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Author(s): Jonathan Truant

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A Goat for Azazel:

Abjection Theory and the Satanic Panic

Jonathan Truant

Starr King School for the Ministry

Berkeley, California, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT: In the 1980s and 1990s, a moral panic swept across America and spread through much of the English-speaking world. It would later be dubbed the Satanic Panic. A number of factors contributed to this phenomenon, including the 1970s anti-cult movement, the popularity of horror films such as the *Exorcist*, the advent of the Church of Satan in the 1960s, and above all, deep-seated cultural anxieties prompted by the decline of the single-income family and the proliferation of working mothers. Using Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, this paper will explore the imaginary construct of the sinister Satanist as a repository for the anxieties of the community, serving much the same function as the Biblical "goat for Azazel." Through this process of abjection, the figure of the Satanist emerges as the shadow of the Christian-aculturated psyche.

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In the 1980s, a moral panic swept across America and spread throughout the world. It would later be dubbed the "Satanic Panic." A number of factors contributed to this phenomenon, including the 1970s anti-cult movement, the popularity of horror films such as *The Exorcist*, the advent of the Church of Satan in the 1960s, and above all, deep-seated cultural anxieties prompted by the decline of the single-income family and the proliferation of working mothers. Very few practicing Satanists were targeted in these suburban witch-hunts, with most of the suspicion falling instead on friends, family members, neighbors, and childcare providers. Therefore the phenomenon of Satanic Panic is not primarily a problem for Satanists—it's a problem for everyone. Its origins lie in basic anxieties

about what Julia Kristeva calls “the abject.” Using her theory of abjection, this paper will explore the imaginary construct of the sinister Satanist as a repository for the anxieties of the community, serving much the same function as the Biblical “goat for Azazel.” Through this process of abjection, the figure of the Satanist emerges as the shadow of the Christian-accultured psyche.

A Constructed History of the Abject

“The” Satanic Panic was not an isolated phenomenon, and in fact I prefer to speak of it as one of a series of Satanic panics (plural). The language of uniqueness is probably motivated by the fact that the Satanic Panic of the ‘80s and ‘90s was relatively recent, and seems shocking in the context of a supposedly enlightened era. To connect it to other earlier incidents insults our identity as modern individuals, and destabilizes our sense of living in a rational, post-superstition world. But the abject truth is that Satanic panics are intimately connected to the phenomenon of blood libel, an ancient set of weaponized stereotypes of the “other,” in the discourse of religious history very frequently targeting Jews.

It may further surprise some people to learn that the original target of the same tropes that would later become part of the blood libel motifs were not Jews or Satanists, but Christians slandered in pagan Rome. Romans described the early Christians as a sinister secret society, knowing each other by covert signs and signals, who met by night to engage in indiscriminate orgies and eat human infants encased in dough.¹ All the basic elements of the blood libel motif are present here already: ‘wicked’ clandestine rituals, rabid sexual deviancy, infanticide and cannibalism. This formula of slander would be repeated throughout subsequent ages ad nauseum—first by Christians against heretics such as the Cathars,² then by Christians against Jews,³ then much later against supposed devil-worshiping witches in our present era.⁴ Today these stereotypes remain

¹ Ruben van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ *Ibid.*, 28-29

⁴ Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum: The Montague Summers Edition* (New York: Dover, 1988), 13-16.

familiar, present in the rhetoric of many popular conspiracy theories (cf. “Pizzagate”).⁵

Notable instances of prior Satanic panics following the blood libel formula include the entire phenomenon of European witch hunting, the Affair of the Poisons in the court of Louis XIV,⁶ and the remarkable anti-Masonic hoax perpetrated by Leo Taxil in *fin de siècle* France,⁷ which forever linked Freemasonry with “Luciferianism” in the minds of those who are easily misled. Throughout all, we see the same repetitive themes: nocturnal rituals, unrestrained orgies, the murder of children, cannibalism, bestiality, and the use of human flesh and blood as blasphemous sacraments. Women are usually important participants, and worship of a disapproved deity is generally involved. Since Christian times, this deity is nearly always equated with Satan.

