Like the optical effect, this glance askance of Claude's is also repeated later. Muriel has sent Claude a portion of her diary in which she confesses to an episode of lesbianism and masturbation earlier in her life; and as Claude finishes reading her words, he turns to the camera with a guilty look. Even the diary is a device calculated to remind us that it is only a re-creation, a recollection of experience rather than the experience itself, which we are witnessing. Muriel's diary is one of several such narrations that are part of Truffaut's narrative. Two others—one spoken by Truffaut himself and another originating in Claude's letters to his mother—are also voice-over contributions to the plot. But a fourth narration that figures in the film, a moot one of sorts, is perhaps the most significant. It is a novel that Claude ultimately writes and publishes about his twenty-year affair with his two English girls.

Claude's novel reverses the situation in his life: it is about two men in love with the same woman. This of course inserts yet another layer in the awareness of art that is here altering our perception of the story. The novel on which *Two English Girls* is based was written by Henri-Pierre Roche, whose only other work, *Jules and Jim*, was made into a film by Truffaut ten years ago. *Jules and Jim* also tells a story that reverses, like a photo negative, the plot of *Two English Girls*. In this way Truffaut reminds us that the experience recollected here was an artistic experience to begin with, his own.

When he made *Bed and Board* a few years ago, Truffaut finally brought to a conclusion the cycle of Antoine Doinel films that had begun with his first work, *The 400 Blows* from a new point of view more sympathetic to the adult than the child. *The English Girls* might be said to remake *Jules and Jim* with a comparable change of heart. In 1962 Truffaut's sympathies lay with the Jeanne Moreau character, who is the freest spirit in *Jules and Jim*. In *Two English Girls*, however, it is with Claude, the sanest, most stable corner of the triangle, that Truffaut's sympathies lie. It is a remarkable thing for a director to have begun his own career all over again with such brilliance and vitality as Truffaut has shown in these last two films. Unlike sculpture, film doesn't lend itself readily to the sort of stylization of gross reality that Truffaut has attempted in *Two English Girls*. It is a remarkable thing at any point in a director's career to have performed so difficult a feat of art so well.

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

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an exchange of views

'Exorcising the Exorcist'

Rochester, N.Y.

Perhaps I will be judged insufficiently objective to counter Raymond Schroth's somewhat arch dismissal of *The Exorcist* [*Commonweal*, Nov. 3, 1972]. I am, truth to be told, in the film version of the novel (Harper & Row, $6.95; Bantam, $1.25) and may therefore be construed as blindly defending the star I've hitched my rickety wagon to. However, both Bill Blatty and Ray Schroth are my friends and, since they are both—perhaps without realizing—on the same side, it's possible I might be a mediator. There are few enough Christians who take to the stump for what they believe, and it would be a shame if they wasted time hurling snide brickbats at one another when they could be off on the quest for listeners to the Good News.

Father Schroth's article seems to have three main objections to *The Exorcist*: first, that it deals in pre-Conciliar preoccupations and thought-patterns; second, that the events of the novel have nothing to do with the evils of today; third, that the novel does not offer a definite explanation for Karras' death.

Father Schroth asserts that Blatty deals with a church purportedly in the '70s but actually the church of the '40s which, he presumes, no longer exists. The actions and reactions of the novel's characters manifest a mind-set which is unaffected by Vatican II. This assertion, which I think is true of the characters, says less about Bill Blatty than it says of Father Schroth's apparent unfamiliarity with the mind-set of what may be a majority of today's Catholics. It is an error far greater than misjudging the novel. It is, sadly, a misjudgment of the audience that Blatty, the novelist, and Schroth, the priest, are both trying to reach. I think Blatty has read that audience better than Schroth has.

Surely, even at post-Conciliar Fordham there are, even now, a few priests who "still say Mass in Latin." I live in a community of only 20 Jesuits and at least three of the 18 say Mass in Latin—and every day at that. Surely, even in the circles Father Schroth frequents, there are still more than a few priests who swap "clerical banter at . . . cocktail parties." God forgive me, I do. Finally, I realize that I come from the boonies outside The Big Apple, which encompasses 99 per cent of the U.S., but I still "surprise otherwise sophisticated people when (I) wear informal clothes." Since the summer, I've been to L.A., N.Y. and D.C., and in each place film stars, interviewers and just ordinary old sophisticated folk express surprise—pleased surprise, I admit—when I turn up in turtleneck and sport coat. (Turtleneck? Okay. Tie? Well. . . .) Surely there are even a few becassocked Jesuits in Father Schroth's own recreation room who put their heads together and tut-tut at the garb of their younger brethren. "They're killing the Society *and* the Church!"

