



**Dr Cary
Edwards**

THE EXORCIST

Dir. William Friedkin,
1973, Warner Bros

SECTION B SPECTATORSHIP

Popular Film and Emotional
Response

FM4 - VARIETIES OF FILM EXPERIENCE

Issues and Debates

WILLIAM PETER BLATTY'S THE EXORCIST

Directed by **WILLIAM FRIEDKIN**



STARRING **ELLEN BURSTYN • MAX VON SYDOW • LEE J. COBB**
KITTY WINN • JACK MACGOWRAN

JASON MILLER AS FATHER KARRAS **LINDA BLAIR** AS REGAN
PRODUCED BY WILLIAM PETER BLATTY • EXECUTIVE PRODUCER NOEL MARSHALL
SCREENPLAY BY WILLIAM PETER BLATTY BASED ON HIS NOVEL

FROM WARNER BROS.



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CONTEXT

The film was adapted from the best-selling book by William Peter Blatty (who also wrote the screenplay) which was itself based on reported events. Costing \$12 million, *The Exorcist* took \$193,000,000 at the US Box-Office alone making it the second most successful film of the year. It was nominated for 10 Academy Awards, winning two (Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Sound Mixing). It has had four sequels and a TV series.

AUDIENCE

"Every day 5,000 moviegoers stand in the long queue wrapped around the Sack 57 Cinema in Boston. Four Manhattan theaters have lines extending for blocks from noon to midnight." (Time, 1974)

1. The film was very controversial on release and caused mass hysteria. Several organisations campaigned for it to be banned and it wasn't released on VHS until 1995 having been withdrawn in the 1980s as a "Video Nasty". Why do you think this is?
2. Has the audience changed from 1973? How?
3. How important is a religious faith to the affect that this film has on its audience?





PLOT & STRUCTURE

4. The film begins in Iraq with Father Merrin then moves to America. What is the purpose of this opening sequence?
5. How active are the main characters in the film? Are they really protagonists?

GENDER/GENRE

6. How does *The Exorcist* compare to *Psycho*, *Scream* and other examples of the Horror genre.
7. In the events on which the book is based the 'possessed' child was a boy. Why has he been changed to a girl for the book and film?
8. How does the film treat gender? Think about the family that Regan belongs to, the career of her mother and the fact that the Catholic Church is a patriarchal institution.
9. How does the Horror genre generally represent women? Are there any films that counter this representation?
10. How is Regan treated by the film?
11. What gender is the Demon?
12. Is the Male Gaze (Mulvey) evident in this film?
13. How can this film be related to the Abortion debate in America (Roe Vs Wade, 1973)?

TECHNIQUE

14. What techniques are used to instill fear and foreboding in the audience?
15. How is sound used, both diegetic and non-diegetic?
16. What elements of editing are used?
17. Are these techniques typical of the genre?

EXTRACT OF A LEAFLET DISTRIBUTED OUTSIDE CINEMAS IN THE BIRMINGHAM AREA

FEAR

Fear is contagious, and no fear more so than the awesome dread of disembodied evil.

1974

And, if we become gripped by this type of fear, our minds are opened wide to the psychological suggestion that we too are at risk of invasion by similar powers of evil. We are not immune simply because this is 1974 and we are in Birmingham, we are not immune simply because our reason tells us such things cannot happen – and we are very vulnerable indeed if we believe they might.

THE PEOPLE WHO GIVE OUT THIS LEAFLET have not come here because they think they are better than anyone else. They are just aware of the great danger of evil and how it can affect us all. They believe, too, that there is an answer to this challenge of life in Jesus Christ and they want to share this with you. It is because His love and power are real that they have come to see something special about life and they hate to see it smeared by evil and twisted ideas.

If after seeing the film you need spiritual help, or counsel or just want to talk it over with someone, then please telephone one of the following numbers:- [16 phone numbers in Harborne, Edgbaston, Moseley and Sutton Coldfield followed]

- From *Ban this Filth! Letters from the Mary Whitehouse Archive*, ed. Ben Thompson (2012). London: Faber & Faber.