

**Analyzing the Representation of Biblical Angels in Mainstream Horror
Film & Television**

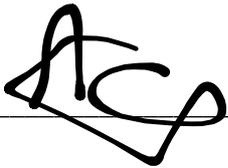
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**Submitted to the Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies in
candidacy for the BA (Honours) Degree in 3D Design, Modelmaking &
Digital Art, DL828**

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) 3D Design, Modelmaking & Digital Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ACG', written over a horizontal line.

Amy Catherine Gannon

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Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the question as to whether or not the dark representations of angels within horror are reflective of true angels that have been depicted in the bible. Or, have these creatures been exaggerated in order to instil fear into an audience as a way to selfishly profit from them.

Angels in horror often appear sinister and monstrous, far different from the holy angels that the average person grows up learning about in school or church. This may be done to frighten viewers, allowing creators to increase profit made from these films. Despite this, many filmmakers have written their films in a similar manner and have not received any negative press on their usage of angels. And considering that audiences have been building a more critical mindset over the years in relation to the realism being presented in films, it makes one wonder if filmmakers have been taking the time to research the character of an angel so they can present them in this fashion.

This will be done by analyzing the relationship between horror and religion over the years as a way to understand the reason behind this portrayal. Also, a study of angels in general will be taken in an attempt to understand the world's view of them and to learn what the role of an angel is in society. This will include examining the narrative side of the bible to understand the actions and appearance of angels that have been reflected. In addition, works of art will be looked at to understand the visual construct of angels that has been manifested over time. Afterwards, these findings will be compared to mainstream films and television programmes prominent in the horror genre that feature an angel.

Table of Contents

Introduction _____ pg. no. 8

Chapter 1: Horror and Religion _____ pg. no. 10

1.1 The relationship between religion and the horror genre

1.2 The manifestation of Angels

Chapter 2: Biblical Angels within Horror _____ pg. no. 16

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Angels by name: Gabriel and Lucifer

2.3 Representation in film

Chapter 3: Angels vs Modern media _____ pg. no.22

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Angels in paintings: visual analysis

3.3 Appearance within the media

Conclusion _____ pg. no. 27

List of Works Cited _____ pg. no. 29

List of Figures

Fig. 1: Film poster, *The Exorcist*, Dir. William Friedkin, (Warner Bros. 1973), p.1.
<https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/9552-the-exorcist/images/posters>

Fig. 2: Comic Issue 001 *The Castle of Otranto, Adventures into the Unknown*, by Frank Belknap Long and Fred Guardineer (American Comics Group. 1948) pg. 3.
<https://dmichaelmay.wordpress.com/2010/03/22/pass-the-comics-sinbad-conan-deep-sea-spies-and-more/>

Fig.3: Art *Saint Augustine and the Devil* Michael Pacher (1475) pg. 4.
<https://hrc.cass.anu.edu.au/events/origin-devil>

Fig 4: Art, *Painting of Angel* by Armand Cambon (2017) pg. 5.
<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/angel-armand-cambon.html>

Fig 5: Iconography, *Nine orders of angels* by unknown (1700s) pg. 7.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nine_orders_of_angels.jpeg

Fig 6: Art, *Painting of The Archangels* by 'Master of Pratovecchio' (1450) pg. 9.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Master_Of_Pratovecchio_-_The_Three_Archangels_-_WGA14476.jpg

Fig 7: Art, *The Fallen Angel* by Alexandre Cabanel (1847) pg. 11.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fallen_Angel_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fallen_Angel_(painting))

Fig 8: Film Poster, *Constantine*, Dir. by Francis Lawrence (DC, 2005) pg. 12.
<https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/561-constantine/images/posters>

Fig 9: Film still, *Constantine*, Tilda Swinton as *Gabriel*, Dir. by Francis Lawrence (2005) pg. 13
<https://theplaylist.net/john-wick-3-tilda-swinton-20170927/>

Fig 10: Film still, *Constantine*. Fig 10: Film still, Peter Stormare as *Lucifer*, Dir. By Francis Lawrence (2005)
<https://screenrant.com/constantine-movie-lucifer-costume-appearance-actor-fight/>

Fig 11: Film Poster, *The Prophecy*, Dir. Gregory Widen (1995) pg. 13.
<https://filmbliitz.org/prophecy-1-1995/>

Fig 12: Film still, *The Prophecy*, Christopher Walken as *Gabriel*, Dir. Gregory Widen (1995) pg. 14.
[https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/Gabriel_\(The_Prophecy\)](https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/Gabriel_(The_Prophecy))

Fig 13: Film still, Fig 13: Film still, *The Prophecy*, Viggo Mortensen as *Lucifer*, Dir. Gregory Widen (1995)
<https://www.tor.com/2020/08/14/a-few-of-our-favorite-devils-in-sff/comment-page-1/>

Fig 14: Art, *The Battle of the Archangel Michael with Satan* by Jacopo Tintoretto. (1592) pg. 15.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_019.jpg

Fig 15: Art, *The Angel of the lord visits Gideon* by Howard David Johnson. (2017) pg. 15.
<https://www.pinterest.ie/pin/327073991678540653/>

Fig 16: Film poster, *A Dark Song*, Dir. Liam Gavin (2016) pg. 16.
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4805316/>

Fig 17: Film still, *A Dark Song*, Martina Nunvarova as *Guardian angel* (2016) pg. 17.
<https://m.imdb.com/title/tt4805316/mediaviewer/rm4057568513>

Fig 18: Netflix Poster, Midnight Mass, Dir. by Mike Flanagan (2021) pg. 18
<https://waxworkrecords.com/collections/all/products/midnight-mass>

Fig 19: Film still, Midnight Mass, Quinton Boisclair as the 'angel' Dir. By Mike Flanagan (2021) pg. 19
<https://www.fangoria.com/original/monsterpiece-theater-part-five-a-conversation-with-quinton-boisclair-the-angel-midnight-mass/>

Introduction

The dark representations of angels within the horror genre have been heavily questioned over the years as a number of people do not believe that these depictions are reflective of actual biblical angels. It has been claimed these films have been exaggerated in order to instill fear into their viewers so that the filmmakers can gain monetary rewards from that fear. Among these people is Steffen Hantke, writer of the book, *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* (2010) who believes that these films have been made in aid of “selling as many tickets as possible”¹ and from a scholarly perspective, one must consider whether these ghoulish creatures have any true correlation to the angelic entities being described in the original text, or if they are merely a distorted version created by the human imagination made for monetary consumption.

An example of this phenomenon is William Friedkin's horror film *The Exorcist* (1973). It tells the story of a 12-year-old girl called Reagan who is possessed by the devil and must be exorcised in order to expel the demon. Despite the popularity of this cult classic, many were repulsed by this film's usage of Christianity. This included a group of clergymen that were interviewed for a news article titled *Exorcist' Adds Problems for Catholic Clergymen* written by Edward B Fiske (1974). These men claimed that people had to be “hospitalized”² as they began to believe that they were being possessed because of this film. This led them to the opinion that this film was misinforming the public, leaving individuals to have misconceptions about the church. In contrast, there are plenty of other viewers that claim that this film was accurate in their approach. This includes Film critics such as Roger Ebert who claimed in his article, *The Exorcist, film review* (1974) that the “theological details in his book are accurate”³ as exorcisms are a real ritual performed in Christianity and the film was simply illustrating that. In addition, there have been many additional horror films that have taken on the horror concept of religion and have studied their own religious symbols that represent Christianity including heaven, crosses, and angels.

