

## 4 And let my cry come unto thee

Mark Kermode, *The Exorcist*, 2nd Edition,  
London: BFI, 1998

For all its dense textural layering and complex editing, *The Exorcist* is chiefly remembered as a special-effects *tour de force* – a reputation that has often obscured its less obvious virtues. It was clear from the outset that if the movie's third act – the exorcism itself – was to have the necessary impact, groundbreaking visuals would be required. While soundman Ron Nagle spent two months recording the sounds of angry bees, fighting dogs, hyperactive hamsters and terrified pigs,<sup>53</sup> Friedkin decreed that all the supernatural goings-on of the exorcism sequence should be achieved mechanically, on-set, producing a sense of verisimilitude often lacking in post-produced effects. To this end, the interior of the MacNeil house was constructed from scratch at New York's Ceco Studios, the real house in Georgetown (belonging to one Florence Mahoney) being used for exterior shots only.<sup>54</sup>

Freed now from the restrictions of location work, Friedkin's team constructed mock-ups of Regan's bedroom, replete with false walls to facilitate the fork-lifting of the bed, false ceilings to allow Linda Blair to be levitated with piano wires, and an air-vented window which would billow and blow on cue. An entire room was then encased in a vast, refrigerative cocoon which dropped the temperature below freezing-point, producing the extraordinary condensing breath of all those who enter Regan's domain. As well as tales of contact lenses freezing,<sup>55</sup> those who worked on the satanic finale of *The Exorcist* recall incidents of icy cameras, electrical fires, sprinkler floods, even indoor snow, all of which added costly weeks to the already overlong shooting schedule.

For the movie's most startling special effect – the show-stopping projectile vomiting – Friedkin wanted Dick Smith to devise a way of achieving, on set, a full-face shot that would show the audience Regan's open mouth clearly spewing forth copious amounts of steaming matter. Smith developed a plastic mouth-harness reminiscent of a horse's bit, which would pump pea soup into the mouth of the actress, then out through a central nozzle. On either side of her face, the harness would

be hidden by heavy 'possession' make-up, while the main feeder-tube lay hidden under her hair. Although much has been written over the years about the hardships that Linda Blair endured using this contraption (a subsequent aversion to pea soup has been widely reported), the movie does not apparently feature her using it. According to Dick Smith, the first vomiting scene (during Regan's first encounter with Damien Karras), was originally shot with Eileen Dietz using Smith's contraption to create a 'broadcast' effect, with vomit spraying every way from Regan's mouth. Later, Friedkin decided that this scene was not to his liking, and reshot an insert of Linda Blair lurching forwards on the bed, on to which he grafted a single stream of vomit using the very opticals he had sworn he would not tolerate. In the final assembly, this inserted optical shot of Blair cuts away to Jason Miller being splattered with

The levitation



green slime, then back to Eileen Dietz who is recoiling violently while the last dribbles of 'vomit' bubble from her lips. Later, during the exorcism itself, Smith's harness is used to produce a slow pulse of vomit oozing from Regan's mouth and on to the purple stole with which Father Merrin is attempting to bless her. Again, according to Smith, the

sequence features Eileen Dietz, whose face remains identifiable even under the possession make-up. 'When you see Dietz lying in bed,' he told Tim Lucas in 1991, 'with her head on its side, vomiting this slow, thick substance on to Max's purple stole ... that's the only time my make-up device for the vomit effect was used in the film.'<sup>56</sup>

Crucially, Friedkin never informed Smith that his complex special-effects gag had been bowdlerised, and insisted to the press that Linda Blair had performed all the vomiting sequences. This was in keeping with the campaign of disinformation which the director waged concerning the film's special effects, and which culminated in his hilarious announcement that the levitation sequence 'was achieved by the use of a magnetic field'.<sup>57</sup> The aim of this repeated assertion was clear: to make the piano wires suspending the actress disappear by simply telling the audience that they weren't there in the first place. By suggesting some magical hocus-pocus whereby Linda Blair had *really* been levitated on set, Friedkin injected an air of mystery into an otherwise corny gag. He was also heard to announce with a splendidly straight face that, while he couldn't possibly reveal how Regan's head-spinning effect was achieved, he could promise that, 'Any way you think I did it is not the way we did it.'

