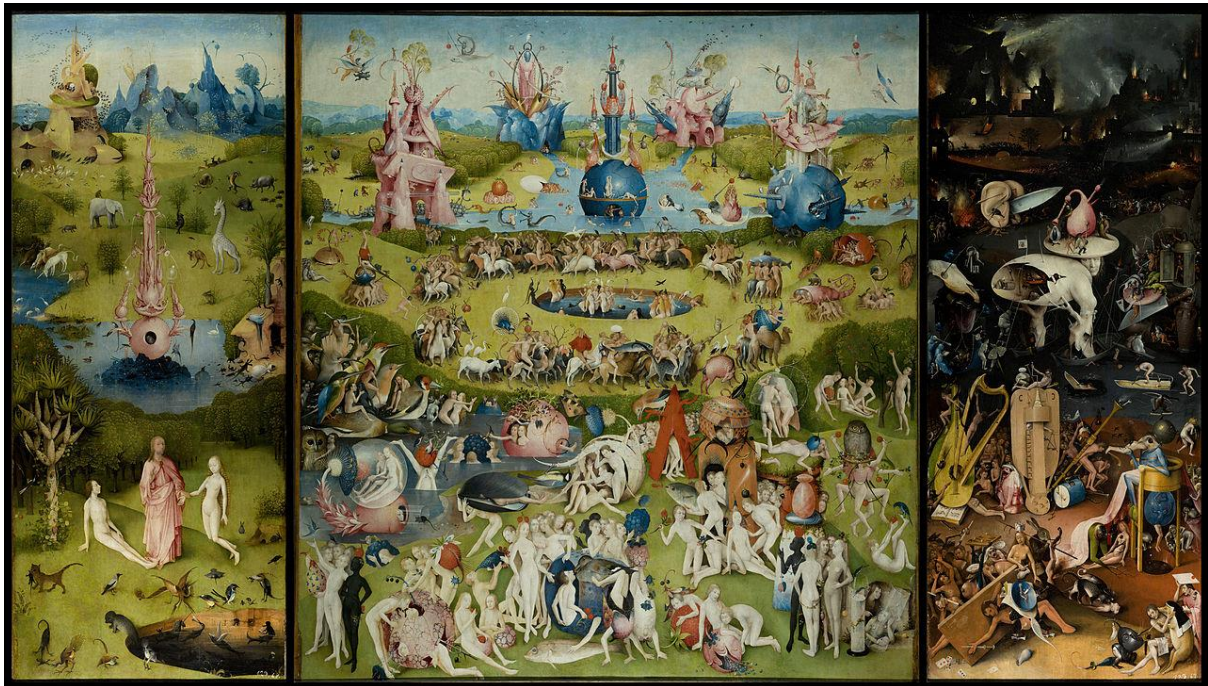


# 'BORN TO FLY UPWARD'

## Depictions of the afterlife in early modern drama and contemporary film



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# Abstract

This dissertation will investigate representations of the afterlife in both early modern drama and contemporary film and how it relates to our changes in Western belief systems. To do so I will be analysing three early modern plays and a variety of films from the last half a century. Drawing on elements of new historicism, I will explore how the notion of the afterlife has persisted in a secular age. The ultimate aim is a better understanding of where today's beliefs come from and how they still draw upon the influences of the past.

# EIP DRAMA: supervision record 2016-17

## Semester One

Student Name: Mathilde Martin		
Date of Tutorial	Length of time	Agreed areas for action
23/09/16	30 min	We agreed on the formulation of my question of research as well as the primary sources that I should look at. For next meeting I should start researching and making a basic plan.
09/11//16	30 min	We agreed on a rough structure and decided that this first semester would be better spent researching, structuring, and that we should meet once my first chapter is written.

## Semester Two

Student: Mathilde Martin		
Date of Tutorial	Length of time	Agreed areas for action
23/01/17	30 min	I had feedbacks on my first chapter and we agreed that I should bring the first 500 words of my second chapter in two weeks' time as well as my abstract.
06/02/17	30 min	We discussed the first 500 words of my 2 <sup>nd</sup> chapter and agreed on having it finished for our next meeting.
27/03/17	1 hour	I had feedbacks on my second chapter and we agreed on having the intro done by the following Friday.
03/03/17	30 min	We went through my intro then talked briefly about formatting and referencing before agreeing on sending my 3 <sup>rd</sup> chapter before 9am Monday.

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Thank you to my best friend Salomé. Knowing that you are always present for me, even thousands of kilometres apart, keeps me going.

Thank you to my Aunts Catherine, Laurence and Sylvie, for being the best family I could ask for.

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*For my Grandma.  
Kocham cię.*

# Introduction: 'But the soul flutters out like a dream and flies away'

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2011, my grandma was killed by cancer. The announcement of her illness, the hospital, her quick deterioration, and finally her death were all very sudden. One minute she was here and the next she was gone. We had always been close. From when I was four months old and my mum was being trained as a paediatric nurse, she would leave me in her care. Her eccentricity – or perhaps, more appropriately, her theatricality, inspired me into the arts. I loved her very much. Without her I felt as if I was left on my own. I felt empty, and in that emptiness rattled around questions forming in my mind. What now? Is that it; is she dead and gone, evaporated out of existence? Is there nothing else? Could she, as perhaps too many people tried to convince me, be watching over me? If so, from where? Is there such thing as an afterlife? And finally if there is, what does it consist of? Heaven, Hell and Purgatory? Or something outside the realms of our comprehension? Although death is one of the two only certainties we have in life – the second one being that we exist – we tend to ignore death until we are either confronted by it for ourselves or one of our loved ones.

After seeing the comforting depiction of spirits watching over their loved ones in *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1990) – incidentally just how everyone described it to me, though I didn't really appreciate the idea until seen onscreen – I slowly started looking more broadly at how the afterlife was presented in both early modern drama and films.

Debating what happens to us after we die has been a preoccupation for humanity ever since times as early as 4000 BC as evidenced by the Egyptian's obsession with gods and burial rites. It was a worldwide phenomenon as about 3000 years later the Greeks were heavily incorporating images of the afterlife in their texts starting with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and followed later with philosophers such as Plato.

*'Yield to the dead, forbear to strike the fallen;  
To slay the slain, is that a deed of valour?'* (1029-1030)

In ancient Greece, funeral rites were 'necessary if the person [was] to enter the land of the dead' (North, 1992:50). When Antigone's brother is killed we can then appreciate her urgency in wanting to ensure him a proper burial. Even more so this gives us a basis to



understand the insistence in the advisor's tone when he addresses Creon imploring that the funeral rites must be offered 'otherwise, the gods are offended and punish those responsible' (North, 1992:50). His failure to allow it would be tantamount to killing him over again; first his mortal body, and then again his immortal spirit, forbidden from finding peace in the underworld.

We can observe from literature and archaeology that the Greeks believed that when we die something of us survives: the *psyche*. As Helen F. North suggests in her chapter *Death and the Afterlife in Greek Tragedy and Plato*, the *psyche* is 'roughly "soul," but not really equivalent to our word at any period; sometimes "shade" is a less confusing translation. [...] Another term is the post-Homeric *daimon*("spirit").' (North, 1992:49).

As we first observe in Aristophane's *Frogs* 'the placing of an obol between the teeth of the deceased as payment to Charon' (Garland, 2001:23) was fundamental for a shade to be ferried across the rivers Styx and Acheron to the realm of the dead. Once in the House of Hades – Zeus' brother who ruled the underworld with his wife Persephone – the souls are carefully examined 'naked and indelibly marked by the actions performed in life, the wicked are sent to Tartarus, where if they are curable, they endure therapeutic pains or, if incurable, they suffer exemplary punishment as a deterrent to others. The good are sent to the Isles of the Blessed' (North, 1992:60). It would not be far-fetched to assume that Creon, for going against the gods' laws, would be sent to Tartarus where he would be punished.