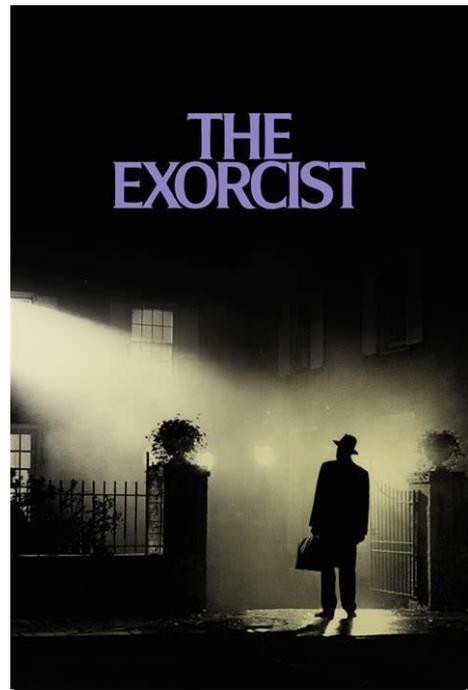


Fig. 1: 'The Exorcist' Film poster (1973)

This thesis will explore the question through an intertextual analysis of biblical text and modern media. The beguiling concept of horror angels will be discussed, and a comparison will be made with different theatrical resources in hopes of figuring out why there is such a difference in the first place. These comparisons will illustrate if filmmakers have researched how angels are portrayed in the bible or if they have adopted a new way of viewing them that challenges that of the bible for their own selfish need. This will be done by breaking this thesis up into three chapters that each detail their own aspect that pertain to this discussion.

Chapter one will define horror in the world of film and examine how it is used to create suspense to terrify the audience. This information will then be compared to the

¹ Hantke, Steffen. “Return to the graveyard”, *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, Mississippi: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 30 Sept. 2010, (pg. 150)

²Fiske, Edward B. *Exorcist' Adds Problems for Catholic Clergymen*, The New York Times, 28 Jan. 1974

³ Ebert, Roger. *The Exorcist* film review, Chicago Sun-Times, 26 Dec. 1973

relationship between this genre and the role of Christianity within it. This will provide a starting point into understanding why angels are portrayed in this horrific manner. Also, a study of angels will be taken in order to understand how the wider world views them and to learn what the role of an angel truly is.

Chapter two will be used to provide further information on the topic of angels with the intention of understanding the role they played. This will be done by undertaking a narrative study of well-known angels in the bible including, Gabriel and Lucifer. By analyzing how they are described in scripture, an understanding of their true identity will be revealed. These identities will then be compared to the angels based on them in the films *Constantine* (2005) by Francis Lawrence and *The Prophecy* (1995) by Gregory Widen to see if filmmakers have done their due diligence in researching these angels for their films.

Chapter three will conduct a visual investigation into the overall appearance of an angel. This study will be carried out by analyzing paintings from different eras that feature an angel. By comparing and contrasting these works of art with the angels present in them, a better interpretation can be made on how people viewed them throughout history. These interpretations can then be compared with angels that have been seen within media such as, *Midnight mass* (2021) by Mike Flanagan and *A Dark Song* (2016) by Liam Gavin to see if these filmmakers have captured their likeness.

The discussions made in each chapter will provide an organized approach in order to research the topic at hand. It will outline all the background information that will be needed to understand the initial direction taken with these beings in the bible and works of art. This information will then become immensely valuable for the use of comparison with the films listed above. Hopefully, the assessments made in these chapters will answer the question as to whether or not these angelic entities have any link to the altered perceptions crafted by world-renowned filmmakers. To explore this concept further, the realm of Christianity must be explored to figure out whether today's interpretations differ from those of yesteryear.

Chapter 1: Horror and Religion

1.1 The relationship between religion and the horror genre

This chapter introduces the relationship between horror and religion within film. For this study, a timeline on the progression of horror throughout history will be constructed as a basis of understanding how it transgressed into film. In addition, the scientific reasoning behind the terror and suspense will be analysed as a means of articulating why the usage of fear is crucial for the purposes of watching a horror film. Finally, a study of the existence of angels in the bible will be investigated in order to learn what positions they possess within their structured hierarchy. This will help to understand how the wider world views them and to learn what the role of an angel truly is. This will allow it to be compared to the role of angels showcased in horror. Overall, this chapter is an informative study for the purpose of more thorough comparisons.



Fig. 2: 'The Castle of Otranto, Adventures into the Unknown', comic Issue 001 (1948)

The horror genre is one of the most popular genres in media as it offers a unique feeling that is hard to find in other genres. This genre is varied with its approach which makes it difficult to define by one singular definition. In his work "An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture" Dominic Strinati created the following definition that characterizes this phenomenon as "uncomfortable and disturbing desires which need to be contained."⁴ This definition illustrates that this genre is unsettling in nature and visually displeasing for a viewer to witness. Interestingly, this reasoning behind the genre is the logic behind why it is popular in the first place.

Horror has been with us since the mid-18th century during the rise of literature which encapsulated different and unique stories. Typically concerning, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* which are cult classics in the horror community. These particular authors explored humanity's darkest terrors with emotional conviction. In many ways, these works act as significant points in time that has continued to fascinate readers today. The story *Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole is often labelled the "first"⁵ horror story to be brought into the public eye, establishing the beginning of what will soon turn into one of the most prevalent genres in the media.

Nowadays, the genre has risen in popularity and has now transitioned into theatre, video games, television and most notably, within films such as *Scream* which earned \$173 million in the box office. The popularity of horror films comes from the science behind the

⁴ Strinati, Dominic. *An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture*, London: Routledge, 6 July 2000 (pg. 82)

⁵ Cohenour, Gretchen. "A Man's Home Is His Castle: Bloodlines and The Castle of Otranto," *A Journal of Critical and Creative Work*, English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities, 2008 (pg. 73)

intrigue as it is one of the only genres where its enjoyment not only comes from the storyline but the reaction of the viewer. It seeks to elicit fear or disgust in its audience for the sake of entertaining the viewer. When the viewer is faced with a horrific act in a horror film, they will react in a number of different ways depending on the type of individual they are. According to psychologists, Haiyang Yang and Kuangjie Zhang this reaction could be “negatively (in the form of fear or anxiety) or positively (in the form of excitement or joy)”⁶. However, these reactions can change depending on the feeling of the viewer or if the writer intends to receive a particular reaction. Author, Bruce F. Kawin states that this reaction can make the “repellent, the terrifying and the creepy compelling.”⁷ This allows for an abundance of different types of reactions to entice the viewer for an aspect of the film that is not the plot itself.

Over time, writers have scrutinized the genre closely in hopes of finding new areas to explore and take apart to put on the big screen. From this, new and different sub-genres have been made to capture the viewers attention as a means of frightening them or to provide them with a relatable text. This includes the concepts of vampires, werewolves, ghouls, and a plethora of other beastly creatures that have all made an appearance one way or another, providing iconic and noteworthy scenes. In addition, realistic stories have been introduced with murderers, rapists, and humanized characters that suffer from psychosis, probing the viewer to question the worldly accuracy of it. This is because the “human mind is fascinated with the unknown”⁸ and what could be, imagining themselves in the positions of the victims shown in these types of horror films.

The most interesting sub-genre⁹ to come from this easily must be those with a religious grounding as there is a certain aesthetic and wonder to faith. However, this concept is no stranger to this genre as it is a known occurrence in an individual’s life which allows them to relate to the materiel at hand. Furthermore, most films are rooted in occult¹⁰ subtext¹¹ in order to aid the story and provide a background context to set the scene.

In light of this, a lot of creatures and legends that are manifested in these films are commonly inspired by figures in religious text. For example, researcher Dorothy Ivey found that the church claimed that the vampire is considered “an agent of the devil”¹², which introduces them as the root of all evil. Despite this, James Kendrick who wrote *A Return to the Graveyard: Notes on the spiritual films* believes it is just an easy way to make a profitable film and attempt an “approach that borrows liberally from Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and various new age belief systems without specifically citing any well-known figures”¹³ without giving any respect to Christianity.

On the other hand, others debate that there is a sense of truth to this matter as most horror films immerse themselves in a morally relative universe. In simple terms, horror explores the challenges between right and wrong which reminds the world that horror showcases the “deepest fears and anxieties”¹⁴ that everyone faces every day. These same questions present frequently within an individual’s faith, reflecting the similar reality of right and wrong showcased in horror.

