present another baby to Kathy as their own, not wanting her to go through deep grief over the loss. Nevertheless, Robert's plan backfires once Damien, the alien child, wreaks

supernatural havoc on the Thorns. Even though it does not have the current critical status of Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist, Donner's film is important in the context of its era. In showing adoption as an act with catastrophic consequences, The Omen, which was released soon after the Vietnam war and at the zenith of the second wave of feminism, emphasizes the value of a homogeneous family. The toll that the war took on the American people was a contributing factor in once again appreciating blood ties, after the period of hippies' disassociation from the traditional family unit, and Donner's film drove home the point with the outsider child as its villain. The climax of the second wave of feminism, on the other hand, makes us see the film's story as a narrative that tries to give back power to the patriarch. The film tries to achieve this task not only by depicting Kathy as oblivious, but also by portraying most of its other female characters as either weak or villainous. However, by having the Devil himself secretly adopted by the father, the film also turns the Thorns' patriarchy, along with their quest for an even higher social status via parenting, against them. These numerous layers make The Omen more than a mere capitalization on the 1970's trend of Devil-oriented films.

The film ushers the Antichrist into the human family in a subtle, yet effective manner. The first character we see is Robert Thorn, an

American diplomat, his taxi rushing on a gloomy night in Rome. As we soon realize, he has just found out that his wife, Kathy, has suffered a miscarriage. Indeed, the very first sentence uttered in the film is "The child is dead". This phrase has a tragic meaning in any context, but, given that the date on screen is June 6 – the sixth day of the year's sixth month -- and the time 6 P.M., the statement also has an ominous ring to it. As soon as the audience translates the date and time into 666, they see what is traditionally recognized as the Devil's number, or, as the Bible calls it, "the number of the beast". Right after we recognize the number, the adoption unfolds in the hospital. Robert is offered the chance to adopt a child whose mother died in delivery. Before the offer is made, he expresses concern for his wife, stating that their child's death would kill her; still, he refuses to adopt, saying that "she wanted her own". In the next sequence, we see a light illuminating the baby in the hands of a nun, while an apprehensive Robert looks on. In the end, he decides to accept the baby. There is an indisputable irony in the adoption sequence, considering the direction the film will be taking. The priests, nuns, light and language – "on this night, Mr. Thorn, God has given you a son" – are all traditional symbols of a holy force, indicating a fresh start at this point in the film. The main reason Robert decides to go ahead and adopt the baby is his wife, so what he does can be seen as a Christian,

unselfish act. Furthermore, it is possible that Robert ultimately sees the other child as a godsend, indicative of the fact that he and Kathy should become parents that night, after all. The light illuminating the baby, who is cradled by a nun, could point to such an interpretation of the event on Robert's behalf; so could the aforementioned words spoken by the priest, "On this night, Mr. Thorn, God has given you a son." However, even with these events unfolding, the audience still remembers the unholy number and the poignant sentence from the beginning; we know that they were matched for a reason. The adoption scene is haunted by these two elements. Keeping the adoption a secret from Kathy does not seem right, either, even if it is for her own sense of tranquility. The combination of the secret, the Devil's entrance into the family and the tragedy that the film's first sentence implies, eventually proves to be disastrous, not only for the Thorns, but also for the future of humanity.

Even though it is the father who brings the alien child into the family, one should note that Robert's decision is made out of sheer desperation. After all, one of his first statements concerns his wife and her mental health. His joy and relief are evident when he and Kathy are together with the baby for the first time. However, his first words to Kathy in this scene are "Here's your boy". The question is, why does Robert not identify himself as the other parent right away? Considering

the later revelation of the baby's genetic makeup, one could say that this sequence views the mother's miscarriage as the reason for the impending doom, in handing the torch of parenthood solely to her. We are not sure if Robert sees his wife that way as well, since his main reason for refusing adoption was Kathy's desire to have her own child. Still, his determined tone in the conversation with Father Spiletto, the priest who offers the newborn Damien, shows us that Robert is unsure of what to do, now that the pregnancy has ended in disaster. He does not blame his wife; rather, he subconsciously distances himself from a parenting mindset. We know that he is probably still in shock, and that his way of thinking could merely be his temporary way of coping with the new tribulations. After all, he adopts Damien primarily because of Kathy, and it is her peace of mind that makes him keep the adoption a secret. These facts, coupled with the fact that Kathy's miscarriage is essentially the reason for the adoption, lead me to believe that, in retrospect, the film sees Kathy as indirectly accountable for the Devil's presence. Another important point for the way the film views Kathy is that the audience never actually sees what happened to the Thorns' biological baby. We receive the first version of the incident from the hospital officials, when they let Robert know, and another version from Robert himself, when he discovers the bones of Damien's real mother, a

jackal, alongside the bones of a newborn human baby. Robert presumes that the hospital officials killed his biological child, but we never get proof of this claim, just like we never get proof of the miscarriage. This lack of facts does not necessarily back up the film's perception of Kathy as the indirect originator of the Devil's presence, but does not invalidate it, either. In other words, the reason for the Devil's presence is left open to possibilities, but the audience is first presented with a possibility they are inclined to believe. It is safe to say that the audience first suspects a miscarriage and not murder as the reason for the baby's death, simply because, in most viewers' minds, the former is more likely to influence a birth than the latter is. The Omen uses a realistic incident to prevent the audience from believing in the mind-boggling truth about the baby's death and Damien's true origin. The film also uses the baby's death to let the father regain power as head of the family, having him find a way to keep the structure of the family alive. Therefore, instead of having both parents involved with finding their child's murderer, we have the father resolving what can be perceived as the mother's failure to produce offspring.