After the Greeks – once Christianity became the widespread religion in western cultures – the 'popular beliefs about heaven and hell developed, particularly through the Middle Ages, with their increasingly vivid imagery' (Obayashi, 1992:114). Dante – who lived between 1265-1321 – is most probably the widest recognised writer of that time to have depicted the afterlife in such a detailed manner (fig 1: Flynn, 2011, [Picture]).

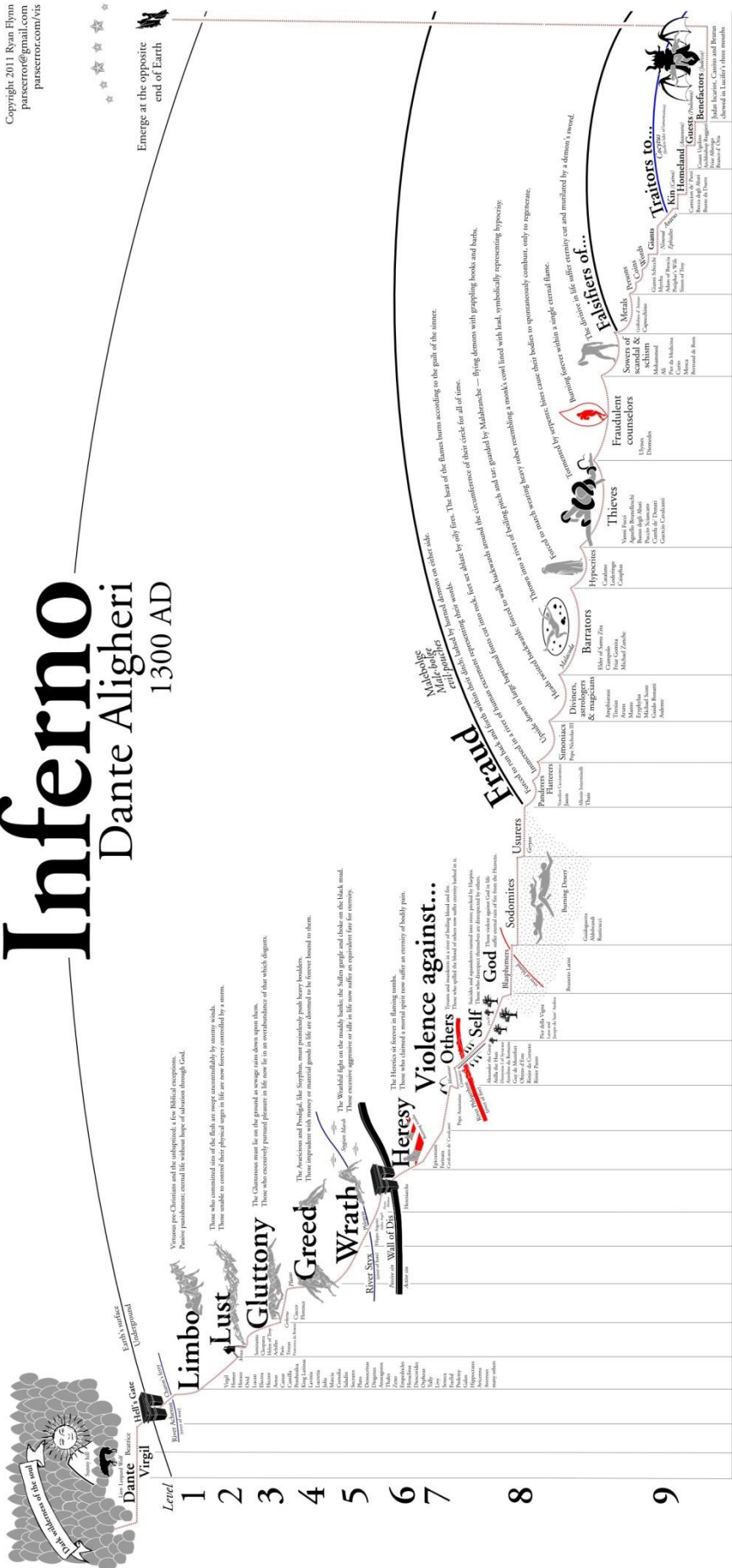
We can note a few connections to Greek belief systems, the most apparent one being the idea that sinners are punished. The major difference however, is the fact that they are punished by degrees depending on their crimes during mortal life. A lustful individual, for example, wouldn't therefore be treated with the same intensity as a greedy one. Another common point to the Greek's beliefs – in addition to the River Styx which in Dante's version of Hell separates the wrathful from the heretics – is the fact that 'the river Acheron separates the Vestibule from Hell proper. All the souls of the damned gather by its bank to be ferried across by Charon' (Jacoff, 2007:71).