While Friedkin's efforts to 'help the audience suspend their disbelief' succeeded in lending an eerie credibility to the on-screen lunacy, it also created a situation in which Linda Blair would ultimately suffer. Most notably, Friedkin's repeated assertion that Blair had 'no stand-in, no substitute', and had performed every scene in the movie, ironically proved doubly damaging to the young actress. At first the assertion that a teenage actress had performed *all* the on-screen atrocities, including the notorious crucifix masturbation sequence, led to press rumours that Blair had become deranged by the trauma of making the film.<sup>58</sup> Later, when both Eileen Dietz and Mercedes McCambridge sued for credit for their work on the movie, Blair's professional reputation was unjustly called into question. 'It's not true that some of [Blair's] words were blended with mine on the final track,'

McCambridge told the *New York Times* in 1974. 'All of the devilish vocality is mine – *all* of it. *Every word!*'<sup>59</sup> Friedkin was finally forced to acknowledge McCambridge's work (which had involved swallowing and regurgitating pulpy eggs), and she received a screen credit – though not as the voice of the demon – on all but the first thirty prints of *The Exorcist*.<sup>60</sup> But by this time her dispute with the director had halted the planned release of a soundtrack album including dialogue scenes.<sup>61</sup>

More messily, Eileen Dietz became embroiled in a very public battle with Linda Blair who, she claimed, was stealing all the credit for work in which she had played a role. Furious at Friedkin for publicly denying that there had been any on-screen substitutions, Dietz counter-claimed that she had performed *all* the possession sequences. Warner Bros. finally stop-watched the movie and conceded that Dietz appeared on screen for 28.25 seconds, but denied that her contribution was dramatically significant. Dubbed 'The Great Pea Soup War', this high-profile fight is generally believed to have worked against Blair at Oscar time, though oddly it did nothing to alleviate the rumours about her mental health. As far as the tabloids were concerned, Blair was still fair game, stand-in or no stand-in.

'The point is, the press really *wanted* me to be mixed up,' Linda Blair told me resignedly in 1989.

They wrote all these articles about how deranged I was and the psychiatric problems I was supposed to have ... The press thought they could make money taking pictures of me doing weird things ... and I did *not* do weird things. Also ... the audience, they *chose* to see a scary film, and maybe they wanted to believe all those rumours because it helped the whole process. Maybe people wanted to believe weird things happened because it helped them to be scared.

This observation precisely pinpoints the thinking behind Friedkin's attempts to promote *The Exorcist* through the strategic use of superstitious hokum. As well as telling journalists that 'There are strange (Overleaf) 'The power of Christ compels you!'

images and visions that showed up on film that were never planned, double exposures in the little girl's face at the end of one reel that are unbelievable,'<sup>62</sup> Friedkin also claimed that the sounds of a real exorcism of a young boy, performed in the Vatican, had been mixed on to the film.<sup>63</sup> On top of all this, Friedkin also seems to have played up rumours of a 'curse' which supposedly haunted the movie, the most widely reported incident being the death of Jack MacGowran shortly after he had completed his scenes as Burke Dennings. Other fatalities obliquely attributed to the movie included Max von Sydow's brother (who died in Sweden) and Linda Blair's grandfather. To add to this, Jason Miller's son Jordan was struck by a speeding motorbike during a beach visit, putting him briefly into intensive care; a gaffer cut off his fingers (or toes, depending on your source) on the set; and Ellen Burstyn had her



back injured as she was yanked across the floor by unseen wires during the crucifix masturbation scene. Meanwhile production office coordinator Noni Rock was mysteriously taken ill and the Ceco Studios set burned down . . . on a Sunday, no less. 'There were in fact some thirteen episodes during the making of the movie that seemed like diabolical

A grisly Blair in full demon make-up

interventions,' declared unit publicist Howard Newman with showman's flair. 'Coincidence or not, numerologists will enjoy speculating on that.'<sup>64</sup>

'All those rumours of a curse were total nonsense,' laughs Blatty now, recalling how they began:

Billy Friedkin had fallen vastly behind schedule, and he gave an interview to *Newsweek* magazine blaming it all on devils. The next thing, reports about all these troubling occurrences started circulating. But for God's sake, if you shoot something for a year, people are going to get hurt, people are going to die . . . these things just happen.