The events that follow further showcase the film's negative view of female characters. Soon after Kathy first lays eyes on 'her boy', Robert is appointed American ambassador of Great Britain. While, in

one scene, the mother states that she “better stay here and fool around with Damien”, the husband goes to a meeting. The mother’s implied sins – both the failed birth that brought about the Devil child, as well as the suggested incestuous relationship with him -- are balanced with the father’s success as patriarch and provider. This scene also represents the beginning of the film’s attempt to give the power back to the father, hinting at the social status of each party in the marriage. Even though Kathy and Robert enjoy a high status as a couple, they are in very different social positions as individuals. Robert seems to be the next in line to become the American president, while Kathy’s social status starts and ends with her being Robert’s supportive wife, and the mother of who she thinks is their child. She is not a successful workaholic, like The Exorcist’s Chris MacNeil. Unlike her, Kathy does not even have a career. Throughout the film, we can see that not many of the female characters are shown as being in power; when they do possess some kind of power, it is destructive. Whereas Kathy is dependent on her husband – both financially and, as he proves when insisting he keep the big secret, emotionally – Holly, the young nanny, apparently grows enthralled by and dependent on Damien. At his fifth birthday party, after Kathy takes Damien away from her, she hangs herself in full view of the guests, having disturbingly declared: “Damien, I love you! Look at me,

Damien, it's all for you!" Her suicide makes her look weak, while her loyalty to the Antichrist makes her look malevolent. Finally, there is the new babysitter, Mrs. Baylock, who seemingly arrives as the new nanny from an agency, while her real role is, in fact, that of Damien's guardian. All the women in the film are inferior to male figures. Kathy is inferior to Robert by social and emotional status. She also gives in to him, both by not being self-sufficient, and unknowingly, in regards to the adoption process. Mrs. Baylock is the very protector of evil, killing Kathy and getting herself killed by Robert at the end, all for Damien's sake. Holly is submissive to the Devil's spell, which leads to her suicide, an act that Western society generally perceives as weak and selfish. Her last words, 'look at me, Damien, it's all for you', prove Damien's dangerous seductiveness and Holly's lack of will. The words 'look at me' also summarize the way the female characters in the film demand attention from the men, consciously and subconsciously. Kathy needs Robert, as well as her psychiatrist, to take care of her during the film; Holly sacrifices herself for Damien, even asking him to look as she does so; and Mrs. Baylock needs Damien as much as she is sheltering him, maybe even more. Ironically, at the peak of feminism, The Omen's women do not act any differently than Rosemary, Minnie and Terry from Rosemary's Baby -- a film that also ties its female characters to

patriarchy, but which was released eight years prior to Donner's film.

The meek Rosemary always relents to her husband Guy, losing her own identity within her marriage; Minnie, although seemingly strong and aggressive, is a devout follower of Satan and under the strong influence of her husband Roman; and Terry is a former drug addict, the Devil's first mother-to-be, and, eventually, a suicide victim.

One could say that, in a bizarre way, even Rosemary has more feminine power than Kathy, The Omen's principal female character, since it is effectively Kathy's husband who brings "their" child into the world, "who effectively gives birth to the child by arranging for the secret adoption of another newborn" (Paul 324). Still, in the context of the feminist movement that swept America in the 1970s, Kathy could be considered powerful, due to the fact that she tries to distance herself from one of women's traditional duties – that of a mother -- during the course of the film. She first tries to distance herself from Damien and then, when she finds out she is pregnant again, she wants to have an abortion. In a way, Kathy appears to be starting out on the path set by the second wave of feminism, which encouraged women to forego their traditional place in the home: "The second wave of feminism condemned housewives as parasites and [Betty] Frieden said they were 'less than fully human'. She urged women to seek independence and

self-fulfillment in the workforce" (Online Pioneer). The miscarriage may have been a good thing to happen to Kathy, since she had not yet found her career, or gained financial independence for that matter. By not wanting to have anything to do with children during the film, it appears that she may look elsewhere for self-fulfillment. However, her marriage is the most significant element in this equation. Kathy is linked to a man not only by law and by vows but, most importantly, by his social status. She is married to a man of great political and economic power, who needs an heir, and fast. Not only does the husband decide to adopt without consulting his wife, he also hides his decision from her. Robert's arrangement with the priest to hide the adoption from Kathy, because he believes that the miscarriage would affect her mental health, can be seen from the feminist perspective as fraud perpetuated by the "weaker sex" stereotype. From the film's onset, Kathy's character is established as unstable, and this incorrect portrayal is further perpetuated by the fact that she starts seeing a psychiatrist to help her deal with her "delusions" about Damien, while her doubts are actually justified. Hence, although she appears to forego tradition for a while, the film had already sabotaged this view of her by depicting her as unbalanced from the start. The stereotype of the distressed and dependent female is not the only one The Omen offers. Just like Kathy depends on Robert as patriarch,