# Inferno

## Dante Alighieri

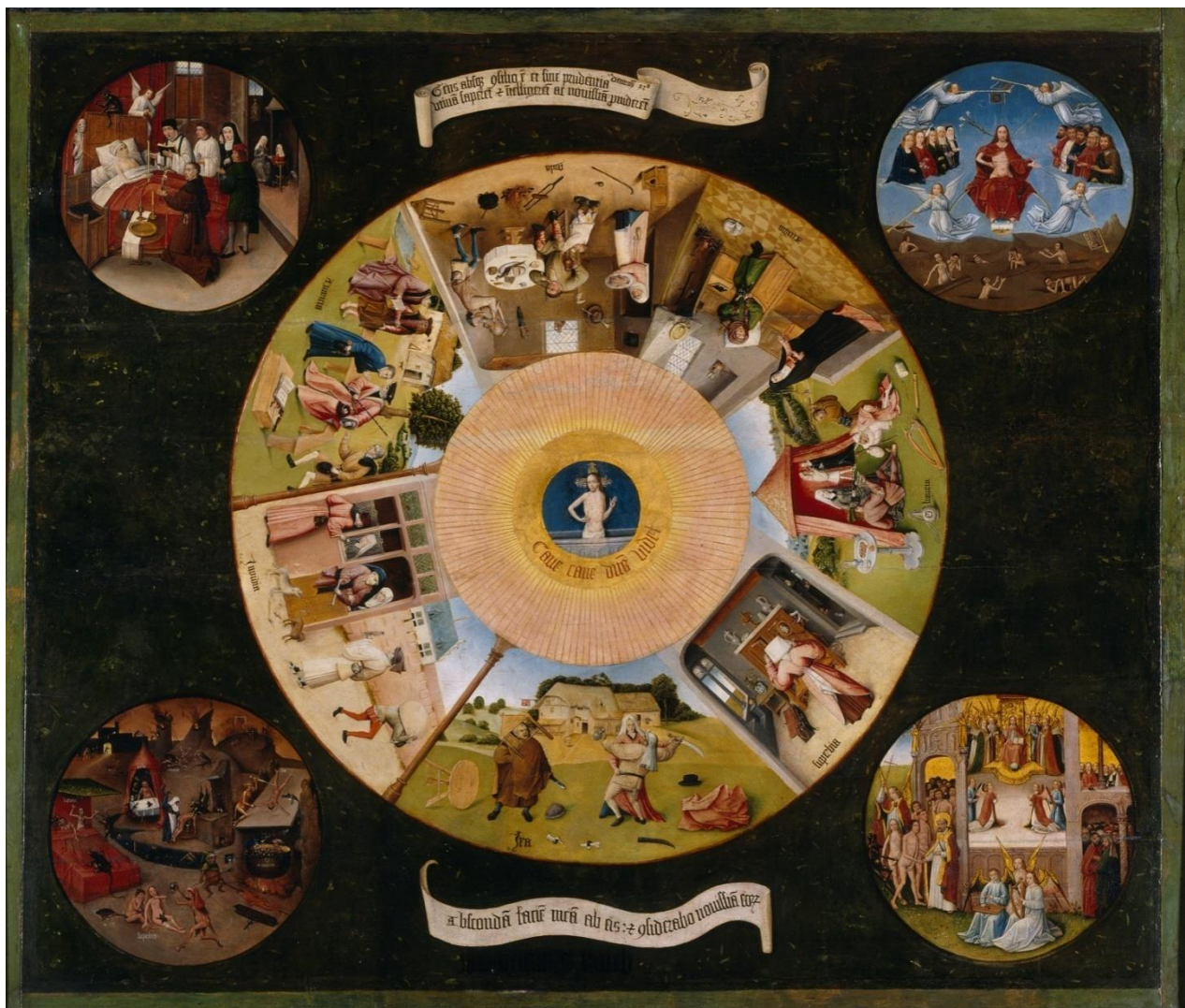
### 1300 AD

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To summarize Obayashi’s words in *Death and the Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, after the Roman Catholic Church institutionalised Purgatory – a third realm where venial sins could be cleansed – it began to take advantage of people’s faith who would then offer masses for their own souls as well as the souls of their deceased loved ones (Obayashi, 1992:117). To maintain this sale of indulgence it wasn’t uncommon for them to commission an artist to represent the eternal torment that one would be subject to in Hell. Bosch, ‘a pious member of the Catholic church in ‘s-Hertogenbosch’ (Snyder, 1980:35) is one of those artist. His conception of the afterlife differs little from those of his contemporaries and his paintings are, as ‘Sigüenza wrote, “[...] painted satires on the sins and ravings of man” ’ (Snyder, 1980:10-11).

‘An example of Bosch’s moralizing paintings is the unusual *Tabletop of the Deadly Sins* in the Prado with a huge circular “Eye of Christ” where the seven major vices are represented in the outer cornea surrounding the figure of Christ in the pupil’ (Snyder, 1980:14). (fig2)



(fig 2: Bosch, 1485, [Painting])

Keeping in mind the context of this painting, the inscription on the pupil, ‘Beware, Beware, the Lord Sees’ feels like a threat, or rather a reminder that your actions on earth will determine your fate in the afterlife. It strongly suggests that a life of sin will lead you – after receiving the Last Rites – to be damned and receive punishments in Hell as opposed to being part of the blessed and going to Heaven as presented in the four corners of the painting. We can say of both his paintings – like *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1515), *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (1485), etc – and the popular literature of Bosch’s day, that it ‘bemoaned the wretched fate of man inflicting on the reader the anguish of guilt by describing the terrors of Hell’ (Snyder, 1980:33).

Whilst researching this subject I noticed that the majority of academic books dealing with religion focus on one particular time period and very few actually make links from the past to the present. Even less make the link with plays and/or contemporary films. This has left something of a vacuum for me to fill in. Through this dissertation I then aim to understand the representation of the after-life in both early modern drama and contemporary film and how it relates – or doesn’t – to our changes in western beliefs since those laid down by Bosch, Dante and the Greeks.

Drawing on elements of new historicism and using the analyses of contemporary films and early modern plays, I will explore how the notion of the after-life has persisted in a secular age. The ultimate aim is a better understanding of where today’s beliefs come from and how they still draw upon the influences of the past.

To do so, I will firstly focus on the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras and the opposition between Catholics and Protestants, with reference to *Hamlet*, *The Duchess Of Malfi* and *Doctor Faustus*. I will then move on to explore the last 50 years of contemporary drama with *Ghost*, *What Dreams May Come*, *The Lovely Bones* and *Truly, Madly, Deeply* and bring into consideration the concept of a more comforting afterlife. Finally I will look at the horror movie genre and their presentation of a darker and more threatening vision of life after death, with *The Exorcist*, *The Conjuring 2*, *Poltergeist*, and the *Insidious* Franchise.

# 'I did not die, and yet I lost life's breath':

## A study of the afterlife as presented in early modern drama

The early modern period is defined from the end of the sixteenth century up to the mid-seventeenth century, when Elizabeth I (1558-1603) followed by James I (1603-1625) made Protestantism the dominant religion in England.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, the 'vivid imageries' (Obayashi, 1992:114) and beliefs about Heaven and Hell became more and more important during the Middle Ages, taking their roots in the Old and New Testaments. Those images are still of great significance during the early modern period as seen in Milton's *Paradise Lost*; with Dante's *Divine Comedy* they are 'the definitive literary representations of the widespread beliefs about hell, established enough to find their way into the teachings of the church' (Obayashi, 1992:116). An example of it in early modern drama would be looking at the idea of Heaven and Hell as 'physically located [with] Heaven always up above and hell down below' (Obayashi, 1992:114): during the epilogue in *Doctor Faustus*, the Chorus enters and states that 'Faustus is gone. Regard his hellish fall' (Epilogue.4) implying that Hell is situated 'down below' (Obayashi, 1992:114). In the *Duchess of Malfi*, during the Duchess' dying speech, she says 'your able strength/Must pull down heaven upon me' (IV.2.222-223) locating Heaven above her. In that same scene she also tells Bosola that she does not fear death 'Knowing to meet such excellent company/Inth'other world?' (IV.2.203-204); this follows the description Obayashi makes of Heaven, a place where pain, sadness and other negative emotions are absent and where 'souls were to be reunited with those of all the loved ones who preceded them' (Obayashi, 1992:115).

'Hell evolved from the archaic concept of the underworld [...], called Sheol in the Hebrew scripture, [...] initially the place of all the dead, regardless of their moral worth' (Obayashi, 1992:116). Throughout the Middle Ages and continuing in the early modern period it was 'bifurcated into the realm of reward (heaven) and punishment (hell, Gehenna)' (Obayashi, 1992:116). Whereas 'Heaven is the realm of perfection[where] Humans are in the state in which God meant them to be in "creation in His own image", God-orientated and totally free of moral imperfections' (Obayashi, 1992:115), Hell is described as a place of torment and

punishment where ‘Sinners were to be cast into “outer darkness” with weeping and gnashing of teeth (see Matthew 25:30), or they are to be thrown into “eternal” (Matt. 25:41) or “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43), or even into a “lake that burns with fire and sulphur” (Rev. 21:8)’ (Obayashi, 1992:116). In *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus is aware of Hell’s never-ending torture and in his last soliloquy calls onto God to ‘Impose some end to my incessant pain/Let Faustus live in Hell a thousand years,/A hundred thousand, and at last be saved’ (V.2.102-104); Unfortunately there is no salvation for him. These images echo Dante’s *Inferno* where ‘eternal torments were administered by demons under the guidance of Satan, the ruler of the underworld’ (Jacoff, 2007:91) and where ‘Souls simply “rain down” into Hell following the natural inclination of their fallen bodies to gravitate towards sin’ (Jacoff, 2007:92) to end up in one of Dante’s nine circles of Hell. These ideas were very much present in an Elizabethan mind; In *Doctor Faustus* the seven deadly sins are used to convey the detraction from righteousness and are portrayed as physical entities which embody that which they describe:

I cannot read, and therefore wish all books were burnt. I am lean with seeing others eat. O, that there would come a famine through all the world, that all might die, and I live alone! Then thou shouldst see how fat I would be. But must thou sit and I stand? Come down, with a vengeance! (II.3.136-141)

