April 2013

Satanic but not Satan: Signs of the Devilish in Contemporary Cinema

Adam L. Porter
Illinois College, aporter@mail.ic.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf

Part of the Film and Media Studies Commons, and the Religion Commons
Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/
SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Satanic but not Satan: Signs of the Devilish in Contemporary Cinema

Abstract

Scholars have paid much attention to identifying and analyzing Jesus and Christ-type characters in film. The parallel cases for Satan and satanic characters have been less studied. Some attention has been paid to examining Satan/Lucifer/the Devil as a character (akin to movies about Jesus), but I could find no systematic typology of satanic traits, that would parallel the well-developed Christ-typologies. This article examines six films to begin the process of describing what makes a character "satanic" without being Satan.

Keywords

Creative Commons License

Author Notes

Scholars have been discussing cinematic Jesuses and Christ-figures in film for some time. These are distinct categories. In the first are movies that are explicitly about Jesus in his historical setting, such as *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), or *The Passion of the Christ* (2004),[1] as well as some that imagine Jesus in the modern world like *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter* (2001) or *Ultrachrist!* (2003).[2] The second (and much larger) category features films that have characters who are typologically Christ-figures.[3] Developing a typology for Christ-figures is relatively straight forward, as the New Testament describes Jesus' characteristics and activities in some detail. This allows scholars to identify Christ-figures by things such as (a) a mysterious origin, (b) attraction of disciples, (c) commitment to justice, (d) conflict with authority figures, (e) suffering for others, (f) death (often in a cruciform pose) or the appearance of death, and (g) resurrection or re-awakening.[4]

Paralleling the categories of Jesuses and Christ-figures are films that feature Satan and those with satanic figures. But given the rich literature examining Jesuses and Christ-figures, it is remarkable how little has been written about Satan and satanic figures.

The first category – films that feature Satan as a character – has been discussed by Kelly Wyman.[5] She noted two books that catalogue films with Satan or the Devil as *characters*,[6] but suggests that these works have not *analyzed* the characteristics of Satan in them. Wyman does so by using the work of Russell[7] to categorize cinematic Satans: Satan as human, Satan as beast, comedic Satans, Faustian stories, and the like. Her work is important, as it begins to examine Satan

in film more seriously. Her analysis focuses on films that have Satan (or Lucifer or the Antichrist) as characters, such as *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987) or *The Devil's Advocate* (1997). Interestingly, while there are relatively few films featuring Jesus as a character, there are a plethora of those that feature Satan. I suspect the main reason for this is that Satan is immortal and so can appear in modern times, whereas the human Jesus cannot as easily.

Wyman's analysis provides a parallel for films about Jesus with those about Satan. But she does not discuss the parallel to the second category of films about Christ: films with satanic characters who are not Satan. Developing a list of satanic traits is somewhat more difficult than developing a list of Christ-traits. As mentioned above, the New Testament describes Jesus in detail, but the Bible is relatively silent about Satan and demons in general. Satan does not play a major role in the Hebrew Bible; it was during the intertestamental period that Jews began to separate evil from YYWH and developed a complex demonology to explain evil.[8] In the New Testament, these ideas congealed around Satan. But the New Testament does not devote much time to detailing his activities, appearance, or the like. Russell persuasively argues that most of our contemporary ideas about Satan are based not on the Bible but on medieval folklore, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the various versions of the Faust / pact with the Devil story.

In this article, I examine six films that do not feature Satan but do have characters who exhibit traits associated with Satan in traditional mythology. As villains, all of them are evil and immoral; this is an obvious enough trait that I do not think it needs elaboration below. The most common other satanic attributes

are a) an ability to shape-shift and/or change appearance;[9] b) being physically and/or mentally superior to other humans; c) exhibiting an association with fire and torment; and d) appearing handsome and well-dressed, usually in black attire, and often with a widow's peak hairline. In these movies, all the satanic figures are paired with a Christ-character, who eventually defeats them.

The films to be studied are *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), the three films of *The Matrix* trilogy (*The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003a), and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003b)), *Superman Returns* (2006), and *Dark Knight* (2008). The most satanic figure of all the villains is the T-1000 terminator robot from *Terminator 2*, which exhibits all the major satanic traits.