Kristeva’s Abjection Theory and the Irony of a Christian Satanic Panic

Where do these obsessions come from? Drawing on post-Freudian psychoanalysis, and in particular on Kristeva’s theory of the abject, one can easily find an explanation: that Satanism represents the abject of Christianity. Like anything else, Christianity has a dark side: taboo, violent and uncomfortable elements that disturb the symbolic order and disrupt the fragile boundary between self and other. Kristeva terms such elements “the abject.”

Abjection is not easily defined. At no point in her famous essay *Powers of Horror* does Kristeva lay out a neat, easy-to-grasp, single-sentence definition of the abject. She calls it the “jettisoned object,” which “is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.”⁸ She also describes it as containing “one of those violent, dark

⁵ Amanda Robb, “Anatomy of a Fake News Scandal,” *Rolling Stone*, November 16th, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/anatomy-of-a-fake-news-scandal-125877/>.

⁶ Van Lwijk, 45-49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 224-297.

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Translated by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

revolts of being,”⁹ and as “a ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing.” Simultaneously, however, the “abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.” She also spends many chapters exploring the abject in relation to religious taboos and prohibitions. Throughout her illuminating, sprawling book, abjection is discussed in relation to bodily wastes, “loathed” foods, ritual impurity, and even xenophobia.

So what, then, is this thing which has led Kristeva to write so prolifically? Briefly and imperfectly: the abject is everything that must be expelled, ejected, excreted, thrown away, exiled, and/or denied, in order to maintain the sense of a “clean and proper” selfhood; whether that selfhood is individual or collective (in the sense of a community or nation). The abject is feces, vomit, blood, menstruum. It is a corpse that reminds us of our own mortality. It is the mother from whom we must be ejected and who, in Freudian thought, we must somehow reject, in order to formulate our own identities. It is disease, pollution of the body, religious desecration, leprosy, disability, deformity. It is also the blurring of boundaries between human and animal, natural and supernatural, life and death. It is everything we want to thrust away from ourselves because it is too near and too disturbing. It is that which crosses lines we do not want to cross. Most importantly: the abject must always be near to us in some way—embedded in us, excreted from us, or living among us—otherwise, it would have no power to terrify.

If we indulge this theoretical framework, we can easily see that Christianity has its share of abject aspects. The crucifixion of Christ, for example, is not a human sacrifice—but it “rhymes” eerily with the concept. His violent death is graphically portrayed and continuously repeated in Christian iconography. The sacraments, body and blood, have cannibalistic connotations. In the Bible, God often seems to behave cruelly—indeed, one could argue that the entire figure of Satan was constructed so that certain evils could be “abjected” from God, a subject to which we will return shortly. Moreover, Christianity has historical as well as mythic elements of abjection to cope with—the excesses of Crusades and Inquisitions, and more recently, the sexual abuse of children within the

⁹ Ibid., 1.

church, which is only coming to light in recent decades.¹⁰ (This would seem to imply that much of the abuse later revealed was occurring in the '80s—could the child-abusing Satanic boogeyman have been partially a projection of the horrors occurring in far more conventional churches? A subject worth exploring, but sadly, requiring research outside the scope of this paper.)

In the face of such uncomfortable realities, abjection is an understandable reflex, and one that apparently goes back to Biblical times. The goat for Azazel of Leviticus 16:10 bears witness to this impulse. The scapegoat is a vessel for the abject, allowing undesirable elements to be expelled and carried away from the community. A similar process of abjection can be seen in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. In Samuel, the Lord incites David to take a census, an act which will be punished with a plague (2 Sam 24:1). In Chronicles, a later text retelling the same story, it is Satan, not God, who prompts David to the disastrous action (1 Chron 21:1). The malevolence of God has been projected—and *abjected*—onto a third party, the original scapegoat and most popular incarnation of the abject that there ever has been: the Devil.¹¹ In almost the same way, the stereotypes of the Satanist, the witch, the sinister Jew, the Luciferian Freemason, are all constructs of the Christian (or Christian acculturated!) psyche, onto which the abject may be projected, and thereby expelled.