In addition to this Faustus states ‘now I die eternally’ (V.2.4) before having his body torn to pieces and his soul dragged to Hell. This is a representation of all the torments that he has yet to face. This eternal suffering is what Hamlet dreads in his famous soliloquy wishing ‘To sleep: perchance to dream’ (III.1.65) and find infinite peace in Heaven as ‘it is the desired point of rest, offering an ‘end’ to all the sufferings of the restless and tormented self—‘a consummation devoutly to be wished’ (iii. i. 59-63)’ (Neil, 1997:217). Hamlet’s nightmare in this case would be a fall to Hell that ‘may prove only a false ending (lines 64-81)’ (Neil, 1997:217) and as it is discussed in *The Duchess of Malfi* ‘That’s the greatest torture souls feel in hell,/In hell: that they must live, and cannot die’ (IV.1.70-71). There is, however, evidence to suggest that Hamlet and Faustus might not be so assured in their faith. Certainly both shed doubts that the fundamentals of life after death they were taught might not have been the whole truth. Whilst ruminating on the release of death he questions:

But that the dread of something after death  
(The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns) puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have



Than fly to others that we know not of. (III.1.78-82)

Similarly if somewhat more overtly, Faustus declares ‘Come, I think hell’s a fable’ (II.1.132) and dismisses Mephistopheles by proclaiming ‘these are trifles and mere old wives’ tales’ (II.1.140). In doing so both have displayed an ounce of scepticism. For Hamlet this appears to be due to a fear of the unknown whereas ‘Faustus has decided, like an increasing number of sixteenth-century “empirics,” to adopt a sceptical attitude toward all assertions which his own experience has not proven true’ (Mebane, 1992:114-115). It can be assumed that the characters doubts are potentially heretically atheistic in their nature. Considering both their tragic fate it is not unreasonable to think that their lapse in faith would have been used to reinforce the fundamental wills of the Church.

According to Stevie Simkin: ‘[Faustus] is not an individual ‘character’, but an allegorical representation of sinful humankind’ (2006:13). The underlying meaning here is that men are natural sinners, however if there are, how could they ever be prepared to be in the presence of God? This is what Dan Brown answers in an essay part of *Beyond Death: Theological and Philosophical Reflections on Life After Death* by saying that this is what Purgatory was created for, ‘The doctrine thus had nothing to do with the notion of a second chance, but rather with purifying the individual from any evil that may still lie engrained within them’ (Brown, 1995:47). It was only between 1274 and 1439 that ‘the Roman Catholic Church gave it an official definition, though it did not go beyond the points that such a region exists and that prayer and merit-making are valid means to prepare for it’ (Obayashi, 1992:117). Obayashi continues on that point by saying that capital sins such as the seven deadly sins would still lead to damnation, but minor ones would now be cleansed in Purgatory until admission into Heaven (Obayashi, 1992:117).

During the early modern era however, as Elizabeth I and James I were Protestant, ‘The Church of Elizabeth denied the existence of Purgatory and considered its rejection of this essential part of Roman Catholic doctrine so important that one of the Articles of Religion specifically deals with it’ (McGee, 1987:27). Whereas Catholics believed in a salvation by work involving ‘praying, doing penance, and merit-making’ (Obayashi, 1992:117) Protestants following Martin Luther’s lead (1483-1546) ‘considered the Pauline interpretation of salvation as “justification by faith” to be the single most important teaching of the Bible’ (Obayashi, 1992:119). Dramatists and playwrights would have then to be controlled therefore

having their intellectual freedom diminished by being subject to censorship as: ‘Elizabethan plays had first to be submitted to censorship by a high-ranking member of the Church’ (McGee, 1987:24). An example of a dramatist in ‘whose works Purgatory is mentioned in a context which implies Protestant ridicule’ (McGee, 1987:38) is Marlowe. Indeed in *Doctor Faustus*, whilst Faustus is in Rome and rendered invisible by a robe given by Mephistopheles, he snatches the Pope’s meat and wine when the Cardinal of Lorraine says ‘My lord, it may be some ghost, newly crept out of purgatory, come to beg a pardon of your Holiness’ (III.1.73-74). For the Protestant audience at the time who didn’t believe in Purgatory, this was laughed at and taken as a joke. What’s more, in this same play it is important to notice that only one good entity appear to Faustus – the Good Angel – whereas evil entities are abundant: the Seven Deadly Sins, Lucifer, Mephistopheles and the Evil Angel. God can’t appear to him because he has to have faith. Instead he believes his faults are too great to be forgiven – even by God himself – therefore being guilty of the sin of Pride. This supports the Protestant belief of salvation by faith and their position that was, ‘as Dover Wilson says, ‘that ghosts, while occasionally they might be angels, were generally nothing but devils, who ‘assumed’ [...] the form of departed friends or relatives, in order to work bodily or spiritual harm upon those to whom they appeared’’ (McGee, 1987:27).

From there the question of *Hamlet*’s and *The Duchess of Malfi*’s ghost credibility raises. Indeed at the time a ghost in the drama ‘would have to have come from Hell if it were to conform to Christian doctrine and so satisfy the censor’ (McGee, 1987:41) however in both plays there are ambiguities concerning the ghost’s (or the echo’s) true motive. Taking the example of *Hamlet* first, even though Shakespeare wrote for a Protestant audience who didn’t believe in Purgatory and for whom Hell was the only explanation for this ghost, ‘Catholics present [...] would have agreed that the Ghost was evil’ (McGee, 1987:42) as it demanded revenge for its murder. The fact that it appeared first at midnight – which corresponds to the time Mephistopheles first appeared to Faustus in *Doctor Faustus* as well as the time Faustus was dragged down to hell – didn’t help perceiving this ghost as anything but evil as ‘in Shakespeare’s time feelings were more intense because the Devil himself could appear, so people believed’ (McGee, 1987:47). Dover Wilson, quoted in *The Elizabethan Hamlet*, believes otherwise noting that the ghost was Catholic as ‘it regrets not having had the Last Rites of the Roman Catholic Church’ (McGee, 1987:43) saying how he was ‘Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,/Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled’ (I.5.76-77) meaning that he didn’t have the last sacraments that are respectively penance, viaticum, and extreme



unction(McGee, 1987:43). Another interesting point to note is the ghost's remark: 'My hour is almost come/When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames/Must render up myself' (I.5.2-3). For a Protestant audience, this single line isolated confirmed the suspicion that the spirit came from Hell where he would be damned to eternal agony, however a few lines after that he adds being 'Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,/And for the day confined to fast in fires/Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/Are burnt and purged away!' (I.5.10-13) which according to Dover Wilson 'comes from Purgatory, as Dante described it' (McGee, 1987:46). Indeed flames were supposed to purify someone before their entry into Heaven.

In *The Duchess Of Malfi* we note the absence of a ghost but instead the presence of an Echo whilst Antonio is visiting the Duchess' grave. We can assume it is that of the Duchess: 'Ay, wife's voice' (V.3.26) the echo agrees, and later on Antonio believes to have seen her: 'a clear light/Presented me a face folded in sorrow' (V.3.44-45). She seems to warn him of the danger to come by repeating the end of Delio's and Antonio's sentences which always contain threatening images of his fate 'death' / 'deadly' / 'sorrow' / 'do not' / 'fly your fate' / 'dead' / 'never' (V.3.19-42). By being benevolent, the echo does not conform to the idea of the evil ghost and therefore suggests that the Duchess' spirit either came back from Heaven to warn him, or that she is in Purgatory repenting for her disobedience to her brothers. We can assume that the fact that the echo was not a ghost properly speaking allowed it to be ambiguous enough to escape censorship. In *Hamlet* however, even though the ghost was telling the truth about its murder, the fact that it asked for revenge and therefore lead Hamlet to his own death clearly depicted it as evil, 'thus it would seem that Shakespeare has taken great pains to present the correctors with just the sort of material that would incur their wrath and that it did not can only be explained by its being so manifestly evil that no audience could fail to recognize it as such' (McGee, 1987:46). The censorship of dramatic writing in the early modern period was a result of the division between Protestant and Catholic beliefs systems. It served to enforce the Protestant vision of the after-life but Shakespeare among other playwrights at time seems to be questioning those set beliefs. For Shakespeare this has led to a debate over his religion 'as evidenced in the plays without considering that his work would have been banned if it had not been in accord with the state religion, which he could not, in any circumstances, have criticized' (McGee, 1987:24).