⁶ Yang , Haiyang, and Kuangjie Zhang. *The Psychology behind Why We Love (or Hate) Horror*, Harvard Business Review, 26 Oct. 2021

⁷ Kawin, Bruce F. *Horror, and the Horror Film*. London: Anthem Press, 25 June 2012, (pg. 2)

⁸ Palmer, Michael. *Fear: A Psychophysiological Study of Horror Film Viewing*, Texas State University-San Marcos, 1 May 2008. (pg. 3)

⁹ a smaller and more specific genre within a broader genre

¹⁰ mystical, supernatural, or magical powers, practices, or phenomena

¹¹ the underlying or implicit meaning

¹² Wotherspoon, Dorothy I. *The Vampire Myth and Christianity*, Florida: Rollins College. May 2010, (pg. 8)

¹³ Hantke, Steffen. “Return to the graveyard” *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, Mississippi: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 30 Sept. 2010. (150)

¹⁴ Davis, Jaime L. *Monsters, and Mayhem: Physical and Moral Survival in Stephen King’s Universe*, Utah: Brigham Young University Apr. 2012. (pg. 2)

A common fear that presents itself in faith is the being called Satan or as he is notably referred to as, the Devil. This entity is regarded as the embodiment of absolute evil in religions such as Christianity and Judaism. Satan was materialized through Christianity as the opposing entity to God or the “the enemy of goodness and life”¹⁵ to instill fear into people and push them to run into God’s arms. In other words, it is a mirror image of one another, God is the heavenly father while the devil is the prince of evil.



Fig 3: ‘Saint Augustine and the Devil’ Michael Pacher (1475)

Horror utilizes this idea of good versus evil with the benevolent¹⁶ pitted against the malevolent¹⁷. This allows a film to have a main focal point or to have a device in order to move the story along. Commonly, this is done in the form of a war between the two deities, God and the devil. This indulges the audiences, and they are treated to thrilling scenes full of suspense and intrigue. It is captivating and highlights the heroism displayed alongside depravity. In addition, the writer has the opportunity to introduce demons as a means of scaring the audience. These creatures are known as servants of the Devil, and it is their job to corrupt and defile all of God’s creation. So, if the mirror image of God is the image of the Devil, one must wonder what the reflection of demons could be in horror.

1.2 The manifestation of Angels

Mortimer J. Adler, author of the book *Angels, and Us* (January 1, 1982/ Touchstone publishers) defines angels as “messengers”¹⁸ of hope, peace, and protection for believers. Angels are commonly brought up as the opposite of demons and are portrayed as powerful divine beings sent by God to perform his will and function as intermediaries between heaven and earth. They often appear in human form, with wings symbolizing their heavenly status, and they usually have “intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities”¹⁹ as stated by James D. Quiggle, author of the book, *Angelology, A true history of Angels* (2017). They provide comfort during difficult times and offer guidance towards a better future. Additionally, are subject in more religions than just Christianity as “Belief in Angels is one of the traditional six articles of belief of Islam. In common with Christianity and Judaism”.²⁰ These creatures are said to be the “Sons of God”²¹ acting as servants for the lord and doing his bidding.



Fig 4: ‘Painting of Angel’ Armand Cambon (2017)

¹⁵ Oldridge, Darren. *The Devil: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP, 31 May 2012 (pg. 2)

¹⁶ well-meaning and kindly

¹⁷ wish to do evil to others.

¹⁸ Adler, Mortimer J. *Angels and Us*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1 Mar. 1982, (pg. 11)

¹⁹ Quiggle, James D. *Angelology, a True History of Angels*. California: CreateSpace Publishing, 14 Sept. 2017 (Pg. 31)

²⁰ Jones, David Albert. *Angels: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 25 Mar. 2010, (pg.10)

²¹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Job 38. 7)

In horror films, angels are often depicted as “supremely moving and creepy”²² acting as malevolent creatures throughout the film or programme. Horror angels, like their biblical counterparts, embody justice and avengement. They seek to uphold the cosmic balance of right and wrong, often punishing those who transgress against morality or defy a higher deity. They tend to appear in visions or possess physical forms, typically with supernatural powers and a strong will to manifest events. Even when they are not solely responsible for terrorizing humans, angels can still be used to indicate foreboding danger, hinting at something corrupted lurking beneath the surface. Interestingly enough, they are sometimes addressed as the “Angel of death”²³ in many works of fiction, such as *American Horror Story* (October 2011 – present) by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk. This shows that they are willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve their mission. Such creatures often represent the darker side of human nature by showcasing the “overarching framework that provides meaning”²⁴ which allows us to confront our own fears and taboos. This sense of mystery helps create an atmosphere of fear and tension, ensuring audiences feel unsettled throughout the film.

In the bible, it states that these creatures are “ministering spirits”²⁵ made with the hands of God. These individuals are bestowed intelligence and will so that they can accurately do their job in serving God and providing his message. In comparison to man, they are “a little lower than angels”²⁶ and all “are in heaven”²⁷ as it is their home from creation. Their life remains in the role they are given and can “neither marry, nor are given in marriage”²⁸ as they are attached to his name. And most importantly, “neither can they die”²⁹ as it is their mission to protect the heavenly realms from lower deities and to protect the people of Earth from those that commit great sin.

It is theorised by writer, Ulrich Utiger who wrote *Cycles of Salvation History Genesis, the Flood and Marian Apparitions* (June 20, 2013/ Smashwords) that Adam “represents both the angels and humans”³⁰. He believes that angels were created after the fall of Eden as everything that God made “were all things created, that are in heaven”³¹ meaning that everything that was made after, came from Adam. They first appear throughout the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament with his angels establishing his name on Earth as they fulfilled his word. These angels first appear within their human form in the story of Abraham. It is here, in the plains of Mamre where “three men stood by him”.³² While in their presence, he bows in respect to them as they came in the name of the lord. They ask to speak to his wife, Sarah and they tell her that she “shall have a son”³³ within the year which surprises her as she is an elderly woman, going through menopause but despite this, this was God’s wish, and it was his angel’s job to “do his commandments”.³⁴ In other words, this story showcases angels doing as God commands and relaying his message to the people of Earth.

To understand what an angel is within the Christian tradition, the complete hierarchy of angels must be examined. There are three different ranks that have differing levels of power and within those rankings, there are three roles in each one. Overall, there are nine roles in

²²Glasby, Matt. *The Book of Horror: The Anatomy of Fear in Film*. London: White Lion Publishing, 22 Sept. 2020 (pg. 167)

²³ Muir, John Kenneth. *Horror Films of the 1990s*. North Carolina: McFarland, 6 Oct. 2011 (pg.79)

²⁴ Cutrara, Daniel S. *Wicked Cinema: Sex and Religion on Screen*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 15 Mar. 2014 (pg. 5)

²⁵ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611 (Hebrews 1.14)

²⁶ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611 (Psalms 8.5)

²⁷ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611 (Mark 13.32)

²⁸ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611 (Matthew 22.30)

²⁹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611 (Luke 20.36)

³⁰ Utiger, Ulrich. *Cycles of Salvation History: Genesis, the Flood and Marian Apparitions*. California: CreateSpace, 20 June 2013 (pg. 2)

³¹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Colossians 1.16)

³² *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Genesis 18.2)

³³ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Genesis 18:10)

³⁴ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Psalms 104.20)

the whole hierarchy that follow God. At the very top, there is the Seraphim, The Cherubim and the Thrones who are considered God's "Valiant ones"³⁵. These angels are the closest to God at his side, directly serving him. Within the middle rank, each role has their own job to follow. There are the dominions which act as "a liberal superiority"³⁶, meaning that they decide the placement of each angel at the behest of God. The Powers act as an "extension of his presence"³⁷ and must act upon that will. This means that they fulfill the word of God when needed. Then, the Authorities push back "the power of the devil"³⁸, acting as guards protecting heaven. Finally, the lowest tier consists of three roles, each with their own job similar to the middle rank. Firstly, the principalities are charged to "Lead others to the principle above all principles"³⁹, proceeding as supervisors in simpler terms to the lower angels. The general angels or guardian angels as they are colloquially called, are tasked with the intent of God. This essentially implies that they watch over the human population. Lastly, the Archangels that "represent the Spirit of God in its fullness and completeness".⁴⁰ These angels would be the most well-known as they are directly talking to saints and prophets that are very prevalent in the bible.