The T-1000 provides the best example of a shape-shifting satanic villain. The T-1000 is made of a "liquid metal" and can adopt the appearance of anyone it touches (usually fatally). Terminator robots also have the ability to mimic the voice of people they hear, so they can deceive people into thinking they are someone else. Deceptiveness is one of the attributes of Satan mentioned in the Bible (Jn 8:44, 2 Cor 11:14); shifting shapes is one way Satan can deceive people and even angels.[10]

Although in medieval mythology, Satan often had beast-like qualities or exhibited physical deformities, since Goethe turned Mephistopheles into a suave and sophisticated character, satanic characters – especially on the stage and screen – have often been elegant and good-looking.[11] The main form the T-1000 assumes is that of a policeman, with a widow's peak hairline. Since it is made of liquid metal, any damage it suffers disappears almost instantly, with the metal flowing to

resume its original shape. This means that it always looks nice and dresses well, supernaturally so. Other forms it assumes are a security guard and the hero's foster-mother. Interestingly, all of these represent governmental authority, perhaps recalling the New Testament's association of Satan with the powers of this world (Eph 6:12, Revelation 13).

The T-1000's shape-shifting ability is limited: it cannot turn itself into a machine, but it can turn its limbs into hooks, knives, and other objects. It uses this ability to torture people on several occasions. It kills a guard in the Pescadero State Hospital for the Criminally Insane by stabbing him through the eye and then watching, seemingly bemused, as the guard twitches and dies (Figure 1). Later, it stabs Sarah Connor through the shoulder and threatens to stab her through the eye as well. This recalls traditional images of Satan (or his minions) torturing humans (1 Cor 5:5, Dante's *Inferno*).

Figure 1: The T-1000 kills a security guard.

In the Terminator series of movies, especially the first three, the evil robots become increasingly powerful and diabolical. The T-1000 is superior to the T-800 (familiar from the first *Terminator* (1984) movie) and far superior to humans. Pistols, machine guns, and shotguns do not affect it much. For the most

part, the movie does not show humans fighting the T-1000, but focuses on the fights between it and the T-800. This is effective because having physically imposing, tough-guy Arnold Schwarzenegger (the T-800) getting tossed around by a more normal looking Robert Patrick (the T-1000) emphasizes the power of the latter.[12]

The New Testament associates fire with punishment and Satan (Mt 3:10-12, 5:22, 13:40-42, 18:8-9, 25:41; Rev 19:20, 20:10-14, etc.) and this idea was popularized in the Medieval period. Consequently, fire is associated with the T-1000 at several key points in the film. At the end of the first chase sequence, the truck the T-1000 drives rams a bridge overpass, exploding and creating a fiery inferno. The T-1000 walks out of the fire, initially resembling an androgynous silver mannequin, and then it reassumes its police officer guise. Fire returns at the end of the film, which takes place in a steel foundry. The predominant colors in this section of the film are black and orange, as glowing, molten steel forms the background for the final action (Figure 2). The T-1000 is destroyed by falling into the molten steel, echoing Revelation 20:10: "The devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur . . ."

Figure 2: Sarah and John Connor in the hellish steel foundry.

In this film, the Christ-character is the T-800. It fits many of the tropes identified by Baugh: its origin is mysterious, since it was sent back in time. It attracts a disciple, the young John Connor. He comes to regard the machine like a friend and father figure. The T-800 has conflicts with authority figures, as it fights the LAPD and the T-1000, whose primary form is a police officer. It suffers for others when it gets injured while protecting John Connor and his mother. References to Christ's passion and death are notable: the T-1000 beats the T-800 with a rod and smashes it with an I-beam, before killing it by piercing its lower-right back with a spear. As with Jesus, the T-800 comes back to life. After this resurrection, it destroys the T-1000. Once its mission is accomplished, the T-800 sacrifices itself by being lowered into a vat of steel,[13] thereby offering hope for a peaceful future.[14] While sharing the same fate as the satanic T-1000 isn't what we might expect for the Christ-character, the fact that the latter accepts destruction voluntarily is significantly different: where the T-1000 screams and flails, the T-800 is a willing sacrifice.