If a confrontation with evil forces was happening anywhere on the production of *The Exorcist*, it was being played out not on the set, but in

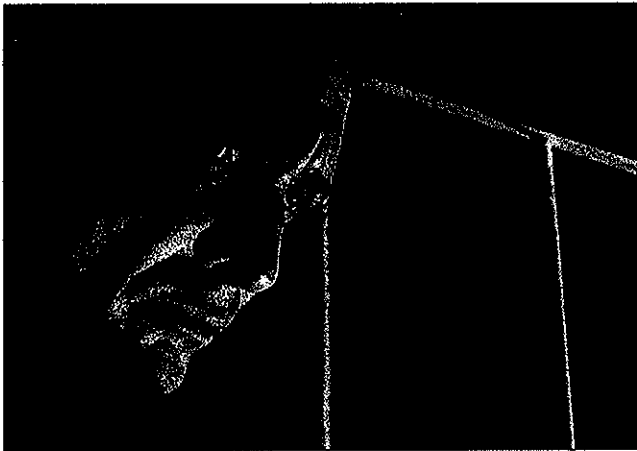
Blair with birthday greetings on the set of *The Exorcist*



the editing room. According to Blatty, some time in the autumn of 1973, Friedkin screened a 140-minute cut of the movie which the writer/producer had enthusiastically endorsed. But as the 26 December opening date loomed ever closer, Blatty found himself barred from post-production as Friedkin proceeded to excise a number of scenes which he believed were adversely affecting the pace of the movie. Having casually

remarked that, 'In editing *The Exorcist*, every attempt is being made to play down the metaphysics and play up the horror,'<sup>65</sup> Friedkin had resolved to reduce to a minimum any dialogue of an explicitly theological nature, letting the action speak for itself. Blatty, who had felt from the outset that his work was in danger of being spiritually compromised, was clearly not going to consent to any such cuts and was therefore banned from the Warner lot by Friedkin, who alleged bluntly that he was 'being a pain in the ass'.

Friedkin and Blatty's disagreements about the theological message of *The Exorcist* dated back to their earliest meetings, when Friedkin simply refused to work from Blatty's much-loved first-draft screenplay. During the writing of the second-draft screenplay, in which Friedkin had assisted Blatty by circling scenes from the original novel, Blatty had held



The stairway conversation becomes merely a moment of silence

fast to a lengthy exchange between Father Merrin and Father Karras in which the exact nature of Regan's possession is explained. Located in both the novel and first- and second-draft screenplays during a lull in the exorcism just prior to Merrin's death, this scene was always considered problematic by Friedkin, and had been gradually whittled down at his request. As it appears in my copy of the revised script, the scene reads thus:

