

Horror in the exorcist essay



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'The Exorcist', directed by William Friedkin, is a Horror film which follows the demonic possession of a young girl named Regan. The film was adapted from the 1971 novel 'The Exorcist', written by William Peter Blatty, and became one of the most recognisable and successful horror films of all time. It remains one of the few horror films nominated for Best Picture. However, it was also one of the most opposed films for its controversial content.

Throughout the film, the theme of horror is created in many ways, through both its form and content. With both physical, and psychological horror evident, the film doesn't fail to scare its audience in numerous different ways. The film creates horror using a very key Binary opposition of Good vs. Evil. The good simply being the humans, set out to stop Regan from being possessed and killed by this possession. The priests are the main symbol of good within the film, as they follow Religious beliefs and set out to perform an exorcism on the possessed child in order to save her from the evil.

They are essentially the heroes of the film. The mother of Regan is also a symbol of good, as she makes desperate attempts to save her daughter from the possession and seeks help throughout the film. The Evil of the film is simply the Devil. We do not see Regan as the Evil herself as we know she is a young, innocent girl, possessed by the Devil who simply communicates through the young girl. She cannot control her own actions. This opposition creates a sense of Horror, because oppositions are something that every horror movie has.

The conflict between the good and the bad creates tension and conflict, as we sympathise with the young girl who is possessed, knowing she is young

and innocent, as well as helpless. The audience is likely to become scared for her because of this situation. If the human that had been possessed had been a 30-year-old serial killer, we would be unlikely to sympathize with the character for being in this situation. Therefore, horror is created through the content of using a young, innocent, helpless girl, having to deal with a horrific situation, and through its form, by using a key binary opposition in how it is made. A scene that greatly shows this occurrence, is in the final scene of the film, where two priests, one young and one old, come to perform the exorcism on the young girl and to get rid of the evil once and for all. The priests perform the exorcism, and halfway through this exorcism the older priest dies from heart failure.

The younger priest then carries on the ritual, which doesn't seem to be going well. He eventually becomes the Hero, as he commands the devil to leave the girl and enter his own body. This happens, but the priest jumps out of a window killing himself, just before the devil is capable of taking over the priests actions and murdering Regan, the young girl he had just saved and dispossessed. We then witness Regan crying on the floor in a corner, making us sympathize with her. The audience is likely to be in relief that she has been saved.

This final scene greatly creates horror in many ways, and is the key horrific moment of the film. Within the content, the dialogue used creates Horror. The possessed child uses aggressive language, frequently cursing towards the two priests. The two priests are performing the exorcism, so using religious language and using the words that are needed for the ritual. The two priests repeat the words " The power of Christ compels you!" numerous

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times. These are supposed to be the strongest words that can be used against the devil.

But still don't completely succeed in the destroying the devil inside Regan, making us wonder what could possibly defeat the evil. This creates Horror, as it scares us into thinking that the devil cannot be overcome. Also within this scene, there is a lot of horrific imagery. When possessed, the young girl has an extremely ugly appearance.

She has pale skin, covered in large cuts and blood. Her voice is manly, croaky, deep and evil. She has yellow rotting teeth, and at times, only the white of her eyes can be seen. This is a scary image to be seen, and adds to the horror element of not only this scene, but also the full film itself.

We also see horrific happenings within the room with which the exorcism is being carried out. The room is dark and extremely cold, which is evident as we can see the breath of both the priests when they enter. The bed shakes vigorously, and objects fly across the room violently, all being controlled by the devil. All of this scares the audience as we see abnormal happenings. We are also shocked by not only the abnormal appearance of Regan, but also her abnormal abilities.

She has strength that would be impossible for a young girl of the age, and within the scene, does a full rotation of her head. This is something that is physically impossible and inhumane, therefore scaring the audience and adding to the Horror elements of the scene. When the priest commands the devil to enter his body, we see the devil starting to take him over. We then get a high angle point of view shot from the priest, looking down on the

young girl. In the shot we can see the girl and just his hands moving down towards her as if he was about to strangle her and kill her. The priest manages to kill himself by jumping out a window, preventing the devil taking over and murdering the girl.

This shows how the camera angle also added to the Horror elements. We see many characteristics of the Horror Genre and a lot of iconography relating to Horror in this film such as; Blood, death, victims, Killers, evil, Dark scenery, Night time shots and scary music. Two of these characteristics, Dark scenery and a night shot are greatly exaggerated in a particular scene. In this scene, one of the priests is arriving at the house where Regan is located in a taxi.

In the streets outside we can see the weather conditions are very dull and misty. There is an unnatural amount of fog around the house. When he exits the taxi, the shot is from just outside the building; it is late at night and very dark almost to a surreal extent. The lighting is set up to create a strong, spooky image. There is a street light, which is turned on, but a very minimal amount of light comes from it compared to what we would expect.

The other light source comes from the bedroom window of the house he is about to enter, which we assume is the bedroom where the possessed child is located. Other lights are seen to be turned on through other windows from the front of the house, but this particular window shoots a ray of light towards the priest exiting the car. As he stands at the entrance to the house, this ray of light causes his figure to look just like a silhouette, creating a dark, spooky image and emphasizing the Horror characteristics. This imagery can be related to film noir.