One major difference between Jesus and the T-800 is that Jesus advocates turning the other cheek (Mt 5:39, Lk 6:29) and passively accepts crucifixion. The T-800 is a violent killing machine. Even when John Connor modifies its programming so it does not kill people, it still attacks and maims humans. But the use of violence is a common feature of modern action-movie Christ characters,[15] one exhibited in all the films being discussed.

The Christ character in the *Matrix* trilogy, Neo, is similarly violent. The trilogy of Matrix films (*The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), and *The*

Matrix Revolutions (2003) has attracted lots of attention from religion scholars. Many have identified Neo as a Christ-figure,[16] while others have seen him through the lens of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Humanism.[17] Cypher has been identified as a satanic character,[18] because he tempts and betrays Neo. But the more satanic figures are the Agents, the intelligent programs that keep the matrix running smoothly; the best known of them is Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving).

Whereas the T-1000 changed it shape to resemble other humans, Agents take over their human targets, changing the human's appearance to that of the Agent. Thus, they act more like demons in the New Testament, who possess their victims. In the New Testament, however, it is hard to tell if someone is possessed by a demon or not, since his or her appearance does not change; only the person's behavior alters. In the matrix, Agents all resemble each other. As with the T-1000, these satanic characters are generally well attired. They dress in black suits, wear sunglasses, and are physically imposing. Additionally, unlike the demons in the Gospels, which are relatively easy for Jesus to cast out, Agents cannot be cast out of a human; they may leave voluntarily, but when Neo kills them, the human host dies as well. For most people possessed by an Agent, the only freedom is death; thus, Agents may be worse than demons.

Humans fear the Agents because they are far superior to normal humans in the matrix. As Morpheus tells Neo in *The Matrix*, every human who has fought an agent has died. This is what makes Neo exceptional: he is superior to the Agents, having the ability to fly, to "see" the reality (that is, the computer code) underly-

ing the matrix, and to ignore some of the "rules" of the matrix. He can both fight and destroy Agents.

Fire was an important association with the T-1000 but fire is not prominent in the first two Matrix films. However, in *The Matrix Revolutions*, Agent Smith escapes from the Matrix. It does this by possessing a human in the real world, deceiving the humans on Neo's hovercraft. It kills several crew members and blinds Neo. But just as Agent Smith is able to manifest itself in the real world outside the matrix, Neo's ability to see the reality underlying the matrix transfers into the real world. Thus, although blind, Neo "sees" the Agent Smith as a creature made of fire, rather than as the human flesh he has possessed (figure 3).

Figure 3: Neo's vision of the fiery Agent Smith.

In addition to other satanic traits, the Matrix emphasizes Agent Smith's satanic qualities by alluding to ideas about Satan found in Revelation and expanded upon by *Paradise Lost*. Revelation 12:7-9 describes a "war in heaven" between Michael and the dragon, "who is called the Devil and Satan." The final battle in *Matrix Revolutions* between Neo and Smith is fought in "heaven": both fly through the air in a protracted fight sequence. After Smith knocks Neo uncon-

scious and he begins to plummet to earth, Smith flies above him, triumphantly, as lightning flashes around him in a distinctly wing-like pattern: he is a dark angel (figure 4).

Figure 4: Agent Smith, with "wings" of lightning.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan rebels against God and after being expelled from heaven, decides to get revenge by disrupting God's creation.[19] Similarly, Agent Smith frightens the AI / machine intelligence that runs the matrix because, after being destroyed by Neo in *The Matrix*, he reappears in *The Matrix Reloaded*, freed of AI oversight. The free Agent Smith begins to disrupt the matrix, the AI's creation, just as Satan disrupts God's creation.

Milton has the archangel Michael foretell Christ's incarnation and how he will defeat sin and death, imprison Satan, and, eventually, renew the world.[20] Allusions to Christ's taking on human flesh to defeat death are found at the end of *The Matrix* and *The Matrix Revolutions*. In the first, Neo kills Agent Smith by entering it and then causing it to explode. At the end of the third movie, Neo willingly takes on the form of Agent Smith to eradicate it. This also reverses the typical role of Agent and human. As mentioned above, Agents possess humans and can only be "cast out" by killing the human. Neo possesses Agent Smith and de-

stroys it. The allusion to Christ is particularly obvious when Neo dies in a cruci-form pose in the real world (figure 5). Finally, as the movie ends, a new world is created both in the matrix (where the characters sit in a park and see a beautiful sunrise) and in the real world (where the war ends between the machines and hu-mans). Thus, Neo fulfills the predictions about Christ: he destroys the satanic fig-ure and a new world is created.