To nit-pick these details seems silly, but I do so to demonstrate that Father Schroth just may be guilty of three repertorial sins—if that word is still relevant: inadequate sampling of the feelings of the audience he serves, not keeping his ears open to opposing views, and thus, misjudging the receptivities of the audience he purports to know. The People of God are by no means identical to the college campus or theological circles or the City of New York. Obvious, but I wonder if Father Schroth realizes that.

The majority of Christians I have met do not read *Commonweal* or *The Critic*. At best they read the diocesan paper and perhaps the columns in *Time* or *Newsweek*. They do not have much connection with the activities of their parishes other than Sunday Mass —which they still don't call "the Liturgy." And they mourn—very privately—the death of any sense of mystery in the present homogenized language of the Mass. They don't want Latin back, really, but they do want some sense of a transcendent ceremony. I know a handful at best who have read even one of the documents of Vatican II, and fewer who could identify Cardinal Suenens or Dom Helder Camara or Hans Küng. I weep for the fact, but I don't ignore it.

I say all this not to gain points—much less to deride—but I think Father Schroth ought to know what the job is for the lovely-footed messenger who brings the Good News over the mountain to today's grassroots church. One can say true things without true things being heard. The language of the Vatican II-ers is as opaque to many Christians as the language of the catechism was. Perhaps Father Schroth has a greater realization of the susceptibilities of the faithful than his article demonstrates, but I don't see much evidence of it. So, if William Peter Blatty uses "cheap sensationalism" to hook such an audience into considering the possibility of some transcendent dimension to human life, he may have found a "way in." Father Schroth may deride it, but the fact is that Blatty *has* made people think of impalpable realities. This is no negligible achievement, even if it was reached by the cellar door. When all is said and done, I suspect more people have read *The Exorcist* this year than have ever read *Commonweal*. I weep for the fact, but I don't ignore it.

Father Schroth further suggests his aloofness from the majority of believers (and unbelievers) when he laments Blatty's failure to produce a work with the subtlety of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. Perhaps Father Schroth does not watch television or go to the movies or skim the best-seller lists, but he can't possibly have failed to understand that any novelist or screenwriter today is writing for an audience far different from Henry James' or William Shakespeare's. When news commentators have to get on the air immediately after a Presidential speech and tell the people what it said, subtlety is not the avenue to any large audience.

Even further, he states that "the tales of Faust, Frankenstein, Dracula . . . draw our attention to larger themes —man's lust and pride and the power of evil (like Original Sin)." Why can *Dracula* draw a reader to a more profound consideration of evil and *The Exorcist* cannot? Is it because *Dracula* is hallowed by time and our boyhood nostalgia for Bela and the Boys? I don't know whether Bram Stoker had an apostolic purpose in writing *Dracula*, but even Father Schroth admits that Bill Blatty did.

Can anyone read *The Exorcist*, whether he believes in devils or not, without asking the question: if evil doesn't come from devils, where does it come from? If nothing else, *The Exorcist* did make Father Schroth ask the question!

I fear that Father Schroth may be cloaking himself in a Vatican II triumphalism as sterile as post-Tridentine triumphalism. Contrary to his suppositions, Vatican II has only touched the surface of the People of God. One cannot legislate a change in "presuppositions and thought-patterns." Alas.

Many people come to God, as Augustine did, through sin. As Merrin states in the novel, "Perhaps evil is the crucible of goodness. . . . And perhaps even Satan—Satan, in spite of himself —somehow serves to work out the will of God." Any door may serve. But one has to get people at least to consider the ultimate option before they can even apprehend the meaning of what Father Schroth rightly calls the core of Christianity: "the Lord and Father revealed to us in the self-emptying love of Jesus." One must have some suspicion of transcendent reality and theism before he can understand that Jesus purported to be something more than a social reformer.

On another tack, Father Schroth says that the prefaced allusions to Dachau, Communist torture and the Mafia "have no real connection with the rest of the novel." He then concludes by saying that *The Exorcist* reader "finishes as reassured as any good citizen of seventeenth century Salem that the ultimate source of evil is not the malice and selfishness of the human will but an Outside Agitator who comes in and takes over."