To demonstrate this, let us examine the archetype of the imaginary Satanist. It is composed of inversions of the normal, the clean, and the proper. These “Satanists” have sinister versions of everything “good” (in this case read as “Christian”) people do. They say Christian prayers backwards. They have their own wicked churches. They invert the cross. They have sacraments, consisting of either communion wafers baked with blood, or more efficiently, the raw flesh of infants. Every dark subtext of Christianity liturgy and mythos has been made explicit. Christ dies and does not rise. Abraham actually sacrifices Isaac. The Virgin conceives the

¹⁰ “Priest Found Guilty of Molestation,” CNN.com/LawCenter, January 18, 2002, <https://www.cnn.com/2002/LAW/01/18/priest.verdict/index.html>.

“Why the nation’s two largest religious groups are talking about sex abuse this week,” Daniel Burke, CNN.com, June 11, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/10/us/catholic-baptists-meetings/index.html>.

¹¹ Phillip C. Almond, *The Devil: A New Biography*, 2nd ed. (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016), 19.

Antichrist by the Devil. The stereotypical Satanist terrifies not because they are so alien, but because they are so familiar, their every action a distorted echo of the clean and proper, the good and Christian. This construct of the stereotypical Satanist is quite old (far older than the actual practice of Satanism, which current academic consensus cannot date earlier than the founding of LaVey's church in 1966).¹² In the decades leading up to the panic, this construct of the Satanist underwent some updates to become a more viable modern boogeyman, better reflecting current anxieties.

Emergence of the Contemporary Satanic Panics: Case Studies

The seeds of the '80s Satanic Panic were planted in the fertile soil of the late 60s and the 70s. New religious movements thrived, including such notorious "cults" as the Children of God and the People's Temple of Jim Jones.¹³ Charles Manson declared himself the Devil, while his followers called him Jesus Christ.¹⁴ During this same era, Satanic-themed horror movies such as *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* were terrifying audiences.¹⁵ *Rosemary's Baby* had an added layer of demonic terror after the Manson family's murder of the director's wife, Sharon Tate—a murder initially reported as "ritualistic" and "Satanic."¹⁶ In response to the excesses of new religious movements, the anti-cult movement was born.¹⁷ 1972 saw the release of three anti-Satanic books written by evangelical authors: *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay, *The Satan Seller* by Mike Warnke, and *From Witchcraft to Christ* by Doreen Irvine.¹⁸ By 1974, concerns about possibly Satanic "cattle mutilations" were mounting in the Midwest.¹⁹

¹² Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker, *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (San Jose, CA: Author's Choice Press, 2001), 65, iBooks.

¹³ Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 12-13.

¹⁴ Vincent Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders (25th Anniversary Edition)* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 139-40.

¹⁵ Nathan and Snedeker, 62.

¹⁶ Bugliosi, 45.

¹⁷ Hexham, 3-5.

¹⁸ Van Lwijk, 357-359.

¹⁹ Nathan and Snedeker, 68-69.

The panic cannot be attributed primarily to this revival of Satanic imagery and mythology. Deeper, quieter underlying tensions in society would prove far more important. Single-income homes were on the decline, working mothers were on the rise, and hence, daycare was becoming increasingly necessary.²⁰ While the idea of a “preschool” may not seem sinister to us today, at the time daycare had not yet been normalized. Many parents felt understandable anxiety at the thought of leaving children so young in the hands of virtual strangers.

It is also important to understand the state of psychiatry at the time. Many theories and practices which are no longer considered legitimate were popular in therapy then. By way of illustration: 1976, a film version of the book *Sybil* was released, telling the story of a young woman who ‘recovers’ memories of horrific abuse and develops ‘multiple personalities.’ This was based on a true story of psychotherapy involving a young woman whose therapist had used hypnosis, high pressure questioning, cash incentives, and sometimes even dosing with sodium pentothal to induce her patient to spin a captivating yarn. The patient tried to recant early and often, but this was met with cries of “denial!” by her therapist, who had a book deal to fulfill.²¹ These practices would obviously not be acceptable today, but at the time they were relatively common. Standards for psychotherapists were low, due to an influx of new therapists into the field who were trained at dubious professional schools unattached to universities.²² Furthermore, the very concept of ‘recovered memories’ is no longer considered credible in the discipline of psychology.

Finally, on the very eve of the ‘80s, Moral Majority was founded in 1979.²³ The conditions for the Satanic panic were now mostly in place. All that was needed was to bring them all together. A single book accomplished the synthesis. It was called *Michelle Remembers* and written by Michelle Smith and Dr. Lawrence Pazder.

²⁰ Ibid., 35.