Figure 5: Neo, dying in a cruciform pose, saves the matrix and the real world.

Both *The Terminator* and the Matrix trilogy are science fiction films. *Superman Returns* (2006) might be situated in this realm as well: its protagonist is an alien who has supernatural powers. But unlike the super-human antagonists in the former films, the villain in *Superman* is a human. While Lex Luthor exhibits satanic traits, they are more mundane than those exhibited by the T-1000 or Agent Smith.

This can be seen in the first scene in *Superman Returns*, which shows Lex Luthor's shape-shifting skills. After conning a wealthy old woman into leaving her riches to him in her will, he leaves her room. Walking past her family, he re-moves a wig and hands it to a little girl. Throughout the movie, he changes his

appearance using different wigs, fake beards, and various suits: a mundane form of shape-shifting.

While he has limited shape-shifting skills, some other satanic traits are more pronounced. Mephistopheles was suave, cultured, and sartorially splendid. Luthor, too, is always neatly attired. His wardrobe on his yacht has dozens of well-tailored suits and shirts. He is completely bald, so lacks a widow's peak. His yacht and its accoutrements also show that he has high cultural tastes. He surrounds himself with classical music, identifiable to audiences (Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, Bizet's *Carmen*, etc.). The yacht has a nice library and grand-piano and even his goons have some piano playing skills. His intelligence and elevated taste are highlighted by comparison to his girlfriend, Kitty, whose naiveté is emphasized. On the other hand, where Luthor is utterly amoral, planning to create a new land mass and kill millions of people, Kitty has reservations about his plan and eventually destroys the stolen crystals. (Thus, whereas Luthor fulfills satanic stereotypes, Kitty fulfills the "bimbo with a good heart" stereotype.)

Luthor compares himself to Prometheus; for the 19th century Romantics, Milton's Satan was also a Prometheus figure.[21] Luthor describes Superman as a god and seeks to steal knowledge from him, finding Superman's Fortress of Solitude. He takes crystals (the basis of Krypton's technology) from the Fortress and steals a chunk of kryptonite from the Natural History Museum. He combines these to create his new land mass. Its crystalline structure is laced with kryptonite, making it toxic to Superman.

The Prometheus story makes clear the risk of stealing from the gods and Lex Luthor needs every advantage he can devise, since, unlike the T-1000 or Agent Smith, he is clearly physically inferior to the protagonist of the film. He tries to overcome this disadvantage by employing a band of goons to help him. This may allude to Satan being assisted by demonic minions. Luthor's goons staff his yacht, help him to find the Fortress of Solitude, and aid in the theft of the kryptonite from the museum. They also help Luthor beat-up Superman after he is weakened by kryptonite.

Luthor says that Superman is a god and the movie demonstrates this. Superman's divinity is emphasized in several shots of him floating in the "heavens" (figure 6), while an (angelic) choir sings on the soundtrack. From heaven, he om-

Figure 6: Superman watches over the world from heaven.

nisciently watches the earth, waiting to save humans. But Superman exhibits more Christ-like qualities than the protagonists in the other movies discussed. This is probably because the Superman-Christ connection has been part of the Superman mythos from its inception,[22] but they are striking here. In a voice over, Superman's father says humans have a capacity for good, but "they lack the light. This

is why I sent them you, my only son." This language alludes to the opening of the Gospel of John. Later, Luthor stabs him in the side with a spear-shaped sliver of kryptonite, echoing the gospel story of a soldier stabbing Jesus with a spear (John 19:34).

Christ allusions dominate the end of the movie, closely paralleling the end of the Gospel of John. Ridding the world of Luthor's kryptonite-laced crystal land-mass kills him and he assumes a cruciform pose as he falls to earth (figure 7). Taken to a hospital, human attempts to revive him prove futile. But when a

Figure 7: Superman dies in a cruciform pose.

female nurse enters the room where the "dead" Superman was laid, she finds the bed empty, as did the women who entered Jesus' tomb (John 20:5-9). How Superman comes back to life is a mystery, but the film concludes with his post-resurrection appearance to Lois Lane. This follows the end of John, which suggests that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene before the male disciples (Jn 20:14-18).