True, anyone who skimmed the novel as cursorily as Father Schroth must have, probably could be left with this impression. If so, he missed the three pages (Bantam, 368-370) in which Blatty, through Merrin, confronts the question of human vs. diabolic responsibility for evil:

> Yet I think the demon's target is not the possessed; it is us . . . every person in this house. And I think—I think the point is to make us despair; to reject our own humanity, Damien; to see ourselves as ultimately bestial; as ultimately vile and putrescent; without dignity; ugly; unworthy. And there lies the heart of it, perhaps: in

unworthiness. For I think belief in God is . . . a matter . . . of accepting the possibility that God could love *us*. . . .

There is no need for a devil to run our wars or our prison camps or our organized crime. He (or "It") need only convince us that we don't have what we should have—and then *we*'ll reach out and grab it, no matter what the cost. Perhaps Blatty does not directly connect the source of Evil in Regan to the evil in Munich or Chicago; he gives us credit or the ability to make connections for ourselves.

This was perhaps too subtle to be noticed; not as subtle as Henry James, but nonetheless not as blaringly obvious as the more bizarre elements of the novel. If Father Schroth missed it, the reason might be that he was looking for less in the novel than was actually there.

A final objection Father Schroth raises is that the novel does not offer a definite explanation of Karras' death. Does he crack under the strain? Is it a sacrificial suicide? Is it an echo of the Gadarene swine plunging over the cliff? And he fears that the movie will take the same ambivalent point of view.

Of course he is right. The novel poses an option, not an answer. As Socrates discovered, a question is more likely to provoke thought in the general public than a pronunciamento. Far better that the ordinary reader ask, "What do *you* think happened in the end?" than to have a definite statement by the author or film-maker which closes the question and precludes further probing.

As a result of *The Exorcist,* I'm constantly asked by students and their elders, "Do you really think there's a devil?" My answer is that I don't know. But I do believe most heartily in an objective, personalized, nonvisible Good. In fact, both Father Schroth and I have wagered not only our lives but our possible families on that belief. I don't *like* to believe there is a personalized Evil, but in accepting a personalized Love, I've opened the door to the possibility of a personalized Hatred. Nor can I slough off the Gospel passages which put into the mouth of Jesus references to such a Personage. I'd like very much to consider them mere primitive myths, but it is not that easy to do without pulling the plug on the rest of what Christ reputedly said. Moreover, I find it odd that Father Schroth dumps devils which do have some Scriptural men-

tion, yet still clings to terms like "Original sin" which doesn't. It seems like rather selective reading.

Just as his does, my hard-wrought sophistication convinces me that devils are mere superstition, but there is just enough contrary evidence that I am hesitant to risk Father Schroth's enviable certitude.

Where does superstition end and an honest sense of mystery begin? I fear we won't get the answer from people who use the word "pious" as cavalierly as Father Schroth does.

It is true that our more susceptible forebears saw dryads in every tree and a god in every waterfall. We ourselves were led to believe that Adam conversed with a snake and Moses saw a bush burning in the desert without being consumed. It is reported further than an itinerant Jewish rabbi turned water into wine and wine into his own blood.

They were more gullible souls then, and our generation is one which sees gullibility as the cardinal sin. To be taken in, to be suckered, is unforgivable. To stand open-mouthed before anything is to blow one's cool. To have faith without certain proof is naive. We live in a generation without awe.

The White House and the Vatican are subject to so much criticism that they can inspire no gut loyalty in a people for whom even a landing on the moon has become commonplace. Who even bothers to watch capsule recoveries any more? For the last two years even the carnage in the Vietnam news could stir only a few to say, "Oh, my God!" We have a tolerance, almost an immunity, to awe. When one has witnessed an atomic explosion, very little can capture the susceptibilities of the American public and make them feel humbled by power. Certainly not the power of an unseen God. Even for the Architect of the Universe, Hiroshima is a tough act to follow.

And yet, as Father Schroth says, in such a vacuum "people will turn to pseudo-religious substitutes—drugs, apparitions, violent ideologies." *The Exorcist,* for one thing, shows the results of such substitutes. And it was successful to a great extent precisely because the occult is one thing that can still catch a jaded audience and open them to awe. If one can *use* this very fascination with the bizarre to lure an apathetic audience to consider the very Reality for which it substitutes . . . bravo!

Even Father Schroth can't deny that this novel has drawn many readers at least to consider the possibility of a personal reality transcending our senses. If one can make an audience, jaded by immensity, do that, he deserves better treatment—and deeper study—than Ray Schroth gave Bill Blatty. WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY, S.J.