the two babysitters each depend on Satan, the patriarch to end all others. Holly is imperiled, while Mrs. Baylock is one of the film's main evildoers. They represent two sides of the babysitter coin, two characters that nannies have been depicted as ever since the 1950's spread of urban legends. Additionally, the fact that Satan already has followers at such a young age – followers that are female, hence able to spread his seed -- makes us realize the enormity of his power over the human family. In making its female characters weak and corruptible, even taking away their unique power to give birth, The Omen manages to restore the reign of cinematic and social patriarchy. However, by placing the Devil in place of the Thorn family's offspring, the film catches patriarchy off guard, taking a fresh, absurdist approach to the traditional family.

It is impossible to watch the first forty minutes of The Omen without noticing a cleverly inserted montage of family photographs, a part that precedes the scene of Damien's fifth birthday party. In these pictures, Robert, Kathy and Damien are shown doing everyday family activities, such as sightseeing and horse riding. Whether we are new to the film or not, this montage will seem curious. The sequence is so idealized, so forced, that it simply begs to ask when something will go wrong. The deceptiveness of this pastiche reflects the initial creation of a Thorn "dynasty", courtesy of Robert: "At best, [the child] will carry the

father's name forward – at least, his seed” (Sobchack 148). Since Robert had thrust an alien baby into his and Kathy's lap, keeping the event hidden from her, the rose-tinted pastiche of family photographs is automatically a falsely idealistic picture of the Thorns' lives, not only in light of the clandestine adoption, but also in light of the tragic events that are yet to unfold. Considering the Thorns' high social status, it is also inevitable to think of a baby as a welcome heir to the family wealth, and a figure viewed as a status symbol by society, something Robert is aware of when he goes through with the adoption:

[Taking the family's picture also] has a larger meaning for the film because establishing how this family appears is a key concern. Together Robert and Cathy represent an eminent and successful couple [but] a child is necessary to complete this picture. (Paul 325-326)

Using the family photo montage and the scene that follows, the film makes a profound statement to the father – it mocks his quest for offspring. In response to his conviction that a baby was destined to be born to him and Kathy, even if it meant bringing an outsider into the family and pretending he is an insider, the film shows an artificially fabulous photo assortment. Then, the film contrasts the idyll with the brutality of Holly's suicide, as if to say to the husband and father: “Are those previous portraits what you thought your family would be like? Well, think again.” Furthermore, putting the Devil in place of Robert's

son makes the father's behavior look foolish and mocks his wish for authority, by having the much-desired child be the destroyer of God himself. Even a later statement -- by an oblivious Kathy, no less -- lends credence to the fallacy of the perfect family that Robert has created. After she takes Damien to the zoo, and he manages to scare the animals away, she tells Robert, in all seriousness: "What could be wrong with our child, Robert? We're beautiful people, aren't we?" The notion of forcefully positive appearances returns the image of the American family to the 1950's father-knows-best way of thinking. This standard clashes with the modernized version of the family unit, which was shown in The Exorcist three years earlier, and the archaic tradition's romanticized façade is impossible to live up to, on any level. Truthfully, the façade may be idealized, but it is certainly far from ideal, since it can easily lead to the creation of an unnatural living space, such as Ira Levin's devilishly -- pun intended -- delightful Stepford. The Omen's Devil symbolizes the implausibility of the father-knows-best ideal, as well as a revolt in response to it:

[In the early to mid-1970s American cinema] the child was figured as an alien force that threatened both its immediate family and all adult authority that would keep it in its place -- oppressed and at home. [Cinematic children like Damien] are figured as uncivilized, hostile, and powerful Others who -- like their extra-cinematic counterparts -- refuse parental love and authority

and mock the established values of dominant institutions. (Sobchack 150)

With the Devil as child, The Omen turns the family's patriarchal principles against it. It achieves this end by making the authoritative father look thoughtless and the oblivious mother ineffectual, and, in the finale, by making both parents pay dearly, for indirectly using a child to gain more social clout.

The Omen tries to return the power to the father, by making him the family's provider, the force behind the adoption and even a high-ranking diplomat. At the same time, the film diminishes the wife's role in the family's economy, as well as the positive influence of the other female characters. By placing the Devil in the role of offspring, on the other hand, the film satirizes the entire patriarchal unit as a power-hungry entity, which eventually implodes by consequence of its own actions. However, upon the film's release in 1976, many reviewers failed to see The Omen as anything more than a commercial thrill ride, and a very bumpy one at that, due to its factual plot holes. Many of them saw the film as pretentious and silly, but also as a work which, although unbelievable in every way, succeeds in maintaining our attention due to its grim atmosphere and quick pacing. Contrary to numerous reviews of Rosemary's Baby that described Polanski's work as insignificant, and those of The Exorcist that panned Friedkin's film as plainly repulsive,