While Superman is more Christ-like than the other protagonists discussed, the opposite is true in *The Dark Knight* (2008), the last movie to be studied. Inter-

estingly, while the Batman exhibits relatively few Christ traits, the Joker is very satanic. Unlike the other protagonists discussed, Batman has no super-human abilities. He is athletically gifted and well-trained as a fighter, but his main edge is that he has access to better technology than other people. As a (more or less) normal human, his Christ-attributes are far less pronounced than those of the protagonists in the other films. In fact, the main Christ-trait he displays occurs at the end of the movie, when he expresses his willingness to accept the sins of another (the crimes committed by Two-Face, the insane alter-ego of Harvey Dent) in order to save Gotham and keep it on a path to renewal.

Both Lex Luthor and the Joker, the villain of *Dark Knight*, are human and exhibit more mundane evil attributes than the Agents or the Terminator robots. But their human evil may be more frightening than that of the supernatural villains because it is harder for viewers to distance themselves from the movie by saying, "This is impossible." One may be able to suspend disbelief while watching films about time travelling killer robots and computers run amok to enslave humanity, but one doesn't have to suspend disbelief while watching psychotic killers, corrupt politicians, urban decay, and the other evils that blight Batman's world. Batman (and even more, Superman) may stretch our credulity, but their worlds' ills are larger-than-life illustrations and caricatures of familiar problems; their familiarity makes them scary.

Because the Joker is closer to reality, he, like Lex Luthor, cannot exhibit supernatural satanic traits, but he has a panoply of mundane satanic attributes. While the Joker has been identified as satanic before,[23] what makes him satanic

has not been described. Many of the traits identified above, however, can be found in this movie as well.

The Joker, like Lex Luthor, has a limited ability to shape-shift. His face is disfigured by extensive scarring, which he calls attention to with clown-like red and white makeup. Despite these scars, he is able to successfully disguise himself with masks (during a bank robbery), normal makeup (while attempting to assassinate the mayor), and dressing as a female nurse (while visiting Harvey Dent in the hospital). Heath Ledger introduces a disturbing tic: his Joker's tongue is frequently in motion, licking his lips, or darting out of his mouth. This affectation may call to mind the way a snake uses its tongue and snakes are, of course, associated with Satan.

Satanic figures are usually well-dressed, and so is the Joker. His color choice is bizarre, but this may be attributed to the comic book genre. His high-quality purple suit and green vest are expensive, as several other characters note during the film. On the other hand, his extensive facial scarring prevents him from being attractive, especially because he often calls attention to them with make-up. He does exhibit a high forehead and a widow's peak.

The Joker is associated with fire. He uses it to kill Rachel Dawes and to disfigure Harvey Dent. He demonstrates his lack of concern for money by making a pyramid of it and burning it, while commenting that the things he loves – dynamite, gasoline, and gunpower – are cheap and flammable (figure 8). When he blows up Gotham's main hospital, two reverse-tracking shots allow us to see him walking down the hall and away from the building, with explosions and fire be-

hind him. As he drives off, a crane shot shows the entire building engulfed in fire and collapsing. The Joker is not motivated by money, but by his intense desire to maim and destroy.

Figure 8: The Joker burns his pyramid of cash.

Lex Luthor was forced to employ a band of goons because Superman was so physically superior to him. But the Batman is a human, so the Joker does not need as much help to fight him. The Joker's henchmen are a constantly rotating group, as he kills them himself. This serves mainly to highlight his evilness and complete disregard for human life, even for his (nominal) allies. It also suggests his love of chaos and disorder.

We noted above the Miltonian allusions in *The Matrix*, where Agent Smith disrupted the orderly functioning of the matrix. The Joker affirms this love of chaos. He tells Harvey Dent that planners and schemers are trying to control the world. He sees himself as trying to demonstrate that their attempts to control the world are "pathetic." He takes their plans and turns them on their head. He is an agent of chaos. But these claims are false: he carefully plans and executes bank-robberies and kidnappings, blows up a hospital, and rigs ferries to explode.