### Scene 232

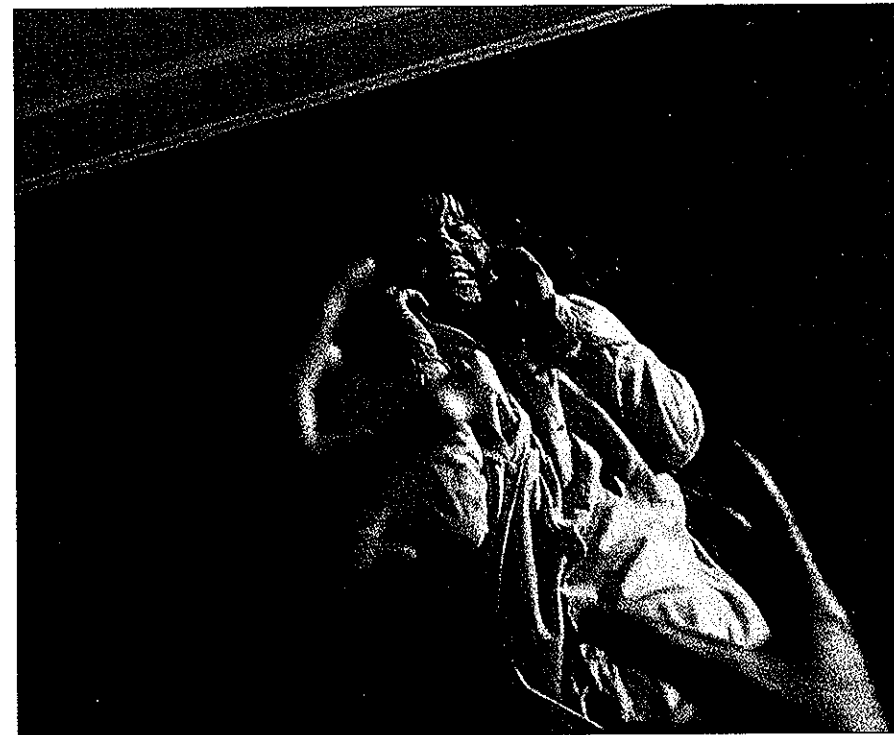
INT. HALL OUTSIDE REGAN'S BEDROOM

In the dimness, Merrin and Karras lean against a wall, their faces numb with shock as they stare at door to Regan's room. O.S. singing continues.

KARRAS: Father, what's going on in there? What is it? If that's the Devil, why this girl? It makes no sense.

MERRIN: I think the point is to make us despair, Damien – to see ourselves as animal, and ugly – to reject our own humanity – to reject the possibility that God could ever love us.<sup>66</sup>

According to Blatty, Max von Sydow had argued for these lines to be expanded during rehearsals, a request that was apparently granted



Karras's possessed hands move to strangle Regan

during the filming of the scene. 'That exchange on the staircase between Merrin and Karras is the key to the whole film,' states Blatty firmly. 'This is where you find out why you've been subjected to all this horror for so long.' But Friedkin disagreed, and after months of battling with Blatty over the importance of this exchange ('Is the scene really essential, Burke? ...'), he simply sliced it out in the editing room. 'I threw that scene out because it was overstated,' explains Friedkin:

It's like, the whole movie was about what they were talking about, so *why are they talking about it?* This was the equivalent of that scene which ends *Psycho*, which I hate. Blatty's feeling was that he had to have his characters sitting there and explaining the picture to the audience. That's where Bill and I differ. I felt that we did not need to explain it, that the audience should fill in



Karras finds  
Merrin dead on  
Regan's floor

everything for themselves. The worst thing you could do was to actually tell them what this was all about.

Interestingly, however, the stairway conversation between Merrin and Karras was not a victim of Friedkin's re-editing of *The Exorcist* in Blatty's absence, having hit the cutting-room floor *before* Blatty

proclaimed Friedkin's initial 140-minute cut 'a truly masterful film'. Despite Blatty's later assertion that 'the entire moral centre of the movie was contained in those few lines that were cut', it would seem that at some point he was persuaded by Friedkin that their message remained implicit in the film.

One element that may have helped to counterbalance Blatty's anxiety about losing the scene was the clear manner in which Karras's final confrontation with the demon was now portrayed. Ever since his editors at Harper and Row had asked him to 'make the ending less obvious', Blatty had been concerned that the climax of his story had been thrown open to misinterpretation. For him, there was no room for doubt: Karras taunts the demon to leave Regan and come into his body, at which point he makes a superhuman effort to retain control of his muscles just long enough to throw himself *and the demon* to their deaths. It is an act of self-sacrifice which saves Regan and confirms Karras's own reborn faith. For Blatty, the true nature of Karras's victory was apparent, but some readers and reviewers of the novel thought otherwise, imagining that the demon had killed Karras. Blatty was therefore concerned to prevent any such misinterpretation of the forthcoming film. As it transpired, viewers of the film would ultimately witness something that had remained ambiguous in the novel – Karras's final confrontation with the demon.