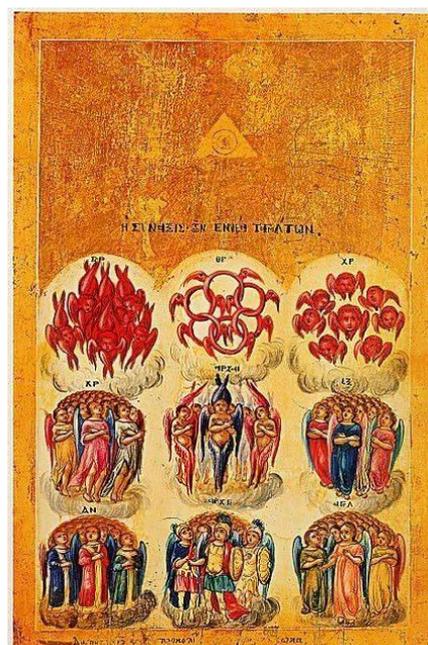


Fig 5: 'Nine orders of angels' icon (1700s)

In accordance with the bible, there a particular image of an angel that the average mind thinks of. They are believed to possess a glorious form that radiates beauty. The wings are like pure white feathers that can be "stretched forth".⁴¹ Moreover, they are dressed in "white apparel"⁴² as the colour white is seen as the colour of purity and innocence in the Catholic church. Its body is tall and graceful, and their presence brings hope and joy to your heart. Most of the time, when they are in the presence of humans they can completely transform and be perceived like a regular human. it is believed that some individuals "have entertained angels unawares"⁴³ so it is expected that you treat strangers with kindness in Christian tradition as they may be an angel in disguise.

In addition, it is true that angels do fight for God against the hellish Demons. These angels are prepared to go up "against the dragon"⁴⁴ when needed. With this understanding

³⁵ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611(Isaiah 33. 7)

³⁶ Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchy*. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, AD 400 to AD 699 (pg. 21)

³⁷ Miller, Stephen. *The Book of Angels: Seen and Unseen*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, (pg. 4)

³⁸ *Angelology Explained in Obsessive Detail*, YouTube, uploaded by Mr. Mythos, Aug 29, 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKfZ8RJ487M&ab_

³⁹ Murphy, Mary Agnes. *The Representation of Angels and Angelic Orders from the Late Middle Ages through the Reformation C.1450 -C.1650*. Leicester: University of Leicester , 1 Oct. 2010 (pg. 35)

³⁹ Murphy, Mary Agnes. *The Representation of Angels and Angelic Orders from the Late Middle Ages through the Reformation C.1450 -C.1650*. Leicester: University of Leicester , 1 Oct. 2010 (pg. 35)

⁴⁰ Bucur, Bogdan G. *Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit: A Contribution to the Study of the Book of Revelation's Wirkungsgeschichte*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 2008 (pg. 178)

⁴¹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Kings 1 6.27)

⁴² *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Acts 1.10)

⁴³ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Hebrews13. 2)

⁴⁴ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Revelations 12.7)

of angels in mind, the portrayal of angels in horror films becomes one of interest. Although, some horror films are exact in the way one would expect angels to be shown, there may be some films where angels are good, and the demons are bad. Some writers have completely flipped this concept on its head and the villains that are portrayed in these films are the very angels themselves. Considering this, it begs the question as to how these films were able to create countless iterations of angels that differs from the status quo that we have come to learn about.

By analysing the relationship between horror and religion seen in the media, this chapter has shown that filmmakers have adapted the horror genre so that it can give an audience an abundance of reactions. It can be unsettling and visually terrifying for a viewer to witness while also spiking them with enjoyment, making it one of the most popular film genres that the world knows. However, the research into angels clearly illustrates that angels are perceived in a more positive light as they have an exact role to play in the hierarchy at the behest of God, but it also raises the question further of the sudden change that filmmakers have taken in their films. It is obvious that there is an imbalance within the relationship between horror and religion as it is not entirely clear whether horror film writers have taken the time to commence their own research on angels in order to create a compelling world for the piece they wish to make or if they are taking advantage of the religious community to profit off their faith. The purpose of this thesis is to answer that question in order to see how well that image holds up with the purpose of deep analysis.

Chapter 2: Biblical Angels within Horror

2.1 Introduction

This chapter undertakes a narrative study of well-known angels in the bible such as Gabriel and Lucifer. The topic of angels is one shrouded in mystery since there is a common iteration that is to be expected within the media. By analysing how they are described in scripture, an understanding of their true identity will be revealed. These identities will then be compared to the angels based on them in the films *Constantine* (2005) by Francis Lawrence and *The Prophecy* (1995) by Gregory Widon to see if filmmakers have done their due diligence in researching these angels for their films.

Through this investigation, it was discovered that the archangels are the most well-known despite being of a lower rank. These angels are the only ones that are not addressed by their title and are instead called by their given name. This is important as it means they can directly communicate the word of God to the people. Overall, seven Archangels have been mentioned across every religious text and were awarded God's "seven trumpets".⁴⁵ However, only three of these angels have been mentioned by name specifically in the bible. These Angels include Michael, Raphael, and most importantly for this research, Gabriel.

2.2 Angels by name: Gabriel and Lucifer

In the bible, every big announcement that has been made in the bible has been given by one of these angels but not everyone is an archangel according to Christianity. Archangels refers to a chief angel or one in charge. This position is taken up the Archangel Michael who is notably known as "the Lord Michael, Prince of the Heavenly Host, and His Workers in the Kingdom".⁴⁶ Throughout the bible, he is referred to as the Archangel Michael but not once has Gabriel been noted as one and is imply just a cog in Michael's machine.

His name only comes up three times in the bible. The first instance is in the book of Daniel where he starts appearing before Daniel. At first, he was "afraid"⁴⁷ and fell to his knees before him. While in his presence, he "fainted"⁴⁸ and felt unwell after his visits. It is peculiar how Daniel felt sick after being visited by Gabriel since angels are meant to be these ethereal deities that bring light. The second instance and third both happen in the book of St. Luke. In chapter 1, he appears before Zacharias to tell him that his wife, Elizabeth will give birth to a son called John who would later become John the Baptist. At first, he was scared as "fear fell upon him"⁴⁹ and the third instance he meets with a virgin by the name of Mary to tell her she will give birth to the son of God at which she also felt "troubled"⁵⁰ at the sight of Gabriel. This begs the question as to what Gabriel really looks like in biblical text since everyone seems to be scared or sick at first upon meeting. It might suggest that he might not look as perfect as once thought and based on the reactions presented, it is possible that he could be hideous.



Fig 6: Painting of The Archangels by 'Master of Pratovecchio' (1450)

⁴⁵ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Revelation 8.2)

⁴⁶ Printz, Thomas. *Beloved Archangel Michael: His Work and His Helpers*. New York: New Age Church of the Christ Publication, 1953, (pg. 7)

⁴⁷ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Daniel 7.17)

⁴⁸ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Daniel, 7.27)

⁴⁹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Luke 1:12)

⁵⁰ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Luke 1.29)

Also, upon closer inspection it becomes evident that Gabriel is not always great, showing both complex morality and emotions like a human being. For instance, Gabriel refuses to give Mary a choice when it comes to conceiving the birth of God's son in the book of Luke with his use of "shalt"⁵¹, demonstrating his forthright spirit. Also, when delivering God's message to Daniel in the book of *Daniel*, Gabriel revealed the hard truth that "the end of time, shall be the vision"⁵², essentially scaring him with the concept of world destruction if he does not heed the word of God. Likewise, Gabriel was one of the angels that fought in the "war of heaven"⁵³, alongside Michael. This suggests that Gabriel has a dominating presence with a purpose to serve and destroy those that may want to challenge that. These moments contest the idea that although Gabriel can be considered good, he presents himself more as a complicated character with complex feelings.

Moreover, there is an additional type of angel that is not part of the Hierarchy of angels. These angels are known as fallen angels. Fallen angels are considered "The bad angels"⁵⁴ that have fallen from grace. The most notable Fallen angel to come from the bible is the story of Lucifer. Before he fell, Lucifer was considered a "bright star shining in heaven"⁵⁵. This perception puts his presence in an immensely positive light since he was praised so highly by those around him. Similarly, when he was still an archangel, God established the succession of the archangels as "Michael, Lucifer, Raphael, and Gabriel"⁵⁶, showcasing that he was the second-in-command.