Many of his plans are built on the satanic traits of lies and deception. He offers two different stories about the origin of his facial scars. By lying to Batman about where Dent and Dawes are located, he tricks Batman into rescuing Dent, but the police are unable to save Dawes. Towards the end of the movie, he dresses hospital patients like his henchmen and vice-versa; the police are deceived and, were it not for Batman, they would have killed the hostages. The Joker also lies when he tells the hostages on the ferries that they can escape by pushing a button to destroy the other ferry, since he plans to blow them up regardless.

One final similarity between the Joker and Satan, one not found in any of the other villains, is that in popular mythology, Satan and his minions dehumanize people by possessing them and/or encouraging them to do evil. In some stories (like Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*), the evil is fairly low-level: discomforting the Pope with silly pranks, for instance. In other stories (like Goethe's *Faust*), the evil has more serious consequences, such as the death of Gretchen and her family. And in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan gets the humans to disobey God, causing the fall of humans and the earth's axis to twist out of vertical: a (literally) cosmic disaster. In the movies discussed above, the villains rarely try to motivate humans to do evil. The terminator robots simply try to kill humans; the Agents try to control the matrix by killing humans; and Lex Luthor tries to enrich himself, showing no concern for the millions of people who will die in the process. The Joker, on the other hand, tempts people by inviting them to choose to do evil. He succeeds in this with Harvey Dent. After disfiguring him in a fire, the Joker talks to him in the hospital, gives him a gun, and launches him on a mission of revenge. Dent hunts

down the bad cops and the Mafiosos who he holds responsible for Dawes' death, executing them in cold blood. Later, after loading two ferries with explosives, the Joker asks each boat-load of hostages to kill the other to save themselves. In this case, both the Arkham asylum convicts and the civilians act morally, and refuse to push the button to blow up the other boat. This movie thus offers several responses to the temptation of evil: some – Harvey Dent – succumb to it but others – the people on both ferries – resist. This offers a glimmer of hope in an otherwise dark meditation on human nature.

Thus, while the Joker displays some of the satanic attributes seen in other villains, his personality is more complex. The villains in the science fiction films are motivated by a hatred of humans, and Lex Luthor mainly wants money and power. But pinning down the Joker's desires and motivations is more challenging. Assuming he wants to destroy orderliness and reduce the world to a Hobbesian state of nature, what would set him down this path? A number of reviewers commented on how this Joker was more psychologically complex[24] than earlier versions, like Jack Nicholson's Joker in Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989). Batman mirrors this complexity; where Superman is pure and good, Batman is far more conflicted. He is a vigilante who revels in being able to beat-up bad guys. In the middle of the film, he assaults the Joker while in police custody. Later, he attacks the police to prevent them from killing the wrong people. Because Batman is a much darker hero than the other three protagonists, his Christ-attributes are far fewer.

As noted above, other scholars have demonstrated how deeply embedded the Christ-motif is in Western culture, and directors allude to it frequently in their

films. As Robert Detweiler wrote, "the Christ story is certainly the most familiar, most pervasive narrative in Western civilization" especially in its expanded form, which includes not only the New Testament accounts, but "apocryphal additions [and] later legends accruing to the original body of material."[25] I believe directors draw on similar images of Satan for the same reason: it taps into an archetype of evil that is familiar to their audience, either consciously or subconsciously.

While there is a distinct Christ-typology, it is more difficult to define a distinct satanic typology, as there is a less well-defined set of satanic attributes. But the directors of the movies discussed here have drawn on a favored subset of satanic traits, applying them to their villainous characters, allowing the audience to recognize them as satanic without being Satan. The directors use familiar biblical and literary tropes to create a fantasy realm to explore ideas of good and evil, without being limited to the real world and traditional characters. In the movies most distant from the real world – the science fiction films of the *Terminator* and the *Matrix* trilogy – the villains can display *external* satanic traits strongly, since viewers' willingness to suspend disbelief is the greatest.