# 'Remember tonight ... For it is the beginning of always':

## Erotic love and imagination in the genesis of the personal afterlife

It is not unrealistic to assume that humankind has always been preoccupied with “what comes next”, as the only certainty we have is that our life will culminate in death. The increasing number of films exploring the issue through either ghosts or a direct depiction of a place, an ‘undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns’ (III.1.79-80), can be seen as an attempt in making sense of something that we can hardly comprehend. The alternative is that these are, perhaps, an attempt to reassure ourselves that our loved ones are at peace and that one day we will be reunited.

Even though the traditional concepts of Heaven and Hell are generally considered as having been for many centuries ‘the “carrot and stick” for the moral fabric of Christendom as well as the encouragement for faith and repentance’ (Obayashi, 1992:116) it is still, for some fundamentalists, a very concrete part of their reality. Indeed, as we can observe on the Pew Research Centre website, which ‘surveys more than 35,000 Americans from all 50 states about their religious affiliations, beliefs and practices, and social and political views’ (Pew Research Centre, ND, [online]), the vastly dominant religion in the country’s central states is Christianity. More than 70% of their population identify as Christian and less than 20% have no religious affiliation. Furthermore, between 70% and 80% of the population still strongly believe in Heaven and more than 60% strongly believe in Hell.

The 1998’s film *What Dreams May Come* is a direct reflection of the commonly held beliefs about the afterlife. *Rolling Stone* described this film as being a love story turned ‘into a skin-crawling nightmare of New Age clichés’ (*Rolling Stone*, 1998). Hell is shown as being very similar to its depiction in Dante’s *Inferno* where the souls of the sinners are subject to eternal torture depending on the nature of their sin. There are two parallels that can be drawn between Chris’ journey and Dante’s. The first is that they both travel to Hell to find a dead loved one. In Chris’ case it is to find his wife, who committed suicide after her children – followed thereafter by Chris himself – were killed in car crashes. The second parallel is that

both men traverse Hell with the aid of a guide: Virgil in Dante's *Inferno* and Chris' son Ian in *What Dreams May Come*. Chris also passes through a number of Dante's circles of Hell after entering via the river Archeron where he is surrounded by the souls of the damned waiting to be ferried across by Charon. After arriving in Hell proper, on the bank of the river can be found the souls from Dante's first circle of Limbo, where 'alongside the traditional Limbo of unbaptized infants, [are the] souls of the past who never knew the Christian God' (Pertile, 2007:71). Following this first circle can be perceived stormy winds where it can be assumed the souls of the lustful are constantly buffeted. Although the third, fourth and sixth circles – the Gluttonous, the Avaricious/Prodigal and the Heretics respectively – are not portrayed onscreen, the guardian of the third, 'Cerberus', is present under the form of a ship rather than a three headed dog. One of the last circles Chris goes through is the fifth, where the wrathful 'repeatedly attack each other, while the sullen sigh and gurgle beneath the muddy waters' (Pertile, 2007:72). In the film this circle is represented with warrior tribes fighting each other in an arena, whilst above them the sullen are buried up to their necks, complaining in the mud. This is slightly contrasting with Dante's vision as according to him the actively wrathful are immersed in the marshes of the river Styx and the sullen are entirely submerged in it. Finally he arrives in the seventh circle which this time wholly differs from Dante's as there is no sign of the souls who committed violence against others or those who committed it against God, nature or art (Pertile, 2007:73). Instead he finds his wife in their now decrepit house who rather than having turned into a thorn bush (Pertile, 2007:73) is punished with amnesia. Nothing is said nor shown of the last two circles. The film then ends with them returning to Heaven and choosing to be reincarnated, having the chance to live life together once more. This idea of reincarnation is surprising, as it is outside of the orthodox Christian beliefs. Hiroshi Obayashi explains in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions* that Augustine distinguished two resurrections: the first one being our resurrection from mortal earthly life to our life in God's light and the second being our resurrection to mortal bodies come Judgment Day. These are the only two times where souls are brought from one state to another (Obayashi, 1992:113).

In the coastal states of the US which have a more diverse population and are renowned for cultural exportation, less than 65% of the population identify themselves as Christian and more than 20% claim not to have any religious affiliation; in those areas beliefs of Heaven make up for approximately 60% of the population and beliefs of Hell about 50%. Therefore looking back at *What Dreams May Come* we can assume that those concepts 'of heaven and

hell, damnation and salvation would presumably have been more concrete and immediate to a typical Elizabethan than they seem to many of us today' (Simkin, 2006:12). The increasing secularisation and/or multiculturalism of the coastal states can explain the originality of ways in which filmmakers have explored the representation of the afterlife, as, 'Ultimately, every heaven, hell, reincarnation, ascension or oblivion that any religion or philosophy has ever offered is just a guess – a provisional response to the unanswerable question, 'what happens to me when I die?'' (Haunton, 2009:251). Added to that the fact that 'over the last 60 years, religion in Europe has seen a strong decline' (Crabtree, 2015) the need for Hollywood to find new ways of addressing those issues for them, as much as for Europe can be felt.

In the first season of *Breaking Bad* (2008), in Walter's flashback, we listen to him breaking down the chemical composition of the human body. Something, he notes, upon adding up the various percentages together, is missing. 'There's got to be more to a human being than that' (*Breaking Bad*, 2008). This isn't the first speculation that the human soul has measurable attributes in the physical world, such as mass. Indeed Mary Roach describes in the third chapter of her book *Six Feet Over: Adventures in the Afterlife* the experiment conducted by respected surgeon and physician Duncan Macdougall. This experiment consisted of having a dying patient placed on a large scale to observe any changes in mass at the time of his last breath. At that precise moment, Macdougall observed a mass loss of twenty one grams. The experiment was repeated on five more patients over the years (Roach, 2007). This might not be absolute proof of a soul, but this shows that if science and religion can agree on the concept that there may be something 'more to a human being than that' (*Breaking Bad*, 2008) then it is not unreasonable to question what happens to that part of us when we die, and on a more immediate level how can we represent something in film and drama that goes beyond the realms of the physical world from which we are bound?

In *Ghost* (1990) although the main protagonist Sam retains his human form whilst stuck between the world of the living and that of the dead, there are two instances where souls are represented in different ways. Firstly when looking at Willy's death scene, we can note that dark, vaguely shaped shadows rise from the ground to engulf him and drag him back from whence they came (fig 1). This scene is rife with imagery, set after nightfall when the ground is wet and the lighting is dim. All of these elements contribute to the feeling of an imminent threat before reminding us – as he is dragged downward – that Hell is below; the destination for all the sinners.



(fig 1: *Ghost*, 1990, [screenshot])

As opposed to this during Sam's own death at the start of the film, glowing ethereal orbs descend upon him to bring him into the light (fig. 2). This echoes Dante's *Paradiso* in which the Primum Mobile – ninth sphere – 'offers no human interlocutors. Instead of encountering radiant souls, Dante sees a hypnotic geometrical figure, an infinitesimally small and infinitely bright point of light' (Jacoff, 2007:116). If we assume this to be the case, then perhaps the souls of the blessed are taking him with them. The bright light also reminds us of the Empyrean 'which itself is immaterial, a heaven of "pure light, light intellectual full of love, love of true good full of joy, joy that transcend every sweetness" (30,40/42)' (Jacoff, 2007:117). Therefore one line of interpretation could be that he is transcending into a state of existence closer to God. Similarly to Dante he is transitioning 'from time to eternity' (Jacoff, 2007:117).