Fig 7: 'Fallen Angel' by Alexandre Cabanel (1847)

It is said that this all changed in the tale of Adam and Eve. In the story, the snake is "popularly equated with the Devil"⁵⁷ based on its evil nature. Many consider this moment to be the first appearance of Lucifer before he became Satan as it is commonly believed that Satan and Lucifer are the same person. However, according to John Day, this was a "later identification and not the original meaning"⁵⁸ as there was no consensus as to who the original snake was meant to be. The snake is a symbol, and it symbolizes greed since Eve wanted more than what God offered her so there is no exact interpretation as to who the snake was meant to be.

Furthermore, this is hard to prove as Lucifer appears during the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, depicting his fall from grace which happens sometime after the book of Genesis. In this story, Lucifer became king of a city called Babylon which became "the glory of kingdoms".⁵⁹ However, this wasn't enough for him and in a fit of pride, he wished to "ascend into heaven"⁶⁰ and "exalt"⁶¹ the throne of God for himself. This desire banished him from the heavens and anybody that followed him, fell with him.

⁵¹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Luke 1.31)

⁵² *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Daniel 8.17)

⁵³ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Revelation 12.7)

⁵⁴ Prophet, Elizabeth Clare. *Fallen Angels and the Origins of Evil*, Montana: The Summit Lighthouse, May 15th, 2009 (pg.18)

⁵⁵ *Fallen angel demonology Explained in Obsessive Detail* YouTube, uploaded by Mr. Mythos, Nov 5, 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXcUDMn64Lw&ab_

⁵⁶ Berry, Violet Joan. *A Study on Angels*. Arizona: Grand Canyon University, Oct. 2019 (pg. 2)

⁵⁷ Day, John. *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1-11*. London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013, (Pg. 35)

⁵⁸ Day, John. *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1-11*. London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013, (Pg. 35)

⁵⁹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Isaiah 13.19)

⁶⁰ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Isaiah 14.13)

⁶¹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Isaiah 14.13)

The assumption could be made that this incident is what made him become Satan. However, there is no definitive moment in the bible where Lucifer is cursed to become a different individual. Narratively, they are two different people. This begs the question if Lucifer is completely evil since he is never mentioned again after he is punished. To that end, it would suggest that if a film was made featuring these characters, it would not be completely far-fetched to write a film in this particular way as there is some circumstantial evidence to suggest a plot with an evil angel could be possible.

2.3 Representation in film

Constantine (2005) is a DC Film directed by Francis Lawrence. The film is about Detective Angela (Rachel Weisz) who enlists the help of the Exorcist known as Constantine (Keanu Reeves) to help her uncover the mysteries surrounding her twin sister's death as she does not believe she committed suicide. As they explore further, they realize that her twin did in fact commit suicide but only so she would not be possessed by Mammon who is Lucifers son. Mammon wishes to claim earth in his father's name and to do so, he needed a psychic which is someone who can see demonic entities. After her death, he intends to use Angela now. The hunt begins and Angela gets kidnapped by a demonic entity. Constantine uses magic vigils tattooed into his skin to reveal the entity. It turns out this entity was none other than the angel Gabriel.



Fig 8: Constantine Film Poster (2005)

When asked why he did this, he responded that he was dissatisfied with the quality of humans that were entering heaven out of God's favoritism. He believed it was his mission to bring hell on earth so that those that do survive will become worthy of God's love through their faith in the lord. Afterwards, he tosses Constantine away and prepares to pierce Angelas chest with a spear to release Mammon. As a last-ditch effort, Constantine slits his wrists to kill himself and he is faced with Lucifer. He convinces his son to stop and burns away Gabriels wings as God has now abandoned him.

Although, the story concept of a human getting possessed by the son of Satan does not adhere to the bible, the inspiration behind the idea is not entirely far-fetched. In the film, Gabriel aimed only to release hell on earth so that people may succumb to their faith and run into God's arms which if one reads the bible, is the exact job of an angel to begin with. Angels act as servants in the presence of the lord and spread his love to the far corners of the world. In David Fontanas book, *the secret language of symbols*, he states that war is accomplished for a "cleansing process or the victory of good vs evil".⁶² This means that Gabriel was doing his job but just in a very unorthodox manner.

In addition, there have been plenty of instances in the bible where mass genocide has been committed at the behest of God in the Old Testament. One of the most notable examples being when God used his "righteous judgement"⁶³ against the Canaanites and ordered the Israelites to slaughter them in fear that by having his people around them they will "sin against the LORD"⁶⁴. For this reason, it seems hypocritical that Gabriel should be cast out of heaven if the films ending is to be questioned with its realism. The bible recounts a

⁶² Fontana, David. *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols Their Meanings,* London: DBP, 1993. (pg. 72)

⁶³ Coulter, Dr. Paul B. *Old Testament Mass Killings.* Belfast: Belfast Bible College, 2010.

⁶⁴ *Holy Bible.* King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Deuteronomy 20.18)

number of events where hundreds of people suffer for the sake of the lord and it seems illogical to put this innocent ideal on Gabriel, especially considering he is not perfectly described in the bible either.

Moreover, despite Gabriel being a male name, the director decided to cast a woman as the titular angel. When Tilda Swinton, Gabriel's actor was asked about this in an interview for the New York times, she responded that the angel in question is "amorphous and not strictly human."⁶⁵ This fact makes sense as angels do not possess fluid bodies and are not bound by the scientific notion of sex. In short, angels do not have genders so there is no cause to even question the fact Gabriel was made androgynous in the film.



Fig 9: Film still, Tilda Swinton as *Gabriel*

Also, although Gabriel is not described as a fallen angel in the bible, the aftermath of what happened in the film is the path in which a fallen angel takes. Their wings get clipped, and they can no longer go back to heaven as they will just fall without their wings. Swinton's Gabriel has his wings chopped off and starts to experience human emotions, feeling pain for the first time. It is a direct correlation to the similarities in Lucifer's story which the filmmakers took note of to make sure they had the details right.

Finally, in this film, Lucifer is the one to save the day. He appears near the end of the film after Constantine kills himself so that he can take him away since suicide is a sin. When Constantine sees him, he comes into view wearing a white suit. This shows that he is still possesses some angelic power as white is more associated with heaven. Furthermore, it is surprising how he did not join Mammon in his sinister plot considering he is meant to be 'evil'. Instead, he ignores it until Constantine slits his wrists, providing him an opportunity to come up to the surface. It makes no sense that he would be a bystander in this situation if he is perceived as the Devil. Constantine does take advantage of him and tells him Mammon's plans, at which point, he does get involved as he does not want Mammon to have more power than him. However, he could have easily taken control of the plan, claiming victory for himself. Also, he could have taken Constantine since he was dying. Yet, he does neither of these things. He decided to leave earth alone and lets Constantine continue to live. This complicates his character since he acted as the hero. This illustrates that there is another side to his character, showing he is more than his fallen status.



Fig 10: Film still, Peter Stormare as *Lucifer*

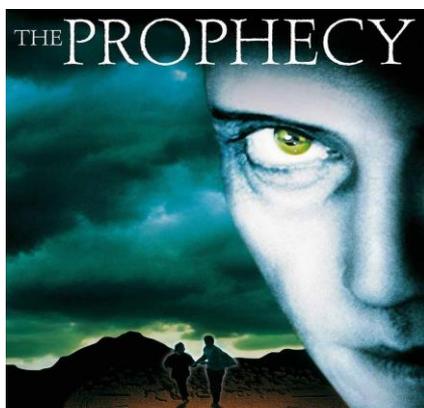


Fig 11: The Prophecy Film Poster (1995)

The Prophecy (1995) is horror-thriller film directed by Gregory Widen. This film is about an ongoing war between angels. Some of the angels are tired of being God's puppets and wish to break free. To do this they wish to wipe out humanity by finding the darkest soul on earth. The angel, Simon (Eric Stoltz) who remains on God's side wishes for this not to happen and through the help of a detective that lost his faith, he manages to find the deceased body of Colonel Hawthorne. Simon manages to steal the soul before anyone can get to it but when Gabriel (Christopher Walken) makes his appearance on Earth, Simon must hide the soul quickly. He hides out in a school where he finds a young girl called Mary.