When the villains are human, the external satanic attributes are lessened: they have to be plausible as humans. But *internal* satanic traits can be empha-sized. Thus, even if he lacks the external trappings of the T-1000 or Agents, the Joker's actions are closer to those of Satan, especially his repeated attempts to en-courage others to choose to do evil. In this regard, he is the most satanic villain in these films. He is, perhaps, even worse than Satan in one way: in many stories, such as *Paradise Lost*, Satan's motivations are fairly clear – he desires to harm

humans to indirectly attack God. But *The Dark Knight* obscures the Joker's motivation. His shifting appearance is paired with his unknowable intentions. The inability to understand or predict the Joker's behavior is profoundly disturbing. Because of this, although less powerful than the villains in the other films, the Joker may be scarier.

In the films I have analyzed, the directors present satanic villains dehumanizing people, either by possessing them (the Agents or the T-1000) or encouraging them to do evil (the Joker). These satanic characters are effective because they tap a trove of associations and mythic symbols. Who can defeat them? The same stories that provide the satanic symbols also provide the answer: only Jesus will ultimately defeat Satan. Thus, it is not surprising that in all these films, Christ-characters provide salvation to the world and defeat the satanic characters. The most troubling film, in this respect, is *Dark Knight*: Batman is not as Christ-like as the other protagonists, and the Joker is chaotically more satanic than some of the other antagonists. This movie, unlike the other three, does not provide a tidy resolution to the question of evil, leaving the audience to ponder issues of good and evil as they leave the theater.

[1]Richard Walsh, *Reading the Gospels in the Dark* (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003).

[2]Dan W. Clanton, "'Here, There, and Everywhere': Images of Jesus in American Popular Culture," in *The Bible In/And Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter*, eds Philip Culbertson and Elaine M. Wainwright, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 52–54.

[3]Anton Karl Kozlovic, "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8 (2004); Lloyd Baugh, *Imagining the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997).

[4]Baugh, *Imagine the Divine*, 205–10.

[5]Kelly J. Wyman, "The Devil We Already Know: Medieval Representations of a Powerless Satan in Modern American Cinema," *Journal of Religion and Film* 8, no. 2 (October 2004); Kelly J. Wyman, "Satan in the Movies," in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. William L. Blizek (New York: Continuum, 2009), 300–310.

[6]Nikolas Schreck, *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated History of the Devil in Cinema 1896–1999* (London (?): Creation Books, 2000); Charles P. Mitchell, *The Devil on Screen: Feature Films Worldwide, 1913 Through 2000* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002).

[7]Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[8]Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), Chapter 3; Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage, 1995), Chapter 2.

[9]Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, 112–14.

[10] *Paradise Lost* (hereafter, *PL*), 3.636, 681-684.

[11]Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, 216.

[12] This trajectory continues into *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003). The terminator in this movie (the T-X) gains the ability to control other machines, as well as having projectile weapons systems built into its body. It is also female. Thus, in this movie Schwarzenegger gets beat up by a woman, again suggesting the power and strength of the newer, more sinister, killing machine.

[13]Anton Karl Kozlovic, "From Holy Aliens to Cyborg Saviors: Biblical Subtexts in Four Science Fiction Films," *Journal of Film and Religion* 5, no. 2 (2001).

[14] This movie introduces a time-travel paradox. Parts from the original T-800 (from the first *Terminator* film) have allowed the development of new technologies by Cyberdyne computer systems; these will eventually allow the creation of Skynet, the computer system which becomes sentient and attacks humanity. Thus, by destroying these parts, as well as those of the T-800 unit in this film, perhaps Skynet will never be built.

[15]John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Eerdman's Publishing, 2002), 6–7.

[16]Mark D. Stucky, "He is the One: *The Matrix* Trilogy's Postmodern Movie Messiah," *Journal of Religion and Film* 9, no. 2 (2005).

[17]Jeffery Wittung and Daniel Bramer, "From Superman to Brahman: The Religious Shift of *The Matrix* Mythology," *Journal of Religion and Film* 10, no. 2 (October 2006); Frances Flannery-Dailey and Rachel Wagner, "Wake Up! Gnosticism and Buddhism in *The Matrix*," *Journal of Religion and Film* 5, no. 2 (2001).

[18]Chris Seay and Greg Garrett, *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in The Matrix* (Colorado Springs: Piñon Press, 2003), 131–38.

[19] *PL* 1.650-662, 2.344-360.

[20] *PL* 12.405-465.