(fig 2: *Ghost*, 1990, [screenshot])

In *What Dreams May Come*, while Hell is represented similarly to that of fundamental Christian beliefs – where bodies are corporeal in order to endure never-ending physical pain – Heaven is presented in a much more original way. The physical is no more and the mind – or perhaps the soul – is therefore freed of restrictions. This means that we are not limited by a particular shape, as Ian illustrates by appearing as Albert for most of the duration of the film to ensure that Chris listens to him. Chris ultimately comes to the realisation that regardless of how he might appear he is the spirit of his son. The same goes for his daughter and the tracker who is the real Albert. This idea of being freed of physical limits is the same concept explored in *The Lovely Bones* (2009) where, although dead, Susie does not take the form of someone else, the in-between world where she ends up is a place subject to her whims. In the scene where she is dancing with her friend, we can see the world constantly metamorphosing from one idyllic state to another. She dances through a field of animal shaped topiary, before appearing on an oversized record with skyscrapers illuminating the night and stars flashing behind her like the flashes of cameras, her universe recognising her celebrity status. After puppies chase her down she leaps onto a sledge and slides from grass to the snowy peaks of a mountain. She seems to exist in this multitude of realities, times and places both episodically and simultaneously. Her reality is one parallel to the one she came from, and yet the same rules and laws no longer apply.

In both *What Dreams May Come* and *The Lovely Bones* it is striking to see ‘the role given to the imagination in creating one’s own afterlife’ (Ehrlich, 2008:82). The part of someone passing onto “the other side” has shifted from accepting an predetermined, passive life after death to the individual spirit actively being its creator, stressing ‘the ability of the individual to fashion his or her own experience. Aspects that religion would characterize as heaven or hell are in fact products of the individual’s imagination and self-perception’ (Haunton, 2013:258). Perhaps the fact that we are becoming more secular as a society might encourage us to put our faith in ourselves and one another. Surely having free-will both in one’s life and afterwards is a more encouraging belief than one that is built on the proverbial “carrot and stick” of Heaven and Hell?

It is a well-documented fact that many people have believed in ghosts for a significant period of time, but the nature of those beliefs has evolved since the 1600s. Around mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘interest intensified in claims that spirits without bodies, including spirits of the dead, could communicate with the living’ (Edwards, 1999:50). Besides, as we have seen and as David L. Edwards continues to describe in his book *After Death?*, there was an important decline of traditional religious beliefs in the West which had the effect of increasing peoples’ curiosity towards the claims of spiritualists. The feeling was widespread that ‘there may be something in it’ (Edwards, 1999:51). Those spiritualists explained their paranormal experience ‘with the use of a different model, as the physical world model is clearly inadequate. The model [...] is referred to as the ‘astral world’, interpenetrating the physical and extending all around and which has in it their own ‘astral body’ (with astral sense) and those of other people’ (Ellison, 1995:175). Nowadays, spiritualism is ‘said to be the eighth largest religion in Britain and has a network of groups across the country’ (BBC, 2009).

Woopi Goldberg’s character in *Ghost*, Oda Mae Brown, is one of those psychics. Although she begins by only pretending to be a psychic as a part of a scam, she soon realises she can truly communicate with the dead when Sam comes and finds her. She can hear but not see him, which can lead us to wonder if the need for his physical representation on the screen isn’t just for us as the audience, as a marker that facilitates our view of the story rather than that of the characters. This would therefore reinforce the idea that he has neither a physical nor spiritual body but rather is a formless, invisible soul.

The reason for Sam being stuck in this in-between world is not explicitly stated and one could argue that ‘Sam’s story takes place here on earth, a fate reserved for those souls with unfinished business’ (Haunton, 2013:256). In this case it appears that Sam unfinished business is his relationship with Molly as whilst his body is lying dead on the ground she begs him ‘Sam don’t you leave me. Sam, hold on!’ (*Ghost*, 1990) and as he runs towards her the heavenly light recedes. In this regard his motivations are not grounded in thoughts of revenge, like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, but rather in love. We can draw a parallel to the character of Jamie from *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1990) who – although he has already made peace with the fact that he is dead, in contrast with Sam – is present only to watch over his wife Nina and help her move on. He describes his experience of being dead as being ‘like standing behind a glass wall while everyone’s busy missing me’ (*Truly, Madly, Deeply*, 1990). Whilst the film detracts from our preconceived notions of the afterlife being composed of Heaven and Hell, it expresses a comforting idea that our loved ones are always close to us, watching over us just behind a ‘glass wall’ (*Truly, Madly, Deeply*, 1990). We could even go as far as to say that it goes against any religious ideals as it expresses the erotic love for a partner as the single strongest form of love. Originally eternal love was reserved for God; people built their life around the worship of their God/gods. In these films however, eternal love is portrayed as something shared between partners. Similarly in *City of Angels* (1998) an Angel falls in love with a human and chooses a mortal life to be with her, rather than his eternal angelic existence. It is quite ironic if we consider it in relation to Dante’s *Paradiso*, as the upper heavenly circles were supposedly home to the angels, were places of transcendental emotions. Yet in this instance the angel still chooses a supposedly limited human capacity for love. This suggests once more that no matter what our idea of a life after death is, we have truly moved on from believing that love to God is the highest form of love.

Both *Ghost* and *Truly, Madly, Deeply* show how our perception of ghosts has shifted from the early modern period on which ‘Dover Wilson remarked: ‘Obdurate Protestants would refuse to admit him [the Ghost] anything but a Devil even after the play scene had proved the truth of his story’ (McGee, 1987:23). Indeed Sam is not portrayed as an evil spirit seeking revenge at the detriment of others but as selfless and bound to the love he felt throughout his life, in need of a proper *au revoir*. It is interesting how even though he does ultimately achieve his revenge it is only in the context of protecting the woman he loves. A “good” ghost would have been inconceivable for Elizabethan audiences, even more so as in this portrayal, given that the sinners are forcibly dragged to what we can only assume is Hell, it is only those with



good intentions such as Sam who are given the opportunity to stay a while longer on earth to put things in order and make peace with the idea of death before ascending to Heaven. This resonates with the ghost of Hamlet's father who is 'Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,/And for the day confined to fast in fires/Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/Are burnt and purged away!' (I.5.10-13). As with Sam, old Hamlet's ghost needs the wrongs done to him and his family to be undone in order to move on.

Even though the 'vivid imageries' (Obayashi, 1992:114) of the afterlife from the Middle Ages are still very present in the minds of some, most have moved away from them in order to try explore the idea of life after death with imaginative interpretations. Although they almost all take roots from a certain kind of traditional belief – with Hell down below and Heaven up above – most of them focus on more personal and emotional ideas of a life after death as 'films about the afterlife are rarely *about* the afterlife. They are invariably about people' (Haunton, 2013:259). More importantly they are about the love that unites partners, showing that nothing can ever truly separate two people that love each other. They create a version of the afterlife where the mind is free of the body and the physical world's limitations, and which moves on from the concept of ghosts as evil entities with malicious intentions in order to have a representation of the afterlife that offers 'opportunities for change – a chance to correct past mistakes, to reconnect with living loved ones, or to transform as an individual. By contrast, in most religious interpretations, the afterlife is not a place of opportunity, but a place of consequences' (Haunton, 2013:259).