'The way that final scene of Karras and the demon was arrived at was through long discussions between Blatty, Friedkin and myself,' Jason Miller recalled in 1992:

There was a feeling that the final confrontation, while it works in the novel, needed expansion in the film. With the novel, you can let the reader's imagination fill in the blanks, but in the movie, the flow of all the dramatic moments seemed to culminate in what happens in that room. And the final decision was to improvise it and see what happens. As I remember it, in the original script Karras walks over to the little girl, and he says 'Come into me, come into me', then you cut downstairs, and then he goes through the

window. It was an almost mystic, serene moment when he makes the decision. But as the film began to progress, Blatty and Friedkin felt that the real influence of the devil, the real indication that Karras is totally possessed, is that he tries to kill the girl, and in the final analysis that was much more dramatic.

As it now plays, Karras's dismay at the death of Merrin unleashes a tide of fury in the young priest, causing him to assault Regan physically, punching her about the head while screaming 'Take me! Come into me!' As Regan rips the talismanic St Joseph medal from his neck, Father Karras trembles and is thrown backwards, resurfacing momentarily in full demonic make-up. With his own body now infested, he stumbles, arms outstretched, towards Regan, whom we glimpse from the priest's point of view, weeping with terror but clearly freed now from her own possession. As Karras's hands move to strangle Regan, we cut to a full frontal view of the priest's anguished face which flashes abruptly (and somewhat clumsily) from Dick Smith's demonic make-up to Miller's own features. Wrestling with the demon within him, Karras screams 'No!' and lunges towards the window, throwing himself through the glass and into the night. Father Dyer then appears at the bottom of the 'Hitchcock steps' where he tearfully administers the last rites to Karras who, though dying, accepts by moving his bloodied hand.

'Does the scene work better like that?' Miller asks rhetorically.

Yes, I think so, because now I think it's one of the best scenes in the film ... I think the film demanded that confrontation, and I think both Blatty and Friedkin realised that in maybe the fourth month of the shoot. Don't forget, it took six months to shoot the film, and there were a lot of decisions made that were not in the original script nor in the novel. That was one of the key ones. As I remember now, that took about ten days of discussion and ten days of improvising.

For all its declarative power and unambiguous staging, Karras's

final triumph over evil was *not* to be an unqualified success. Months after *The Exorcist* opened in the US on Boxing Day 1973, both Friedkin and Blatty found themselves fielding questions about the movie's downbeat ending. They were shocked to learn that audiences were interpreting the finale as negative, a victory of evil over good. For Blatty, the root of the problem lay in Friedkin's savage editing of the film's final coda which (like the conversation between Merrin and Karras on the staircase) he believed contained the essence of the film's spiritual message. In its original 140-minute cut, the movie closed with a poignant encounter between Father Dyer and Lieutenant Kinderman, in which the detective gently implores the priest to come with him to the movies. Kinderman has previously made the same gesture of friendship towards Father Karras, declaring that he loves 'to talk film, to discuss, to critique,' but mentioning sadly that 'Mrs K, she gets tired, you know, never likes to go.' Dyer's response ('What's playing? Who's in it?') and his deadpan declaration that he's already seen Jackie Gleason play Heathcliff, is a direct echo of Karras's jovial reply, and triggers a sense of kinship in the lonely detective. Hooking an arm gently through Dyer's, Kinderman starts to walk with him down Prospect Street, observing wryly: 'I'm reminded of a line from *Casablanca*. At the end, Humphrey Bogart says to Claude Rains, "Louis - I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship".'<sup>67</sup>

Even for the most hardhearted of audiences, the implication of this coda is clear: that Karras somehow lives on in the person of Dyer, and that, from the crucible of all this horror, something of value has emerged - the unlikely friendship between a Jewish detective and a Jesuit priest. 'I shot that ending,' Friedkin confirms, 'and it was no fucking good at all. It was so anti-climactic for this picture. It worked very well in the novel as a sort of nostalgic and upbeat ending, but I didn't like it in the film, so I cut it.'