[21]Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), chapter 2.

[22]Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Superman as Christ-Figure: The American Pop Culture Movie Messiah," *Journal of Religion and Film* 6, no. 1 (April 2002).

[23]Charles K. Bellinger, "The Joker is Satan, and So Are We: Girard and *The Dark Knight*," *Journal of Religion and Film* 13, no. 1 (April 2009).

[24]Richard Corliss, "Batman is Back," *Time*, 9 July 2008; Manohla Dargis, "Showdown in Gotham Town," *New York Times*, 18 July 2008; Christopher Orr, "The Movie Review: 'The Dark Knight'," *The New Republic*, 17 July 2008.

[25] Robert Detweiler, "Christ and the Christ Figure in American Fiction," *New Theology No. 2*, Ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 302.

REFERENCES

Baugh, Lloyd. *Imagining the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997.

Bellinger, Charles K. "The Joker is Satan, and So Are We: Girard and *The Dark Knight*." *Journal of Religion and Film* 13, no. 1 (April 2009).

Clanton, Dan W. "'Here, There, and Everywhere': Images of Jesus in American Popular Culture." In *The Bible In/And Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter*, eds Philip Culbertson and Elaine M. Wainwright. Semeia Studies, 41–60.
Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Corliss, Richard. "Batman is Back." *Time*, 9 July 2008.

The Dark Knight. DVD. Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2008; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008.

Dargis, Manohla. "Showdown in Gotham Town." *New York Times*, 18 July 2008.

Detweiler, Robert. "Christ and the Christ Figure in American Fiction." *New Theology No. 2*. Ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman. New York: Macmillan, 1965. 297–316

Flannery-Dailey, Frances, and Rachel Wagner. "Wake Up! Gnosticism and Buddhism in *The Matrix*." *Journal of Religion and Film* 5, no. 2 (2001).

Kozlovic, Anton Karl. "From Holy Aliens to Cyborg Saviors: Biblical Subtexts in Four Science Fiction Films." *Journal of Film and Religion* 5, no. 2 (2001).

------. "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8 (2004).

------. "Superman as Christ-Figure: The American Pop Culture Movie Messiah." *Journal of Religion and Film* 6, no. 1 (April 2002).

Lawrence, John Shelton, and Robert Jewett. *The Myth of the American Superhero*. Eerdman's Publishing, 2002.

The Matrix. DVD. Directed by the Wachowski Brothers. 1999; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008.

The Matrix Reloaded. DVD. Directed by the Wachowski Brothers. 2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008.

The Matrix Revolutions. DVD. Directed by the Wachowski Brothers. 2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008.

Milton, John. David Scott Kastan, ed. *Paradise Lost*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005)

Mitchell, Charles P. *The Devil on Screen: Feature Films Worldwide, 1913 Through 2000*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002.

Orr, Christopher. "The Movie Review: 'The Dark Knight'." *The New Republic*, 17 July 2008.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Origin of Satan*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. Translated by Angus Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Russell, Jeffrey Burton. *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984.

------. *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Schreck, Nikolas. *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated History of the Devil in Cinema 1896–1999*. London: Creation Books, 2000.

Seay, Chris, and Greg Garrett. *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in The Matrix*. Colorado Springs: Piñon Press, 2003.

Stucky, Mark D. "He is the One: *The Matrix* Trilogy's Postmodern Movie Messiah." *Journal of Religion and Film* 9, no. 2 (2005).

Superman Returns. DVD. Directed by Bryan Singer. 2006; Burbank CA: Warner Home Video, 2006.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day. DVD. Directed by James Cameron. 1991; Santa Monica, CA: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2003.

Walsh, Richard. *Reading the Gospels in the Dark*. New York: Trinity Press International, 2003.

Wittung, Jeffery, and Daniel Bramer. "From Superman to Brahman: The Religious Shift of *The Matrix* Mythology." *Journal of Religion and Film* 10, no. 2 (October 2006).

Wyman, Kelly J. "The Devil We Already Know: Medieval Representations of a Powerless Satan in Modern American Cinema." *Journal of Religion and Film* 8, no. 2 (October 2004).

------. "Satan in the Movies." In *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, edited by William L. Blizek, 300–310. New York: Continuum, 2009.