The Omen was mostly seen as just another Devil-oriented horror film, a mixture of quasi-religious musings and supernatural chills. The New Yorker's Penelope Gilliatt does not explicitly state her opinion, but she does not have to, since her overall tone makes it apparent that she considers the plot to be an embarrassment to all involved in the making of the film: "A sultry priest lurks. The orphan baby is offered. He is the child of Satan. The Ambassador to the Court of St. James's has more than enough evidence to make him suspicious, and you'd think he would diplomatically object, but motherhood wins". Richard Eder of The New York Times sees The Omen as lacking any effect in its portrayal of Satanism, stating that films that deal with this plot device should "make all the details surrounding this device so plausible that when the Thing appears the audience's skepticism has gone to sleep", even praising Rosemary's Baby in this context, writing that it was this mixture of plausibility and the incredible which made Polanski's film as compelling as it was. Eder sees The Omen as a narrative that does not even attempt to gain this kind of cinematic conviction, saying that the film "takes its details with no seriousness at all. It is not a put-on – it is terribly solemn, in fact – but it often seems like one". A somewhat contrary view of The Omen comes from Time magazine's Richard Schickel, who believes that the film successfully manages to combine reality and the seemingly

impossible. Schickel sees the film as a "brisk, highly professional thriller, in which an implausible tale is rendered believable by the total conviction with which it is told". He praises the direction and cinematography, both of which he finds essential to the film's thrills: "Director Donner has a smooth way of burying absurdity in atmospherics and does well with his set pieces, [which include many] deaths by special effect". Still, Schickel's strongest statements in the film's favor revolve around his thoughts on the film's representation of the Antichrist, saying that "the use of a sweetly innocent-appearing child as the principal menace [reverses] all generic conventions and audience expectations while avoiding through understatement the kind of queasy excesses of The Exorcist". It is interesting to note here that the general abhorrence toward the elements essential to the visual symbolism of The Exorcist -- a film also dealing with the union of Devil and child -- had led to a rare positive critique of the visual aspects of The Omen, in particular of Damien's character and the film's ominous atmosphere. I believe that Schickel's thoughts on Damien as the principal villain of The Omen can be applied perfectly to The Exorcist's Regan and her evil alter ego; however, not even a similar critique had been written about the character of the girl. One cannot help but think that it was the children's gender that swayed reviewers, as we saw in Pauline Kael and Paul D.

Zimmerman's reviews of The Exorcist. The uninhibited displays of the female body in Friedkin's film were the main reason reviewers were describing that film as grotesque and unpleasant. On the other hand, Donner's restrained and unassuming depiction of the Devil had some reviewers describe the film as solemn, and the character of Damien as a reversal of societal conventions and expectations. Indeed, "a girl with a bit of the Devil in her is another matter entirely", as William Paul had stated.

On the whole, I was not surprised to find that a vast majority of reviews had claimed to find no depth in The Omen, since the film was touted mostly as a sensationalist commercial vehicle for its director and popular actors. It had even premiered on June 6, 1976, which, to top off the publicity stunt, was a Sunday. With its relentless publicity, exquisite production values and big-name stars, coupled with the high-concept premise of the arrival of the new Antichrist, the film was almost asking for a verbal punch or two, or even more. Nevertheless, even though the film can pride itself on stretching certain prophecies from the Book of Revelations – for example, turning the rise of the Roman Empire into the formation of the Common Market – its characters and themes delve deeply into the meaning of the child within the traditional American family, as well as the longevity of this family as a solid unit. On the

whole, contemporary reviewers do not discuss these aspects of the film at length, but, contrary to their 1970's counterparts, they at least touch upon these topics by discussing the characters' relationships and motives. Reel.com's Mary Kalin-Casey emphasizes the film's poignant look at Robert, Kathy and their marriage, in the midst of the supernatural happenings: "The film is also quite moving in its depiction of the married Thorns' relationship, most effectively reinforcing their love in a quiet scene where the stunned Robert lies motionless after news of his wife's passing". Kalin-Casey also reflects on the fact that, not long after the adoption, Kathy "develops strong feelings that the boy is not her own". In another review, this one from The Cold Spot, film reviewer Jack Witzig pays close attention to the various characters' relationships with Damien, and the role of the child's character in the film, stating that "the ones protecting the life of a child are in fact perpetrating the worst kind of evil, whether they know it or not, and the people who are trying to do the work of God can do so only by destroying a little boy". It is obvious that, just as in the case of Rosemary's Baby, some contemporary critics show increased sensitivity to The Omen's nuances as well, particularly to the role of Damien and the Thorns' flawed relationship with "their" child. A number of contemporary critics also underline the technical aspects of the film as factors that bring more

depth to the film's story, a stance that provides another kind of contrast to some initial reviews. For example, in direct opposition to Richard Eder, Michael Mackenzie of DVD Times states that "What makes The Omen so much more enjoyable than its sequels is the approach director Richard Donner brought [...] Donner basically assumed that all the events in the film could have been coincidence". Additionally, Mackenzie touches upon the score by Jerry Goldsmith, which most of the initial reviewers passed over: "It would be impossible to review this film without discussing Jerry Goldsmith's score. Using a combination of strings and Gregorian chants, Goldsmith's music adds a considerable amount of atmosphere and tension to the film". Indeed, much of the film's atmosphere is reflected in the score, which paints a rich auditory portrait of the looming Satanic dominion. On the whole, I have noticed that some contemporary reviews still praise the thrills as the highlight of the film. However, contrary to many initial reviews, many new critiques consider the role of the child and family in the context of the film's supernatural atmosphere, as well as the effectiveness of the Devil's workings within the film's craftsmanship.