⁶⁵Lawrence, Francis. *Constantine - Q&A with Tilda Swinton*, New York Times, 6 Feb. 2005.

Knowing that Gabriel would not expect to find the spirit in a child, he kisses Mary and pushes the spirit into her.

Now instead of finding the elusive 'prophecy', everyone must protect the child from the clutches of Gabriel before it is too late. Near the end of the film, Mary gets taken to a native American site to get exorcised. During this, Lucifer appears and explains that he doesn't want Gabriel to go through with his plan as it would mean that heaven would turn into another hell which Lucifer does not want so he kills him.

This film acts as an additional chapter to the bible. This is shown through the use of an ancient bible that's prominent at the start of the film. This piece of scripture states that there is a mysterious 23rd chapter to the book of *Revelation* which is the last book in the bible. In this new 'chapter', angels begin to grow tired of God's favouritism towards humans and wish to destroy that love since they believe it is detracting. This enacts a second war to take place in heaven. This illustrates that the narrative behind this film can be seen as imaginative, but any background given as part of that narrative is a direct correlation with that of the bible.

In an interview with CNN upon the film's release, Christopher Walken, Gabriel's actor was asked what he thought of the character and responded that he is just "jealous of people that took his place in the hierarchy"⁶⁶. He is not an inherently evil character since he is just fighting to have his livelihood back. As discussed, the very purpose of an angel is to act as a messenger which means that their livelihood is dictated by God. With this in mind, it is not hard to believe that a situation could come to be considering that the role of a fallen angel exists at all. Every fallen angel came from being prideful and questioning that love initially. With this in mind, this situation could easily be seen as the second heavenly war as it is a mirror reflection of one but with a modern setting.



Fig 12: Film still, Christopher Walken as *Gabriel*

Moreover, although Gabriel is most notably known for bringing news to God's subjects such as the story of Jesus' birth, it is important to remember that he is still one of God's angels. As discussed earlier, the bible has a number of incidences where people have been slaughtered for the sake of God's will like the story of the Canaanites. This means that if God ever needed to have someone killed, he would send an angel. This is further showcased in this film as Gabriel has no remorse when killing individuals in his film as if his very existence allowed him to. Although not mentioned specifically by name, in the book of revelation, Michael fought alongside his angels in the battle against Lucifer which included Gabriel. This showcases his level of strength and the power he holds that the film captures.

Upon first glance, it could be stated that this film is entirely false as Lucifer is Satan and would no longer be classed as an Angel. However, not once during the bible does it explicitly say that Lucifer is Satan. Lucifer is mentioned in the story of the Babylon King, and he is only confirmed to be a fallen angel as he was addressed as such by Isaiah who said, "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star!"⁶⁷ but from then on, he is never mentioned again in that story. And then, in the book of Luke, one of Jesus's disciples says he watched Satan fall "like lightning from heaven"⁶⁸ and the book of Luke is in the New Testament so there is no way that the two stories could coincide together. As said by the Alaska research firm, this is more of an "anagogical interpretation"⁶⁹ instead of it being factually based. In addition, Lucifer is referred to as an angel within this film. There is only one point where he is

⁶⁶ Widen, Gregory, director. *The Prophecy* Interview. Dimension Films, 1995.

⁶⁷ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Isaiah 14.12)

⁶⁸ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Luke 10.18)

⁶⁹ *The Lucifer Myth*. Alaska Research Firm, 2016

addressed as 'the devil'. However, unlike Satan, the term 'the devil' can also be used as a colloquialism for the term evil. This use of the term also came from one of the non-religious characters that would not be aware of the context of the bible.

Despite this, his purpose for the narrative is to act as a savior. Near the end of the film, he appears and tells the main characters that he is here to help them. He does not wish for heaven to turn into another hell since only he can hold that hellish power, according to him. With no other choice, the main characters agree. He assists in the ritual to banish the soul and he devours Gabriel's heart when he comes to disrupt it. After this, he asks if the main characters want to join him. They decided to stay on earth, and he respects their wishes. He could have easily taken them as his rewards for defeating Gabriel but instead, he decided to take his small victory and goes home. With this in mind, it is perfectly possible for Lucifer to be called an angel that posses some form of morality.



Fig 13: Film still, Viggo Mortensen as *Lucifer*

Narratively, the well-known angels in the bible such as Gabriel and Lucifer have plenty of additional elements to their character that would not be thought of at first. It was discovered that Gabriel does not fit the perception of an innocent angel. This is shown when he made individuals like Mary and Daniel fearful upon first meeting. Moreover, his presence is more forthright in the bible which displays his complex relationship with power. This is further backed up with the fact that he participated in the heavenly war, alongside Michael. This shows that he is a force of nature as he was trained to fight for God at his command. In *Constantine* (2005), Gabriel is still acting upon the will of God as he just wishes to cleanse the earth of evil. From this, it is clear that he still sees himself as one of his messengers. Also, there is no clear form for an angel since they are not human. This means that an Angel can take on any form they wish so his gender does not matter. In *The Prophecy* (1995), Gabriel believes he is acting from a place of good conscience. From his perspective, he is fighting to have his place back in heaven since he has been led to believe this fact by God. Additionally, it is hypocritical to call what either of these iterations are doing as evil since there are a number of incidents in the bible where mass genocide is committed. This includes the story of the Canaanites. In addition, it was uncovered that Lucifer is not Satan. In the bible, Lucifer is classed as a fallen angel, but it is never stated that he is the same person as the Devil. And within those stories, he is never brought up again after he falls from heaven. This makes his character more complex as he may not be completely evil. In *Constantine* (2005) and *The Prophecy* (1995), he is the one to save the day from Lucifer's clutches. Both of them could have joined Gabriel's side but instead they decided to stop him. In short, this new information showcases that filmmakers have captured a different side to these characters that is reflective of the bible.

Chapter 3: Angels vs Modern media

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will be used to examine the perception of angels over the last millennia by conducting a visual investigation using paintings from different points in history that feature an angel. By comparing and contrasting these angelic pieces, a greater understanding can be made on how people viewed them from the past. These interpretations can then be compared with angels that have been seen within media such as, *Midnight mass* (2021) by Mike Flanagan and *A dark song* (2016) by Liam Gavin to see if these filmmakers have adapted their screenplays to fit the biblical view.

Art as a medium has been around for thousands of years with the earliest forms of it being done by cavemen. It provides the wider world with an opportunity to learn different ways of thinking and to discover who we are in comparison to our ancestors. In addition, it is a fulfilling way to gain insight into “the beliefs and preoccupations of their time”⁷⁰. With this in mind, art can be a valuable way to recognize how different cultures expressed their religious beliefs at the time.

In order to understand what an angel looks like; these older works of art need to be looked at to see if these visions that artists have attempted to encapsulate match those found in the horror genre today. These comparisons will showcase whether or not there is a religious understanding that can be seen here.

3.2 Angels in paintings: visual analysis

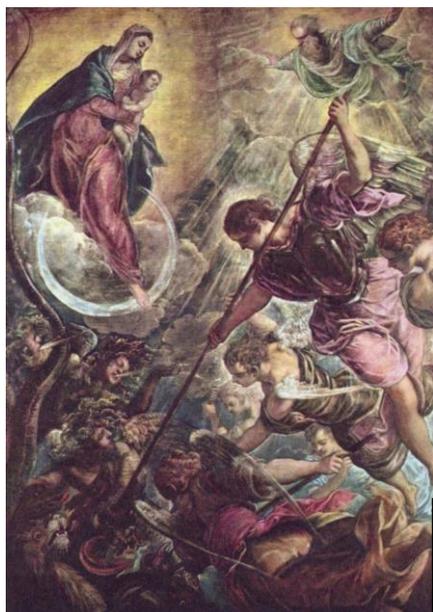


Fig 14: ‘*The Battle of the Archangel Michael with Satan*’ by Jacopo Tintoretto. (1592)

The Battle of the Archangel Michael with Satan (1592) is an older painting by Jacopo Tintoretto. This painting is based on the story in the book of Revelation when God sends forth his army his army of angels to fight Satan or “the dragon”⁷¹ as he is referred to and his hoard of demons. In this painting, Archangel Michael comes “rushing in as upon a whirlwind”⁷² as he surrounds his fellow archangels, such as Gabriel and some lesser angels.