Reply

Father O'Malley is right on one point: other than the news, I watch very little television. Meanwhile he has made a deeply-felt defense of his own collaboration in the film, while still misunderstanding my article, the book and—I suspect—the real needs of the church. His letter, which covers a lot of ground, seems to stress two points: that I write from the point of view of a New York liberal university professor and am thus out of contact with the *real* people whom Father O'Malley meets on movie sets or while teaching high school in Rochester; that I underestimate his friend Bill Blatty's apostolic motive and the effectiveness of

The Exorcist in bringing people to God.

This is no place to argue which of us lives in the larger world—although I make no apologies for my own which, in recent years, has included people of all kinds and classes and three happy years teaching at that same high school in Rochester. I don't know how we're ever going to determine how much Christian love has been increased by the novel. According to an article by Dan Morrissey in the *Georgetown Law Weekly* [Nov. 8] on the impact of *The Exorcist* and the film crew on location on the campus, "the film's heavy theme isn't sparking much discussion among the undergrads on the problem of evil or the question of free will." It quotes Georgetown senior Mike Blatty, the author's son, "There's really none of that around here now. Right now it's all Show Biz." According to the *Washington Post* [Nov. 6], Bill Blatty is peeved that the crew was not allowed to film a desecration scene in Holy Trinity Church, especially after the *other* Jesuits had given him so much cooperation. He was also worried about the fact that a 12-year-old girl in Washington had developed symptoms of "diabolical possession" after reading his book.

I'm afraid that the attempt to solicit priestly blessings for *The Exorcist* book and film reminds me too much of the early days of *Playboy* when Mr. Hefner sought priests and ministers to baptise his little cultural package into respectability by submitting articles and friendly letters. I think we all *should* take risks and put ourselves in potentially compromising situations with the hope that some good will result. That's why priests sometimes find it necessary to join sit-ins, write controversial articles, associate with notorious people, go to political conventions and run for office. So, I'm glad Bill O'Malley has a part in the film. But I wish he would ask harder questions about what it means. And if Father O'Malley thinks that to consider Satan in a mythological context is to "pull the plug" on the rest of the Gospels, he should stop teaching religion and literature and go back to studying Scripture.

Finally, I suggest that the sense of "awe" brought on by the sight of human suffering is a poor gimmick to inspire faith. Faith is increased, I believe, when we see Christians struggle for justice and show concern for one another. The experience of this love lifts our imaginations to consider transcendent reality. Blatty's "devil" in Regan did not increase the faith of any character in the novel. It killed two priests and got Regan's mother to believe in Satan, not in God. Nor has it increased Father O'Malley's already strong belief in God nor helped him make up his mind on whether there are devils. That's not religion. That's not awe. That's Show Biz.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH, S.J.

BOOKS

The perils of being papa

Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years

MARGARET MEAD

Morrow, $8.95

Father Figure: An Uncensored Autobiography

BEVERLEY NICHOLS

Simon & Schuster, $6.95

ANNE FREMANTLE

The Oedipus plays, the sorry saga of the House of Atreus, the play of Hamlet, all concern themselves with the death of a father. Possibly the greatest novel ever written, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, is about patricide. Yet fatherhood is perhaps the most elusive of relationships; many are fathers without knowing it; many women don't know who is the father of their child, and still today, as in the time of Moses to be a Jew, the mother, not the father, must be Jewish.

Margaret Mead is one of the greatest women alive. A pioneer in her field, an immensely creative scientist, a gifted writer, the author of almost two dozen books on anthropology, a concerned human being, she is one of the most valuable of our citizens. Beverley Nichols is, beside her, a lightweight. Yet some of his 43 books have made their mark in England; he is a successful playwright, a musician, a creative gardener; and his *Cry Havoc* showed him to be politically aware. Both these autobiographies emphasize their parents' role: both writers had early hostility towards their fathers. Yet how different their male parents! Margaret Mead's was a perfectly adequate husband and father, a respected university professor, whose lapses were mostly from taste, though "there were occasionally very different women in his life" and "when he threatened to leave my mother" his own mother announced she would stay with her daughter-in-law and the children. Beverley Nichols' father was a pathological monster, an alcoholic who savagely ill-treated his wife and three sons, whose bouts of drinking are described in horrifying detail. Beverley tried three times to murder him—the third time succeeding in breaking his leg. (Questions were asked in the British House of Commons when *Father Figure* appeared in England, as to whether Mr. Nichols should not now be arrested and tried for attempted murder). Mar-