The character of Damien is arguably the central character in the film, since most of the film's action is caused, directly or indirectly, by his identity and the powers it entails. His authority, hidden behind the

mask of a sweet little boy, causes deaths of all characters that oppose him. Among others, his mother is killed by Mrs. Baylock in the hospital, where she finds herself after the accident Damien had deliberately caused. His father is killed by the police in the film's disturbing denouement, just as he is about to kill Damien with the seven holy daggers. While watching the film, the viewers become more and more convinced that the deaths are not coincidental. After all, what Holly tells Damien right before hanging herself is bizarre at the very least. Father Brennan's death comes right after he tells Robert that Kathy is pregnant again, and that Damien will try to kill the baby, the mother and Robert, to try and eventually gain Robert's diplomatic and social status. The revelation of Kathy's new pregnancy, and the pregnant wife's eventual death, is another indicator of the film mocking the patriarch's unending quest for authority -- his real offspring is killed by Damien, who just so happens to be the Antichrist, and who was brought into the family by the patriarch himself. However, while reflecting on the numerous tragic consequences of the adoption, I am also compelled to contrast them with the primary reason as to *why* Damien was brought into the family. The fact that he is truly the Devil has nothing to do with why he was adopted in the first place, yet his identity proves that no good deed goes unpunished. Robert has nothing but good intentions when he decides to

adopt, acting out of despair when he decides to hide the truth from Kathy. Even though he adopts partly because he wants an heir to the family name, his main concern is for his wife's happiness and welfare. Robert's wish to protect his wife, to the point of lying about their child, makes the audience identify with him in more ways than one. We have all acted out of desperation at some point in our lives, possibly driven by the wish for a loved one's well being. Therefore, we feel for Robert when he starts realizing that Damien was a far cry from just another orphan; we feel for him when he loses Kathy and their second baby, an event he had unknowingly caused by his own actions. Furthermore, although we know early on what Damien is, the fact that we identify with Robert means that our wishes for the boy and the Thorn family parallel Robert's wishes from the start. We want the family to prosper, especially after the loss they have suffered, yet all the signs point to eventual doom. We hope the child will turn out to be a regular boy, but we know that our hope is actually wishful thinking, interrupted by Father Brennan's warnings, the babysitters' behavior and other unusual events. Finally, the very image of Damien as an angelic toddler is deceiving, proof that both our and Robert's cultural memory of the Child is false in the case of The Omen. The last layer of Damien's personality – his appearance – is the ultimate and most effective lie of the film.

Whereas Rosemary's Baby's personification of evil has nothing to do with the baby per se – the title's baby is not the evildoer in this film -- and The Exorcist shows us a very different side of a seemingly ordinary and carefree girl, The Omen has no sides to show except one. Damien is Satan and has to die, in order for humanity to survive. Father Brennan consistently warns Robert about the creature in his household; photographer Jennings finds a pattern in his photographs that provides clues to the boy's identity; and the two babysitters fall under the Devil's spell. Still, other characters see things differently. Robert keeps brushing Brennan off, even calling him insane at one point, while Kathy believes she is having delusions, and decides to visit a psychiatrist. After all, the odds of insanity and delusions are more likely than the odds of a child being the Antichrist... or are they? Since we do not know the truth about the boy at first, our discoveries parallel Robert's own. We realize the truth about Damien long before Robert does, though. Even while commiserating with Robert's humane disbelief, we can clearly see that in no case should Damien survive. As Robert is accepting the fact that Damien has to die, the boy cries out 'please, Daddy, no!' to his father, just as Robert is about to kill him. The father hesitates, which gives enough time to the police who followed to kill the Ambassador. The moment in which Damien pleads for his life is poignant to us, even

though we know what he is by this point in the film. Our view of Damien as merely a child – a view that has gradually faded due to explanations and events linked to his identity -- comes back at the exact moment in which Robert falters. At that moment, we do not see Satan and man in battle; we see an adult about to murder a child, which is exactly how Robert sees himself at that moment as well. As in the literary version of Rosemary's Baby, in which Rosemary's first instinct is to kill the spawn of Satan, Robert is intent on murdering the evil posing as his son. Still, while Rosemary recognizes the human half in her baby, a thought that gives her hope for the future, Robert attempts to find humanity where there is none. Whereas Rosemary is somewhat able to back up her optimism – the baby *is* half human, after all – all Robert has at the end is a cultural perception from days past, one that betrays both him and the audience. Herein lies the visual irony of The Omen. The film does not only poke fun at patriarchy by having the patriarch himself inadvertently put the Devil in place of the offspring; by placing the Devil in the body of a child, the film also questions our innate attitudes toward children in general. The film puts the Devil in place of the child, but also puts the child in place of the Devil.