⁷⁰ Fontana, David. *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols Their Meanings*, , London: DBP, 1993 (pg. 40)

⁷¹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Revelation 12.7)

⁷² Jeeves, Mary Angela. *The Archangels: Michael, Gabriel & Raphael*, London: A.H. Stockwell, 1950 (pg. 13)

His stance is one of interest as he comes down in a martial pose as he strikes down Satan with long, sharp spear with his white wings spread out. Angels are considered to be peaceful beings so the fact, he is purposely aiming straight to kill is the very opposite of a peaceful act.

Secondly, the virgin Mary looks down contented at the scene before her. This suggests there may be a sense of normality to this scene as if the appearance of how the angels is presented, does not strike her as unnatural. Also, the composition in this is mesmerizing as it does not have a coherent focal point and instead, it transitions from light to dark. Gillian Rose, author of *Visual methodologies* (2016) states that light can be used in “creating mood of atmosphere”⁷³, this idea allows for a transition that is seen in the painting as it transitions the light representing the good to the dark representing the bad.



Fig 15: ‘The Angel of the lord visits Gideon’ by Howard David Johnson. (2017)

The Angel of the lord visits Gideon (2017) is a modern painting by Howard David Johnson. This painting is based on the story in the book of Judges where an angel appears before Gideon at “under an oak which was in Ophrah”⁷⁴, to tell him that the lord commands him to save Israel. The angel stands before him wearing a suit of armour, carrying a metal shield and a long spear. His presence is one of power as he stands completely straight in front of Gideon. In addition, the painting is quite dark but Gabriel shines through, both metaphorically as he is standing in the focal point of the shot but also physically as there is a literal glow around his head, leading our eyes directly towards him as he is the most important character in the painting.

When Gideon first meets him, his first instinct is to bow before him. This action further illustrates Gabriel being in a position of power. It is captivating how angels are always perceived wearing white but, in this painting, the colours in Gabriel’s clothes are muted but Gideon’s are whiter. Gillian Rose also states that colour can be used to “stress certain elements”⁷⁵. It begs the question as to who is purer between them as logically, you’d say the angel, but Gideon is not an angel. Afterwards, Gabriel lights a fire beside him. In Greek mythology, fire is considered a formidable weapon, symbolizing the “courage needed to challenge”⁷⁶, further illustrating the strength of angel as he commands Gideon.

⁷³ Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Material 4th Edition*, London: Sage Publishers, 2016, (pg. 79)

⁷⁴ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Judges 6.11)

⁷⁵ Rose, Gillian.; *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials 4th Edition*, London, Sage Publishers, 2016 (pg. 65)

⁷⁶ Fontana, David. *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols Their Meanings*, London: DBP, 1993, (pg. 111)

Both these works of art, despite being completed in different points of time showcase an angel in a scarily influential presence. This is a stark comparison to the image visualized in a person's mind. The reality is that creatures aren't human, and their sole existence is spread God's word and to protect it. In order to protect that word, they must be prepared to fight.

3.2 Appearance within the media

Dark Song (2016) is an independent horror film directed by Liam Gavin. This story is about a grieving woman called Sophie that moves to rural Wales to live with Occultist, Joseph. She wishes to use his help in contacting her Guardian angel and asking them to help find her late son. The occultist explains that the ritual will take a number of months and during this time, they must not leave the house which she agrees to. The film details the trials and tribulations that they must face in order to summon the angel. During this, she accidentally kills the occultist and when she attempts to continue their work, she finds that all his notes with everything scratched out.



Fig 16: A Dark Song Film Poster (2016)

The angel does not appear until towards the end of the film. When the angel appears, it is over twenty feet tall and it cannot fit in the room, so it must kneel, using a sword to hold itself up. It dresses in gold, wearing a metal shoulder plate and helmet as if it was preparing for war. Although, this angel does not do anything out of the ordinary and is not inherently evil, the angel does not show up specifically to save Sophie and is just present because the ritual was complete by the end of the film, the key being the occultist's death. It was Sophie's own choice to ask for forgiveness but if Sophie continued to be set in her ways, the angel would have still acted upon her wish which was that she secretly wanted to find her son's killer so that he can be punished. This is obvious because of the outfit she wears and her usefulness with a sword, showing that it is willing to kill because if it did not possess these items, it would not be wearing armour or carrying a sword at all.



Fig 17: Film still of *Guardian angel*

Moreover, there is significant proof that this makes sense when compared to scripture. It has been stated by author, James D. Quiggle that angels possess an "immaterial spirit being"⁷⁷, meaning that they do not have physical bodies and will take on the mortal image when delivering their good news. However, when they do need to materialize a body, it is important they symbolically show "superhuman strength"⁷⁸ which is why they have been written to show that they wear armour and carry weapons.

This need to wear armour is explicitly shown in the book Exodus where it states that God will strike earth with "plagues or with the sword"⁷⁹ with Moses not making sacrifices for him. Since angels act on the word of God, this would be done for him. In addition, the

⁷⁷ James D. Quiggle, *Angelology, A true history of Angels*, California: CreateSpace Publishing, 14 Sept. 2017 (Pg 22.)

⁷⁸ Deffner, Dr. Donald L. *The Truth about Angels*, Illinois: Good News Publishers, 1996. (pg. 2)

⁷⁹ *Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Exodus 5.3)

Archangel Michael is known to lead in “righteous wars”⁸⁰, portraying himself as the defender of faith. This requires him to wear armour as a symbol of his strength

In the painting, *The Angel of the Lord visits Gideon*, the first thing that can be seen is the fact that both the angel in the painting and the unnamed guardian in this film are both wearing heavy armour breasted plates that glisten in their respective scenes. In the book, *Armour as a Symbolic Form* by Zdzislaw Zygulski Jr. a suit of armour is seen as sign of “power and royalty”⁸¹. Although neither of these angels are necessarily royal, they are both seen in powerful presences as they stand over their subjects with their heads held high above.



Fig 18: Midnight Mass Netflix Poster (2021)

Midnight mass (2021) is a Netflix mini-series directed by Mike Flanagan. One day, A new priest named Father Paul joins the island of Crockett after their previous priest falls ill. While he is on the island, unnatural miracles begin to occur to those that attend mass. Because of this, more and more people begin to attend. However, not everyone believes in these miracles and thinks there is a conspiracy taking place on the island. After some time, the audience begins to learn the truth. In Father Paul's monologue, he revealed that he is Monsignor Pruitt, made young again. He says that his severe dementia caused him to lose his way and he found himself going into a cave while on a trip to Damascus. It is here that the Monsignor gets attacked by an anonymous creature that bites into his neck and sucks his blood. The creature then feeds him his own blood which causes monsignor to younger. The

Monsignor perceives the creature to be an angel. Because of this act, he decides to take the creature home. It turns out that the priest was adding the angel's blood into the holy communion, forcing everyone to gain miracles. In the final episode, he introduces the angel to the island and instructs everyone to kill themselves so that they may experience the full potential of what they have been given. Trusting the miracles, the citizens kill themselves and are born again, craving the same thing the angel wanted from the monsignor, blood. Mass genocide is committed as they begin killing off the non-Christian members of the island. However, the ones who were part of the conspiracy begin to burn down every house and clip the angel's wings. That way they cannot leave the island and are forced to burn in the sunlight.

During the programme, it is never explicitly said if the creature is an angel. The term angel came about during episode 3 when it is revealed that Monsignor Pruitt is Father Paul when he recounts what happens to him and he calls the creature upon first meeting an angel. However, he was still in his older state when this happened where he suffered from severe dementia and was repeatedly called 'lost' when citizens refer to him. Because of this, it is hard to trust this initial assessment from him because of his deterred state of mind. Nevertheless, this creature does have angel-like wings, but they are not white, and they appear to be made from their skin which looks dishevelled. Also, it has dark eyes with small white dots, and it craves blood as if it was some kind of vampire. With this new frame of mind, it is clear that this particular creature is supernatural in nature.