# 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here':

## Eternal suffering in contemporary horror

*'It [is] implied that horror is characterized by fear of some uncertain threat to existential nature and by disgust over its potential aftermath, and that perhaps the source of that threat is supernatural.'* (Tamborini and Weaver, III, 1996:2)

When we think of monsters, we conjure images such as Cerberus the three headed dog, the Minotaur, half beast and half man stalking the Labyrinth of Minos and the bird-like Harpies whispering visions of the future even as their heads are severed from their bodies. Or else we think of the hammer-horror monsters – the wolf man, Nosferatu and his brides, or the re-animated dead. Demons and ghosts however hold their own niche in the horror genre, whether they are, as the Greeks thought, unquiet spirits that were denied access to the land of the dead, or, since the rise of Christianity, evil and malevolent entities. These otherworldly beings in their various forms are an endless source of fascination and have inspired artists and philosophers throughout the centuries who wonder what might lie on the “other side” of the veil. Today still, these threatening entities continue to fascinate us. They are a source of influence for, as much as they are influenced by, our beliefs, our superstitions and our fears. The ‘roots of filmed horror were an extension of a genre of literature that got [its] start in the late 1700s: Gothic Horror’ (*FilmMaker IQ*, (ND), [online]). This genre is characterised by ‘Gloomy, decaying setting, [...] Supernatural beings or monsters, [...] Curses or prophecies, Damsels in distress, Heroes, Romance, Intense emotions’ (Marinero, (ND), [online]). Gothic Horror was a genre that was taken into the annals of history by its most prominent figures, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley.

In 1896, Georges Méliès created what is considered to be the first horror film: *Le Château Hanté*. With ‘bats, castles, trolls, ghosts, and a demon [...] you can see the elements of gothic horror [...] firmly entrenched by this time in the public psyche’ (*FilmMaker IQ*, (ND), [online]).

This ‘Horror of the demonic’ (Tamborini and Weaver, III, 1996:3) then faded away, making room for the ‘Mutated Monster Mash’ (*FilmMaker IQ*, (ND), [online]) that followed the

Second World War, and then ‘Psychology, Sex and Gore’ (*FilmMaker IQ*, (ND), [online]). Yet spiritual horror reappeared in 1968 with *Rosemary’s Baby*, followed 5 years later by *The Exorcist*. The concept of ‘Supernatural, Gothic, or horror of the demonic all begin with the assumption that the real world is governed by “natural law” and we live our lives according to this belief. Lovecraft (1923/1973) suggested that horror is created when some “natural law” is violated. [...] We are at the mercy of supernatural forces that appear to have malicious intent’ (Tamborini and Weaver, III, 1996:3).

When looking at the concept of the afterlife, it is almost natural that our first reaction is to turn to the horror genre. Indeed ‘many such films include supernatural elements, and because supernatural elements frequently borrow from religious concepts, it is only natural that from time to time the afterlife would play a central role in such films’ (Haunton, 2013:251-252). Considering the west is a predominantly secular society putting its trust more into science rather than religion, the ‘persistence of supernatural beings as a source of evil on film is astonishing’ (Stone, 2013:316).

*Poltergeist* (2015) is an example of a film trying to rationalise something as obscure as life after death using pseudo-scientific methods. In this film the Freeling family moves into a house as part of a newly built complex. What they ignore is that it was built over an old cemetery and – to reduce the cost – only the tombstones have been removed. The original idea lies in the concept that the disturbed spirits find refuge in the electric currents to which the characters gain access through an energy-portal in their daughter’s closet. This is not far removed from the idea of the “weighing of the soul” as discussed in chapter two, that suggests that science and the afterlife do not exclude one another but rather that what we consider to be the supernatural is actually an aspect of science that we have yet to uncover. *Poltergeist* suggests, as the spirits are able to communicate through the television, that they exist in some sort of confluence with electromagnetic energy. Also, if said spirits come back to haunt this family because the place where they body was laid to rest has been disturbed, this implies that after death there is no distinctive separation between body and soul. Is there no life after death, but an eternal sleep in the earth? The idea of a never-ending sleep - a consciousness bound to the mortal plane by the body they inhabited during life - is somehow even more unsatisfying, and terrifying, than the atheistic interpretation of nothingness after death.

No matter how far removed we may be as individuals, religion is an inescapable part of our culture and our history. As evidenced in chapter two, even when we try to depart from fundamentalist religious ideas of life after death, it's hard to separate ourselves whether we believe it or not from the idea of some variant of Heaven and Hell. This is reinforced by the lack of evidence that science brings us as to what awaits us after death; an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Is it not possible that our current understanding of the universe simply has not yet allocated room for its comprehension?

‘What is aberrant is not the disconcerting sensation of dread but rather the fantasies of order superimposed upon life to make it look seamless and safe’ (Cavallaro, 2002:vii). Whether religious or not the way which we have established the world in our mind is disrupted when we encounter something that does not conform with our individual concept of the “natural order”. This is why over the last century, ‘the threat of supernatural evil has made its way onto the screen largely from three popular sources: (1) the demonic or satanic, (2) that which has died or is able to reach us from beyond the grave (ghosts, reincarnations, mummies, zombies and vampires) and (3) witchcraft and sorcery.’ (Stone, 2013:316)

*The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Conjuring 2* (2016) are two examples of how films can use religious imagery as focus to produce horrific content. The Nun from *The Conjuring 2* is a perversion of the religious ideals of purity, celibacy, and devotion, into what the character of Lorraine Warren describes as ‘something inhuman. Something that took a blasphemous way, to attack my faith’ (*The Conjuring 2*, 2016). Also present in both movies are the possession of a young girl – Linda Blair in *The Exorcist* and Janet Hodgson in *The Conjuring 2* – which is actively displaying the perversion of innocence. William Blatty, writer of the book and the screenplay for *The Exorcist*, stated that ‘the demonic purpose of possession is not primarily to appropriate the soul of the possessed, but to undermine the faith of all those who surround and witness the spectacle: to make them doubt and despise themselves in such a way that they cannot believe that God could love them’ (Noel, 1990 :103-104). We can here draw a parallel to Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* who, tormented by Mephistopheles and even Lucifer himself, suffered the sin of Pride believing that his faults were too great for God to forgive him, therefore leading him into an eternity of suffering in Hell.

As opposed to Faustus, however, the family in *The Exorcist* put their faith into God and his representatives on earth to be saved. In both films a figure of the Catholic Church, either a priest or the Warrens hired by the Church, manage to send the demons back to Hell and in

doing so demonstrate ‘the Catholic Church’s authority and [portraying] it as having dominance over evil. [...] This positioning of the Church leads the audience to conclude that deliverance is only available and attained through faith in God’ (Wyman, 2013:305). It is also important to add that Father Karras in *The Exorcist* acts as the saviour figure when – after Father Merrin died of a heart attack during the exorcism – he demands the demon Pazuzu possesses him instead, only to martyr himself by jumping out of the window to get rid of it. Similarly in *The Conjuring 2*, the character of Lorraine Warren finds a way of sending the demon-nun back to Hell by gaining dominance over it through knowledge of its name, scratched into her Bible. Indeed, whilst at her home earlier on in the film, she has a vision where she is confronted by the demon. When she awakens she discovers that she has made the carvings herself although, no doubt for dramatic effect, only at the end does she realise that it is the name of the demon, Valak, who was forced to answer her when she asked for its name in her vision.

This placing of the Catholic Church as the only protection against evil and an eternity of damnation in Hell could echo the “sale of indulgence” in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, at the end of *The Conjuring 2*, we learn that Peggy Hodgson – Janet’s mother – died in that same house, in the same armchair as Bill Wilkins – the haunting spirit – also died in. This raises the question if anything can really protect us against supernatural forces, and if what lies beyond isn’t somehow worse than what we ever imagined.