By letting Damien live, The Omen gets revenge on a culture which, as Sobchack notices, sees its children as a threat to its stability, a

view undoubtedly stemming from the hippie generation's willful separation from traditional societal norms and the family. As I mentioned earlier, the narrative takes revenge on the parents who essentially try to use a child to gain a higher social standing, and on the patriarch, who tries to have more authority over his offspring than he possibly can. However, another view that takes root in the hippie generation's era is the view of parenting as a trap, which Damien proves by destroying both Kathy and Robert over time. Since the hippies mostly defied conventions by rejecting their families' way of life and taking a stand against numerous government policies, American society found that it needed to tame these "lost" children, as well as those who wanted to follow in the hippies' footsteps. The disobedient attitude of this generation made America suspicious of its children's behavior, while some extremely violent incidents, like the 1969 Tate-LaBianca murders, made America see its children as possibly fatal to the status quo. The Omen portrays this societal struggle using the seemingly idyllic montage of photographs at the beginning, trying to tame its shrew through the framework of family. Daring to put aside the final outcome of Rosemary's Baby, we can see that the earlier film shows the idea of pregnancy and parenting as very positive, with Rosemary even exclaiming at one point "I will not have an abortion!" Even at the end,

she accepts her baby as he is. Contrary to this stance, The Omen shows pregnancy and child rearing as something potentially lethal to society. Soon after the deceptively idyllic start, the parents are wary and, eventually, deathly afraid of their child, whose identity and status proves to be beyond the limits of the human family. Kathy starts believing that Damien is not hers and insists on aborting her new pregnancy, while Robert finds out just what he has brought into their home, thereby finding out that the child he and Kathy were trying to raise can never be allowed to even exist. Even the titles of these two films show us the evolution of the child in the eyes of the American society, over the period of less than a decade. We go from the straightforward hum of Rosemary's Baby to the exceptionally somber-sounding The Omen; in the midst of the timeline is, of course, The Exorcist, which tries to rid its child of the Devil inside. While the latter film succeeds in cleansing Regan, but leaves the future of the child open for speculation, The Omen closes the chapter. The status of Damien as an outsider is merely an excuse for his misdeeds; after all, Rosemary's baby was Rosemary's own, and still turned out to be far from what she had expected. In retrospect, losing their baby and letting go could have been the best thing for the Thorns and human race in general. Damien's smile in the final scene shows us that, biological ties notwithstanding, the Devil may

be lurking behind any child's innocent smile.

Much like The Exorcist's cinematography, which is closely linked to the film's action and which contributes to our sense of discomfort while watching the film, the cinematography in The Omen uses dark, hazy tones to depict the not-so-perfect perfection of the Thorn family. The cinematography also corresponds with the film's view of religion, an ever-present element in The Omen. This view is particularly shown in the visual aesthetics of the first and next-to-last scene. In both of these scenes, the Church plays a prominent part. In the first scene, there is a light illuminating infant Damien in the nun's arms, and the hospital itself is well lit; however, in the scene in which Damien is about to be killed by the holy daggers on a church altar, the church is a dark, even frightening place. The contrast between light at birth and darkness at near-death of the child is stark; however, we have to remember that, while a child is born at the beginning, it is a parent who dies at the end of the film. This contrast between light and darkness shows us that The Omen's view of religion aligns itself with the film's theme of the Other being born, eventually replacing the patriarch as head of the human family. Since we have been identifying with Robert from the beginning of the film, to us he does not only represent the said patriarch anymore, but also symbolizes our last link to humanity in general. This status of

the character is especially evident in the next-to-last scene, at the moment in which Damien is about to be killed, and in which our view of children as innocents betrays both Robert and us. When we hear a shot being fired, and see Damien's triumphant smile in the last scene, we understand that the world as we know it has come to an end. The light is there as the child enters our world; the darkness is there as a good part of what we understand is dying. It is important to note that the visual bleakness during the film never changes, signifying the point of no return that the birth represented. As in the case of Philip Kaufman's 1978 Invasion of the Body Snatchers remake, we can either interpret The Omen's story as an indicator of humanity's end, or we can see it as an indicator of change and the natural uncertainty that comes along with it. In my opinion, though, while Kaufman's film shows us the human race as extinct at the end, Damien's smile at the end of The Omen shows us the worst case scenario – it shows the human race as existent, but subjugated to the Devil child's power. The end does not only show The Child, mistreated by society, who becomes its ruler; it shows the child who, because of society's attitude toward it, has turned into an über-cosmic, unnatural force. Damien's survival, along with bright daytime in the last scene, represents a new dawn for humanity -- one that may not be so bright, after all.