Blatty had already consented to the removal of two exchanges between Dyer and Chris during the closing moments which would have bolstered the film's positive spiritual message. In the first, the avowedly

atheist Chris tells Dyer that she now believes in the Devil 'because the Devil keeps doing commercials',<sup>68</sup> prompting Dyer to ask her: 'But if all the evil in the world makes you think that there might be a Devil – then how do you account for all the good?' According to all sources, this exchange was dropped the night before it was due to be shot because Ellen Burstyn found herself unable to declare with any conviction a belief in Satan's existence. A later exchange, in which Father Dyer gives back to Chris the St Joseph medal which she found in Regan's bed-room (betokening perhaps her dawning acceptance of faith) was dropped during editing on the grounds that the scene, which had looked fine on location, had simply come out badly on film. Since reshooting in Georgetown was impractical, Friedkin merely inserted a close-up of Dyer's hand enclosing the medal, and excised his teary parting declaration that 'It's all right Chris. For him [Karras], it's the beginning.'

'But the "beautiful friendship" ending was important,' pleads Blatty with a hint of exasperation, 'because it tells the audience, even if they haven't even dimly perceived what's been going on here, that somehow everything is going to be all right. That's something you *need* to have when you leave the film.' This was not to be. In its final cut, *The Exorcist* ends abruptly with Father Dyer turning away from the Prospect Street steps, the haunting tones of 'Tubular Bells' cut short by the crashing orchestral stabs which accompany the red-on-black credits. With one final aural jolt, the movie spits its audience back out into the world, startled and disorientated, unable to recover their composure, with no time to reflect on the horrors they have seen or draw any reassurance that everything is indeed 'going to be all right'.<sup>69</sup>

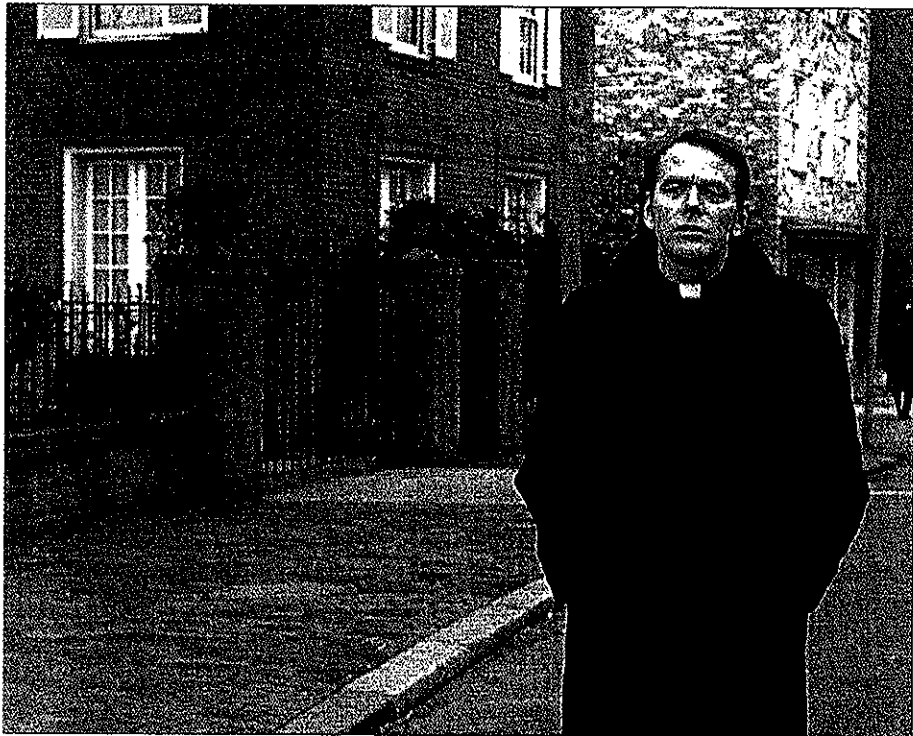
The first indication that audiences were reacting negatively to the film's supposedly uplifting message came as reports began to flood in of hysterical responses to the movie. Within weeks of the first public screenings, stories were circulating of fainting, vomiting, heart attacks and miscarriages. In Berkeley, a man threw himself at the screen in a misguided attempt to 'get the demon'. According to the *Toronto Medical Post*, four women were so traumatised by the movie that they had to be