It was such a strong image, that it became the front cover main image for the DVDs, videos, posters etc. that were produced for the film. And as they wanted an image that would show audiences that the film was a Horror, this image was obviously one that spooked and scared audiences. The lighting could be described as Chiaroscuro lighting, with a surreal extreme contrast between light and dark. This is instantly followed by a quick flashing image of the young possessed girl.

This image was shown just before the two priests performed the exorcism on Regan, and a sign of what was about to come, creating tension within the film. Although the ending of the film is the most memorable and obvious part in showing the Genre of horror, the introduction of the film is more important than is first recognized by most audiences. The film opens with a prologue, located in an archaeological dig site deep in the arid desert of Northern Iraq. We see workers digging inexorably with pick-axes, looking to uncover ancient artifacts. Father Lankester Merrin, who is the older priest who performs the exorcism at the end of the film, discovers a gargoyle-like stone.

When this stone is discovered, the soundtrack simulates an eerie, shrieking chord, signaling that this stone has some kind of negative symbolization. The priest leaves the dig site and drives his jeep to an ancient temple ruins. Here a shadow is cast across his face and as he turns his head, he discovers that the object blocking the light from his face, is a large statue of the stone that he had just discovered. The soundtrack plays the same screeching sound and we see two dogs fighting.

We hear sudden spooky gusts of wind. This all makes it evident that this figure that had just been discovered, is a very important symbol within the film. This becomes more evident at the end of the film. When the exorcism is being performed, a shadow image of the figure that was discovered can be seen from the window. This shows the importance of the beginning of the film and the ways in which horror was created, where for an important reason, showing that danger was to come.

The figure discovered can be seen as a Harbinger, as it is a symbol of doom and danger to come. The scene uses the soundtrack to show Horror and to show that there is something bad, wrong or evil. 'The exorcist' has a main theme tune called 'tubular bells' which is played on certain occasions in the film. Most recognizably, toward the start. Regan's mother is walking home from work, and the spooky theme tune starts, symbolizing the start of her child's possession by the devil. Ironically, as she walks home, children run past her wearing scary costumes, showing us it is likely to be Halloween, a day that is more associated to the Genre of horror than any other.

The theme tune became extremely recognizable, and went on to be a number 1 single on the billboard charts. A horror is a genre set out to frighten and scare its audience. A way in which this is greatly done is with the build up of suspense (The building of tension and anxiety). This is a form of enigma code. Where the audience is led to believe that something bad is going to happen, but are often unaware of where and when.

After the first scene, we know that the discovery of the stone is going to lead to something bad. But we are unaware of where it will take place, and when

it will start. This build up tension is often relieved or heightened in a Horror through different ways. A way in which 'The exorcist' does this is through shock technique and false shock. We are shocked when something unexpected happens, and this happens when we see the physical appearance of the young girl being possessed. We have seen her demonstrate unusual activities before her appearance starts to change, but are suddenly shocked when she suddenly turns into a ghastly looking figure.

We witness false shock within the film as well, being another way to heighten the tension. This happens when the audience expects something to happen, and nothing does. Or something that isn't harmful in anyway suddenly shocks us as we expect something else. In one particular scene, Regan's mother hears noises from the loft, and believes there are rats up there.

She goes up to investigate and look around, and the scene is very silent. We then suddenly hear a voice, which causes the character, and sometimes the audience to jump. But it turns out that the voice is just from a man who is a friend of the family and in no way harmful. This all creates horror, as it succeeds in shocking and scaring the audience and characters. A horror genre usually always follows a certain Narrative theory, according to the Russian theorist Todorov.

Todorov came up with the theory of the film starting with a normal world, or a state of equilibrium. This equilibrium is then disrupted by an outside, evil force, causing chaos. This evil is eventually overcome in some way and a New World and state of equilibrium is evident by the end. This is hugely evident in 'The exorcist'.

We see a happy family at the start of the film, being the equilibrium. The young girl Regan is smiling all the time, and we witness her and her mum getting excited for her birthday. This equilibrium is disrupted by the evil, in this case the devil possessing Regan. It causes chaos and ruins the happy family that we see at the start of the film.

The evil is eventually overcome thanks to the priest, and we eventually see a new equilibrium. The girl is no longer possessed and back to her happy ways. She claims to not remember anything that happened, and the family move away to escape the location in which the disruption formed. This shows how 'The Exorcist' greatly follows the narrative theory seen so often in a Horror. 'The Exorcist' became recognized as one of the greatest horror films of modern times, and inspired many sequels to the film, all seen as inferior to the original.

It also inspired imitations, which followed a similar plot or occurrence such as The Omen trilogy, Beyond The Door (74), The Tempter(74), Abby(74), The Devil Within Her(75) and more recently The Exorcism Of Emily Rose (2005). Before 'The Exorcist', the film Rosemary's Baby Was a successful Horror movie for paramount. It brought horror to the contemporary city with a story about Satanists. And was the landmark film, beginning what was described as a 'family horror'.

'The Exorcist' followed this and both films had children in focus. The films focused on Horror within a family. And due to the success of both, was followed by The Shining (1978) which showed another family in horrific circumstances.