Even though The Omen is often seen as just another attempt at capitalization on the Devil craze of 1970s horror cinema, its themes of adoption, social status and patriarchy make the film a metaphor of its time. After the late 1960's and early 1970's turmoil within the American family and public life, the possibility for further decline in the American society was certainly present, and Richard Donner depicted both the public fear and probability in his film. By rejecting the contemporary flavor of feminism, but also mocking the old-fashioned tradition of patriarchy, The Omen presents us with the dawning of a new era, one that fully belongs to Damien. While seeing both parents as incompetent – the father as reckless and the mother as ignorant – the film gives more and more power to the outsider, culminating in the death of the family as we know it. Furthermore, the film lets Damien keep his outward innocence during the ghastly proceedings he causes by creating the guise of a child, a sacred figure in Western society. The film leads an idealistic patriarchal family into a post-feminist apocalypse, without flinching or letting anyone get in Damien's way. Damien's satisfied smile at the camera is the last thing we see, signaling that, finally, Rosemary's baby has grown up.

Conclusion

At the end of my essayist Satan worshipping and 1970s adulation, I find myself back in my own world, safe from Guy Woodhouse's deceptions, Regan McNeil's transformation from little girl to little Devil, and Damien's matricidal and patricidal ways. Unlike the three films' supporting players, the events caused by the above characters do not continue to haunt me; however, they do spur me on to do even more research. One of my primary reasons for looking at these particular films was a feeling that a number of their themes were unfairly underrated in the scholarly world, especially considering the importance of these topics within the social climate of each film's release period. Even with the numerous writings dedicated to Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist, certain themes that these films deal with have barely been examined, such as the wife-husband relationship in the former and the significance of the explicit possession visuals in the latter. I felt that a thorough examination of these themes would add to a scholarly view of the two films. Another aspect I wanted to explore was the difference between initial and current reviews. Specifically, I was interested in reasons why most initial reviewers saw these two films as sensationalist, and why some of them even felt compelled to add a

great many expletive nouns after this unflattering adjective. As for The Omen, my main question was – *what* scholarly status? Even though it is considered as one of the better representatives of the horror genre by many fans, the film has been largely ignored by the academic world for a long time. While both Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist have gradually achieved cult status in the eyes of layman fans and scholars alike, The Omen has barely found a place in academia, mostly popping up here and there in random articles about other similarly themed films. Bearing in mind Rosemary's tragic final discovery and the open road that lies ahead of the MacNeils, I felt that Damien's metaphorical smile at the end of Richard Donner's offering provided a perfect finale to my study. I also felt that I could use each film's Satanic and gender symbolism to gain a new perspective on the other two works, while breaking the tradition of slim scholarly pickings on The Omen. Basically, I wanted to broaden film scholars' impressions of this trilogy by examining each film's portrayal of the Devil in the context of that film's aesthetics and turbulent social milieu; by comparing these portrayals; and by looking at the influence that these depictions have had on audiences' views of social issues like gender and family.

My love for the horror genre has definitely affected my love for film in general, both by introducing me to new favorites and making me

see the art of cinema in a new light. In fact, besides examining the Devil's figure in the social context of Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist and The Omen, I also tried to inject my own infatuation with film into each chapter, by occasionally referencing films from other genres, like Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Derek Jarman's Blue. Still, as clichéd as this statement may sound, it is indisputable that the horror genre is not for everyone. There are people who stay far away from horror films in cinema queues and video store aisles, simply because these films cause the most instinctive and primal human emotion – fear. However, the feeling of fear differs from one film to the next. While many so-called slasher films, like Friday the 13th and Curtains, are known for causing cheap scares which make us hide behind the nearest sofa, certain other horror films are short on gore and palpable stimuli, and big on emotional effects that dig deep into our psyche. Rosemary's Baby, for example, will not make its audience wonder if our neighbors are actually in a witches coven, since that interpretation would be a literal one. On the other hand, the film *will* force us to question our views of patriarchy, feminism and the traditional family unit, particularly after identifying with Rosemary, the film's most vulnerable character, for 136 minutes. In the same manner, The Exorcist, although more graphic, will make us question the existence of our own faith and its meaning to us, while The

Omen will make us examine the politics of adoption and bloodlines.

Personally, after seeing the Devil in the form of a child in no less than five films, I was also wondering what these depictions do for our often misguided view of children as the most carefree and innocent creatures in the world. Therefore, my study attempted to take a closer look at not only how Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist and The Omen re-shape our social consciousness and influence us as filmgoers, but also why it is the films' children are depicted as little Devils running amok. I also wanted to examine the behavior of the characters affected by the unholy reign, especially given the aspect of the parent-child bond. On the whole, I can say that the scholar in me was dying to get to the psychological subtext of the narratives about Satan's influence on three seemingly ordinary family units. I say "seemingly" because a submissive Rosemary, a single Chris MacNeil and The Omen's father with a secret undoubtedly take the mundane factor out of their families, creating important undertones to the fantasy stories in the process. In the end, I hope that I have managed to increase the value of Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist and The Omen in the eyes of at least a certain number of film scholars, by showing human emotions and behavior lying underneath the supernatural surface.