confined to psychiatric care. 'There is no way you can sit through that film without receiving some lasting negative or disturbing effects,' announced Chicago psychiatrist Dr Louis Schlan. Oakbrook theatre manager Frank Kveton was more down-to-earth in his assessment: 'My janitors are going crazy wiping up the vomit ...'.

More seriously, European press reports in the months following the movie's worldwide release concentrated on a number of cases of criminal or suicidal behaviour, for which *The Exorcist* was squarely blamed. In West Germany, the death of nineteen-year-old Rainer Hertrampf, who shot himself with an automatic rifle some time after seeing *The Exorcist*, led to calls for the film to be banned. In England, a much-publicised inquest into the death of sixteen-year-old John Power, who had seen *The Exorcist* the day before he died, revealed that he had suffered an unrelated epileptic attack, but public fears about the film's harmful potential were aroused nonetheless. In October 1974, *The Exorcist* was cited as responsible for the murder of a nine-year-old girl by a teenager who told York Crown Court: 'It was not really me that did it. There was something inside me. It is ever since I saw that film *The Exorcist*. I felt something take possession of me. It has been in me ever since.' Friedkin recalls:

I was surprised by the hysterical reaction to the movie, because by then I'd been working on the thing for two years and it had ceased to have any power for me. In fact, I thought that a lot of it would be thought of as hysterical[-ly funny] by the audience. I remember there was a young classmate of Prince Charles in Great Britain, in the military academy, who saw the film and dashed into a church and immolated himself on the altar! I remember that newspaper account,<sup>70</sup> and that was just one of many similar such occurrences. It provoked violent responses on both sides. Some people doing harmful things to themselves and others, and other people doing public service and going into the church, embracing Catholicism.

The suggestion that both the English and American censors had been too lenient with the movie only added to the zeal with which *The Exorcist* was condemned in certain quarters. In America, the MPAA had awarded *The Exorcist* a mild R rating which allowed children to see the film with parental approval. MPAA president Jack Valenti stressed that the picture contained 'no overt sex' and 'no excessive violence.'<sup>71</sup> But public pressure in Washington and Boston forced the District Attorney's office to overturn the R rating in favour of a 17. In Britain meanwhile, *The Exorcist* was passed uncut for an X certificate, but found itself under attack from the Christian 'Festival of Light' lobby who picketed performances and handed out leaflets warning of the danger of the forces of darkness. Ironically, on 24 February 1975, the government censorship board of Tunisia banned the movie outright on the grounds



Father Dyer on Prospect Street

that it presented 'unjustified propaganda in favour of Christianity'. In the midst of the hysteria, Friedkin began to relent about his decision to cut the movie's final coda, and approached Warner Bros. for permission to recall and re-edit the prints then in circulation. The director is evasive about this now, but on 23 January 1974 he made the following announcement at the University of Georgia:

The other night, I was lying around in a half dazed state of mind, fighting sleep, and . . . I had this vision of a new ending for the film. What we're going to do is add a new ending to all those presently released theatrical prints, and to all those released later on . . . Had I thought of it at the time, I would have shot [this ending] and put it in. I'm going back to Georgetown to do it. And the point is that nothing will be taken out; it will not be cut. This will be an addition to the present ending that will blow your minds. Those of you who have seen the film, when you see what we are going to add to the ending, are going to be blitzed – fried! It's really strong . . . As to how long the addition will be: I'm adding less than fifteen seconds. But that fifteen seconds . . . will have the impact of the whole picture.<sup>72</sup>