These films also reinforce the mind-set present in the Elizabethan era where people believed, ‘as Dover Wilson says, ‘that ghosts, while occasionally they might be angels, were generally nothing but devils’’ (McGee, 1987:27). This is also true in the *Insidious* franchise where each movie is about an evil spirit trying to either take over someone’s body because ‘they crave life, the chance to live again’ (*Insidious*, 2010) or ‘to cause pain to others’ (*Insidious*, 2010).

What differs however is their depiction of the afterlife. In *Insidious*(2010), ‘The Further is a world far beyond our own, yet it’s all around us, a place without time as we know it. It’s a dark realm filled with the tortured souls of the dead’ (*Insidious*, 2010). What is interesting is that some people can access it by a process regarded as “astral projection”, meaning that their spirit can leave their physical body to explore this separate plane of existence. When Josh enters The Further to find his son Dalton who is trapped there, we get a glimpse of what it looks like. When he leaves his physical body, The Further appears to be a dark and twisted

version of reality (fig 1), but as soon as he steps out of his house he finds himself in total darkness; in a place of energy that he appears to be navigating with his thoughts (fig 2).



(fig 1: *Insidious*, 2010, [screenshot])



(fig 2: *Insidious*, 2010, [screenshot])

Once he arrives in what looks like his old house, the nothingness leaves in place of this warped reality filled with tortured souls re-enacting the last traumatic moment of their lives in a series of perverted tableaux (fig 3 & 4). We have to wonder if they are forced to stay this way by some unseen force or demons that has taken over their free will, or if their mind – stuck in this traumatic event – stops them from moving on? However, the idea of passing through the further in order to save his son is very evocative of Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven to find his own loved one.



(fig 3: *Insidious*, 2010, [screenshot])



(fig 4: *Insidious*, 2010, [screenshot])

Once Elise – the demonologist that is helping Josh – is killed at the end of the first film by the evil spirit that took control of Josh’s physical body, we see her in *The Further*. When, however, she is reprised in *Insidious: chapter 2* (2013) in which as a spirit she helps Josh return to his body, she never manages to find her husband Jack who passed away many years before. This leaves us to wonder if there isn’t something else in addition to *The Further*, where his spirit could have ended up? Otherwise why wouldn’t she have found him? In addition to this in *Insidious: chapter 3* (2015) whilst Elise is trying to help a young girl, Quinn, to defend herself against a spirit that wants to bring her into *The Further*, Quinn’s long

deceased mother appears by her side. She seems different from all the lost and tortured souls seen previously in the series as her figure is surrounded with a glowing white halo. Whereas the two first films make us dread what we cannot perceive and what might await us, this last one leaves us to think that there might be something else, something better. Maybe The Further, similarly to the land of the dead for the Greeks, has its own incarnation of Tartarus and the Island of the Blessed? Or perhaps there is another parallel dimension accessible for the deserving souls?

As with the romantic films depicting a comforting idea of the afterlife, this concept seems hard to tackle in an original way that goes beyond the fundamental religious view. In contrast *The Conjuring 2* differs by painting a more pessimistic finale and the idea of fatality, whilst *Insidious* tries to get away from any religious connotations at all. It does this to the extent that it is restricted by its own genre; a horror film that limits its depiction of the afterlife to something tragic and terrifying where the focus is solely on the world of the demons and tortured souls and jump scares, rather than on where the souls of the benevolent might end up. As opposed to always presenting us with original and thought provoking ideas, they often make us dread what we loved about *Ghost*, *Truly*, *Madly*, *Deeply*, and many others, because if the spirit world exists so closely to our own, what assures us that true evil is not as close to us as our departed loved ones?



# Conclusion

One of the biggest issues that this study has revealed is the near impossibility playwrights and filmmakers face in trying to depict a version of the afterlife that exists beyond the boundaries laid down by conventional religious beliefs. For the early modern dramatists this was often due to censorship, but in more recent years the issue stems from the system of belief being rooted in everyday western culture. The ideas and concepts that the Christian ideologies follow have permeated within our lives before even Christianity itself. It can be traced back to the ancient Greeks; the belief in Tartarus and the Island of the Blessed have been moulded into what we now perceive Heaven and Hell. The difficulty in departing from these concepts lie in our struggle to imagine an afterlife where the benevolent and malevolent can coexist.

This, however, also implies that the beliefs we have now are a result of an amalgamation of other belief systems, and those that we hold today might evolve and take a new form as time passes. Today,

Filmmakers may feel constrained by the many, often deeply held, notions of the afterlife that exist in the audiences' minds, while simultaneously feeling liberated by the total freedom of describing a place that no one has ever seen. (Haunton, 2013:251)

Judging by the statistics from the Pew Research Centre website, the slow diminishing of fundamental Christian beliefs, at least in the United States, may begin to impact on the exponential weakening of these restraints from filmmakers. If the ideas are not so fervently lodged in the minds of the audience, it may be possible to create new concepts of the afterlife altogether that have not yet been explored. If the Greek beliefs helped to shape those we have today, will globalisation and multiculturalism have a similar impact on them in the future?

If this dissertation was to be expanded upon, one of the elements that would be worth looking into is that of other religions and their impact on contemporary cinema. For example, the concept of reincarnation, present in – among others – *What Dreams May Come* is one that is adopted from primarily Buddhist belief as ‘death in the Buddhist world is no longer understood simply as the end of a single life span that is once-for-all and final’ (Obayashi, 1992:160) but as a continuing cycle of rebirth. As well as this, filmmakers have the

opportunity to subvert the assumptions of their audiences by portraying the afterlife in a way that undercuts their expectations.

There are, of course, already a number of interpretations in films that view the afterlife in an atheistic sense. A prime example of this is Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* (1988). Whilst it regards the afterlife as an inevitability, it does so in a way that not only distances itself from any religious connotation, but satirises real life, specifically the American bureaucratic system.

... the next time you find yourself staking out a place at the DMV at seven a.m., remember that you could be continually finding yourself the fifty-four million six hundred and first person in line for your appointment, as you would in Burton's business world of the departed. (monbus, 2014)

The film does for contemporary religious views what Dante did for Middle Age views; it takes an expected vision of the afterlife and expands it as well as subverts it. As Dante travels deeper into the underworld 'we are impressed with images of doom and gloom, yet not of the generic hellfire one might anticipate' (monbus, 2014). Burton's depiction of the afterlife is in no way an easy rest for the deceased and the scenes of "torture" derive from our fears and sufferings in everyday life – primarily, our fear of boredom. As in *Inferno*, the souls of the dead are not far removed from their living state. For a while, Adam and Barbara Maitland don't even realise they are dead. Not only does it directly draw from Dante, but satirises it as well. Beetlejuice is the version of Virgil that you don't want. There is no mention of Heaven or Hell, or even God. The only mention of "punishment" is that after death, suicides become civil servants. Rather than just human souls, we also find those of extra-terrestrial beings. In place of a hellish landscape is a desert – later revealed to be Saturn – in which wandering souls can be eaten by sand-worms and, somehow, die once more. The combination of these elements forms a representation in which the afterlife encompasses both the world of the living and another, more obscure, pseudo-reality.

It is difficult to know if religion will ever be entirely removed from our lives and culture. It is another question entirely as to whether that would be good or bad. Artistically, religion might be a restriction, but it is also an inexhaustible pool from which to draw inspiration. Whilst it is intriguing to think of what concepts of the afterlife we might be able to create without the limits of religious beliefs, all art is derivative, and in the words of Charles Baudelaire, as quoted by Lefebvre, 'Nearly all our originality comes from the stamp that time impresses upon our sensibility' (Lefebvre, 1995:171). Should we not embrace that which we know and

draw upon it to find our own originality, even if it is only to satirise what has already been done?

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