One of the most important issues that the films present for

discussion, and one inextricably linked to each of the films' Devil child, is the issue of patriarchy. Exploring the idea of patriarchy, as presented in these three films, did not pose a challenge; rather, it represented a mission that I gladly accepted. The male and father figures in each film act in very different ways, all of them driven by differing forces. As I saw it, the institution of patriarchy was central to, and an originator of, all three films' proceedings, starting with Rosemary's Baby, in which the baby from the title would not even exist without Guy, Rosemary's husband. In fact, his face is the first face Rosemary sees while being raped and, soon afterwards, his appearance changes into that of Satan. As it turns out, Guy is indeed the Devil of the film, since he commits the ultimate act of betrayal by sacrificing his wife and their marriage for his career. This union of patriarchy and Satan does not end with Polanski's film. While The Exorcist's Regan's father is clearly absent, there are three important male figures that act as patriarchs toward her. The two priests, Father Karras and Father Merrin, come in to help Regan, and both die in the process. The third figure, perversely enough, is Satan – a very twisted patriarch, for sure, but one that takes over Regan, and one that is indirectly brought in by the lack of a biological father in Regan's life. At the end, he too is driven out of her life by possessing Father Karras, making us view the ending's final bow – or fall, for that matter –

- of the patriarch as parallel to the early 1970's thriving of the feminist movement. By making the audience sympathetic to the priests' plight, however, The Exorcist also makes us mourn the loss of the male head of the family, in a way preparing us for The Omen's attempts to return the power to the father. The Omen's Robert Thorn adopts a child to diminish the grief of his wife, making his intentions honorable; however, given his important social and economic position, we cannot help but wonder if his wife's well-being is all he has in mind when he takes Damien in, given the height of feminism in the era of the film's release, and the fact that a man of Robert's social stature needs an heir, simply because that is the tradition that our society dictates for its wealthy and privileged patriarchs. All of the cinematic circumstances described above showed me that these stories did not present patriarchy as merely a straightforward, unshakeable institution. Instead of following this route, the filmmakers chose to play around with the idea, changing the patriarch's place from the insider to the outsider in both Rosemary's Baby and The Omen; having him either absent or being chased out of a single parent family's life in The Exorcist; and, finally, reinventing him in the form of Satan himself, the new and unscrupulous patriarch shown at the end of The Omen. Like a cherry on top of a truly delicious cake, the latter is acknowledged with a uniquely devilish grin at the end of the

trilogy. I trust that my thesis did justice in analyzing the union of the Devil's power and the patriarchal order, as well as how this union is magnified by the Devil's survival. By analyzing certain thematic elements -- for example, the rape in Rosemary's Baby and the priests' roles in The Exorcist -- I wanted to demonstrate how the filmmakers portrayed the status of cinematic patriarchy as shifting, in accord with real life political and social changes of the late 1960s and the 1970s.

My analysis of the films' female protagonists and their situations, along with my analysis of patriarchy, was vital to advancing my argument that placing the Devil in the position of offspring changes the three films' family balance and affects the way we read portrayals of gender in American cinema. Each female protagonist's actions affect, and are in turn affected by, the idea of the Devil child. Rosemary leaves the door open for the single parent family by defying her treacherous husband and taking on motherhood, while Chris stays a single mother after her daughter's ordeal, having fought off several possible father figures. I was interested in exploring how Kathy Thorn influences and is influenced by Damien, in light of being oblivious to his identity, as well as how her oblivion somehow becomes intertwined with the father's, given that he was unknowingly responsible for bringing the Devil into the Thorn household. Naturally, I also attempted to compare and

contrast Rosemary's general dependence on her husband and Chris's life with no significant male figure present, and the implications each woman's situation bears for their offspring. I hope that my study has successfully emphasized and explored those female protagonists' characteristics that have had the biggest influence on the behavior of their sons and daughters. I also hope that I have managed to show how we, the audience, see these women, in light of the events unfolding on screen.

While Roman Polanski's Rosemary's Baby envelops us with the protagonist's claustrophobic feeling of paranoia, William Friedkin shocks us with the spectacle of a little girl possessed in The Exorcist, and Richard Donner's The Omen presents the idea that maybe, just maybe, an unassuming toddler could be the Antichrist. The children in these films take the societal concept of the Child as a blissfully unaware angel to a degree of tension that only the Devil's deeds can create. However, these three films alter long-standing public perceptions of several other issues as well, such as the patriarchal family and the single parent family unit. In light of these changes, I believe that these three films also have the capability to shift, or at least begin to shift, the meaning of the horror genre itself in the eyes of non-fans. The three works show just how effective and socially charged horror films can be.

By placing socially significant issues within a supernatural or otherwise fantastic narrative, horror films are capable of creating a sense of discomfort in the viewer, forcing us to look at the values and transformations of our world from a unique and atypical angle.

Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist and The Omen, specifically, open the door for further study of depictions of the family unit and children in the genre, as well as how these depictions influence our own views of these topics. Damien's survival is a good starting point for further academic research on these two issues. This enterprise should include detailed analysis of other contemporary horror films such as Batoru rowaiaru and Ringu, which represent children as a threat to social hierarchy and address the ongoing changes in the family unit, while inevitably making us see the reflections of our choices and ourselves in the faces of the next generation.

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