Within the bible, angels are described differently to what we expect. One of the most bizarre descriptions of an angel in the bible is that of Cherubim which has “four faces and four wings”⁸² including an ox, eagle, lion, and a human face with a body wrapped in four

⁸⁰ Jeeves, Mary Angela. *The Archangels: Michael, Gabriel & Raphael*, London: A.H. Stockwell, 1950, (pg. 14)

⁸¹ Żygulski, Zdzisław II. “Armour as a symbolic form” Germany: *Waffen-und Kostümkunde*, , 1984 (pg. 79)

⁸²*Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Ezekiel 1.6)

wings. With this in mind, it is not out of the ordinary for an angel to look different to what we expect. In addition, Daniel was “afraid”⁸³ of Gabriel in the book of Daniel when he first looked at him. In context with the series, it is possible that angel presented is definitely an angel. This is further proven by the fact that the angel was allowed into Monsignor Pruitt’s church to enact their plan. In folklore culture, supernatural creatures such as vampires are barred from entering holy establishments because of their demonic presence on earth.

It is possible that the angel here could be a fallen angel that fell alongside Lucifer after the battle in heaven. It is never stated in the bible that fallen angels become demons so there is nothing to say that these particular angels just fell to earth. This is further shown in the bible as it states in the book of Jude that the punishment for fallen angels is that they are to wait in “in everlasting chains under darkness”⁸⁴ until their judgement day. In *Midnight mass*, the creature was trapped in a dark cave and could not leave as he would burn in the sunlight with no shelter as the cave was the only shelter in the desert so it would have defiantly died if it was not for Monsignor Pruitt.



Fig 19: Film still of ‘Angel’

In this painting, *The Battle of the Archangel Michael with Satan*, a light is cast upon the angel seen within the shot just like the angel is seen in *Midnight mass* (2021) as all the islanders praise for him. When a light is cast upon a character, this usually means that this particular character is in the focal point of the scene. However, in the context of religion, light symbolises the “eternal fight of good and evil”⁸⁵ which can be clearly seen in both pieces of media as there is a war depicted in the painting and there will be a fallout on the programme. In addition, these two angels are similar as they both mean harm. Michael intends to follow the word of God by defending heaven. The Angel in this film wishes to bring those together that believe in the miracle of Christ and share his gift with them, by sacrificing them. They wish to fulfil their mission in spreading God’s love even if it is through violence.

Overall, the appearance of these angels reflects the ones present in the painting studied. The paintings used for this study showcase characters that visually represent power. *The Angel of the lord visits Gideon* (2017) showcases the angel Gabriel visiting Gideon to tell him his faith. He stands tall, wearing a suit of armour. The appearance of this angel seems substantial in the research used for them since angels are known to be righteous warriors that defend God so the idea of them wearing armour and carrying weapons is made with good intentions in mind. This is further showcased in *A Dark Song* (2016) as the angel dresses in gold, wearing a metal shoulder plate and helmet as if it was preparing for war. This proved that it was willing to kill because if it did not have this appearance, it would not be wearing armour at all. *The Battle of the Archangel Michael with Satan* (1592) depicts Michael flying downwards as he strikes a spear through Satan’s chest as the virgin Mary watches in content. This showed a sense of regularity in his military role. In *Midnight mass*, it presents a fallout waiting to occur just like the one seen in the painting. This presents a similarity with both angels, showcasing they are one in the same. In short, this analyzation shows how filmmakers took the time to discuss the representation of angels while still being reflective of the bible.

⁸³*Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Daniel 8.17)

⁸⁴*Holy Bible*. King James Version, London: HarperCollins, 1611, (Jude 1.6)

⁸⁵ Fumić, Tea. *Light Symbolism in Art of Different Religions*, Croatia: University of Zagreb, 12 Dec. 2020

Conclusion

It is apparent that filmmakers have adapted the horror genre and provided an appealing reaction for an audience. These audiences can savor the grotesque nature featured and find enjoyment through that medium. This phenomenon has allowed horror to become a very prominent genre in the media.

In addition, the research into angels clearly illustrates that angels act as messengers of hope, peace, and protection for believers. Their presence is perceived in a more positive light as they have an exact role to play in the hierarchy at the behest of God. There are many diverse types of angels that all possess their own jobs within the hierarchy. In fact, we only know the names of three archangels as they are important in religious text. These angels being Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael as they are considered “saints”⁸⁶. Therefore, many other different forms have probably not been seen as it is not viewed as relevant to the word of God.

Additionally, they mirror the actions of demons and possess a heavenly presence, following the word of God as they do his bidding. Yet in horror films, angels are often painted as malevolent in horror genre. Horror angels, like their biblical counterparts, uphold the universal balance of right and wrong. However, they do so by punishing those who dare question that authority. This begged the question if filmmakers were adapting the divine status of angels for their own selfish gain.

On the contrary, upon examining scripture it was discovered that angels have an extensive background. For starters, Gabriel is often seen as a pure individual given his angelic status, yet he is titled as the ‘Angel of strength’ since he is also an entity of colossal authority and power. From his interactions with followers in the Bible, it was studied how he frequently frightens them with his appearance as shown by both Daniel and the virgin Mary’s reactions, suggesting he might have a more fearful impression.

Besides, Gabriel was one of the angels alongside Michael in the battle for heaven. This suggests that Gabriel has a dominating presence with a purpose to serve. These moments contest the idea that although Gabriel can be considered good, he is more complex than one would think. It is not difficult to see why some people may see him as being evil in certain contexts which is further shown with his presence in *Constantine* (2005) and *The Prophecy* (1995) as he has a strong presence in both of these films.

Furthermore, angels may unleash unearthly terror within the realm of heaven and upon humanity. This may be done in order to bring either salvation or damnation at the command of God. This fact can be clearly seen when God used his “righteous judgement”⁸⁷ to have mass groups of people slaughtered to protect his people from intermingling with them. This example is an idea of what can happen when divine power is wielded without morality or restraint.

Also, it was unearthed that there is not as much evidence stating that Lucifer is completely evil as it is commonly believed that Lucifer is the Devil but after researching, there is no instance in the bible that states that he is. In short, he never became a demon as it is not clarified. Once they have fallen, there is little mention of these divine beings ever again. For this reason, there can be some haunting versions of angels which will allow filmmakers to tap into that universal emotion that resonates with audiences from all levels of society. This allowed filmmakers to conceptualize Lucifer being a hero.

With this fact in mind, it is important to note that angels can take on any form and there is not one sole identification in order to determine what is an angel and what is not. Similarly, horror film angels often embody an element of terror, bringing fright and shock to

⁸⁶ North, Wyatt. *The Archangels*, Delaware: Eternal Chrysostom LLC, 2020, (pg. 15)

⁸⁷ Coulter, Dr. Paul B. *Old Testament Mass Killings*. Belfast: Belfast Bible College, 2010.

viewers in a striking way. This is proven by how angels are presented both in biblical text and accompanying art from this time. These angels are presented in a powerful ubiquity and are clothed in the armour of great warriors. Although they have been dressed in white, the belief of them being adorned with a white garment as a symbol of their purity all the time is untrue. This suggests they are not as pure as one would think. Also, they carry weapons in order to fight Satan. This idea that is displayed confirms that they are always ready for battle which sharply contrasts with the idea of them wanting to be peaceful creatures. This idea is then carried over in the films: *A Dark Song* (2016) and *Midnight mass* (2021) which allows the audience to see the true intended form of these beings.

This means that the ideas presented in the films studied are not as far-fetched for a filmmaker to produce. Each film studied provided a background that aligns with text found in the bible. It can be concluded that the dark representations of angels within the Horror genre are indeed reflective of actual depicted biblical angels and although they have been exaggerated slightly in an attempt to develop an interesting story for the viewer, it is evident that these deviations have been made in good thought and showcase an immense thought for the research taken. The films studied have provided an audience with the opportunity to explore the beguiling concept of Horror angels that can be backed up with assistance from the bible.

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