It has been suggested that this proposed new ending comprised a scene in which Father Dyer walks down the 'Hitchcock steps' beside the MacNeil house and glimpses Karras ascending the stairs towards him, signalling his salvation.<sup>73</sup> Blatty is sceptical about the impact this proposed ending might have had, but describes the 'alternate ending' he himself favoured, in which Father Dyer, having become saddened and withdrawn since Karras's death, walks through Georgetown and encounters a jogger. As the two men fall into conversation about 'the nature of evil', the voice of the jogger gradually transmutes into that of Damien Karras, who asks, 'Don't you know me, Joe?' As Dyer finally recognises his lost friend, he notices that the sky has miraculously become full of lights. This episode draws inspiration from two texts close to Blatty's heart: Luke's Gospel [24: 15–32], in which the resurrected Christ encounters his crestfallen disciples on the road to Emmaus,



revealing his identity to them only after a lengthy theological discussion; and Alexander Hall's classic 1943 movie *Here Comes Mr Jordan*, in which reincarnated boxer Joe Pendleton demands of his oldest friend and trainer: 'Don't you know me?'

'I loved that ending, and Billy loved it,' remembers Blatty fondly. 'And we were all set to shoot it . . . This was several years later, when Billy was relaxed by the sure knowledge that the film was a hit, which he didn't know before, as he quite candidly told me.' According to Blatty, Friedkin was now responsive to his suggestions for changes to the movie. The dust had settled following the furore of its initial release and, despite being snubbed at the Oscars (where its ten nominations generated only two awards – Best Screenplay Based on Material From Another Medium and Best Sound), *The Exorcist* had become an enormous international hit, and was still playing in theatres worldwide after an unbroken two-year run. Surely now, with no critics, judges or audiences left to win over, Blatty and Friedkin could allow themselves the indulgence of going back and correcting the 'errata' on which they were both agreed? Although Friedkin denies all knowledge of the proposed new ending which he is supposed to have adored, Blatty insists that:

Friedkin and I had agreed that we were going to shoot a new ending, and we would also restore all the missing footage. We were all set to shoot it, and then a studio executive talked him out of it . . . He said 'Hitchcock made many errors in his films and he never went back to correct them, so why should we?' I don't know what to say to that except that we should make the corrections because they're *right!*

## Epilogue

From the cab stepped a tall old man. Black raincoat and hat and a battered valise. He paid the driver, then turned and stood motionless, staring at the house . . . As [Kinderman] turned the corner, he noticed that the old man hadn't moved, but was standing under street-light glow, in mist, like a melancholy traveller frozen in time.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps the most memorable image in William Friedkin's film of *The Exorcist* is that of the shadowy figure of Father Merrin, arriving outside the house on Prospect Street, gazing up at the unearthly light which illuminates the night fog in a phosphorescent haze. Interpreting Blatty's writing through eyes sharpened by the paintings of Magritte, Friedkin constructs a hauntingly inverted image in which Merrin (the messenger of good) is depicted as a dark, brooding presence, captured in a radiant blaze emanating from Regan's bedroom (the seat of evil), reminding us of Lucifer's designation as 'the bearer of light'. Not only does this iconographic frieze perfectly capture the paradoxical power of Blatty's novel, it also symbolises the ongoing struggle between good and evil which Friedkin's movie would leave open ended. Crucially, it is an image not of closure, but of anticipation – of Merrin *arriving* at the scene of a battle which is inevitable yet unexpected, foretold, yet undetermined.

Twenty five years after its first release, the sense that the story of *The Exorcist* was still ongoing was brought home to me by a call from William Friedkin, who announced that he had finally consented to go back and re-examine the notorious 'missing scenes' detailed in this book, for possible inclusion in a forthcoming anniversary re-release. In the interim, Blatty had signed a deal to write a three-hour television mini-series of *The Exorcist*, largely because that format (although stringently censorial) would allow him finally to put on screen 'all the theology and all the sub-plots that either myself or Billy cut from the film of *The Exorcist*'. Now, despite his earlier enthusiastic disavowals, Friedkin was declaring himself ready to consider reinstating the very material which Blatty had so loved in his first cut, but only on the condition that *all* the missing scenes could be