²¹ Lynn Neary, “Real 'sybil' Admits Multiple Personalities Were Fake,” NPR.org, October 10, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/10/20/141514464/real-sybil-admits-multiple-personalities-were-fake>.

²² Nathan and Snedeker, 421.

²³ Ibid., 129.

Dr. Pazder had allegedly helped his patient Michelle ‘recover’ memories of horrific, ritualistic abuse at the hands of Satanists.²⁴ Among other things, Michelle claimed to have been repeatedly sexually assaulted,²⁵ to have been locked inside an effigy of Satan that was filled with live snakes,²⁶ to have had devil horns and a tail surgically grafted onto her young body,²⁷ and to have faced down Satan himself (who spoke in silly rhyming couplets that would have embarrassed Dr. Seuss).²⁸

The book positively oozes abjection. The villainous Satanists are identifiable by the amputated middle fingers of their left hands²⁹ (deformity as abjection). Michelle’s prepubescent body is violated not only sexually (abjection) but also through a surgical procedure that grants her the demonic/bestial attributes of horns and a tail (blurring of human and animal—abjection). She is the unwilling witness to almost every conceivable crime, and is protected from the defiling touch of Satan himself only by the alleged intervention of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ (Michelle claimed to have experienced a beatific vision).³⁰ But worst and most abject of all, the Satanists of *Michelle Remembers* somehow operated clandestinely, blending in as normal members of the community. According to Kristeva, there is nothing more abject than hypocrisy: “Abjection...is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles...a friend who stabs you.”³¹

None of the events described in the book can be verified, and several have been debunked—for instance, during a period when Michelle was supposedly kidnapped by Satanists, records and yearbook photos show that she was in school.³² But none of that mattered. *Michelle Remembers* became a best seller,³³ and Pazder and Michelle (who had by this time

²⁴ Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder, *Michelle Remembers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), xv.

²⁵ Nathan and Snedeker, 68.

²⁶ Pazder, 148-150.

²⁷ Nathan and Snedeker, 68.

²⁸ Pazder, 203-204, among many other examples.

²⁹ Van Luijk, 360.

³⁰ Pazder, 210-211.

³¹ Kristeva, 4.

³² Nathan and Snedeker, 80.

³³ *Ibid.*, 88.

divorced their former spouses and married each other) went on the talk show circuit, notably including Oprah.³⁴

Michelle Remembers was the small spark to a great conflagration. Much has already been written about what happened next. In brief: due to a mentally ill mother, Judy Johnson, who believed that her two-year-old's diaper rash was a sign of sodomy,³⁵ panic over an imaginary child pornography ring erupted at the McMartin preschool in California. Dr. Lawrence Pazder happened to arrive on the scene and added his Satanic conspiracy theory to fuel the commotion.³⁶ Several McMartin teachers were soon accused of involvement in a Satanic child abuse cult and were arrested. What transpired was the most expensive trial the U.S. had ever seen,³⁷ though it brought no convictions. Nevertheless, a rash of similar panics spread across the U.S. and eventually the rest of the world.³⁸ Many cases resulted in the conviction of innocent people for "Satanic crimes." Some of them have since been released, but not all. One eighteen-year-old boy, Damien Echols, was even sent to death row over a Satanic Panic case—though, thankfully, he is now free.³⁹

Repetitive Themes and a Growing Arc of Targets

Throughout these cases, certain themes repeat. The alleged victims were always children, whose revelations were never spontaneous. Rather, hysterical parents, therapists, and social workers used leading questions and coercion to extract lurid tales of abuse from the reluctant children. Their methods included anatomically correct dolls⁴⁰ ("show me on the dolly where he touched you"), not allowing the children to leave until they admitted to being abused, accusing children who did not disclose abuse of being stupid or of having poor recall, and alleging that other children had

³⁴ Dan Shewan, "Conviction of Things Not Seen: The Uniquely American Myth of Satanic Cults," *Pacific Standard*, June 14th, 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/make-a-cross-with-your-fingers-its-the-satanic-panic>.

³⁵ Nathan and Snedeker, 115-117.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

³⁷ Douglass Linder, "The McMartin Preschool Abuse Trial," abstract (University of Missouri at Kansas City - School of Law, 2007).

³⁸ Van Lwijk, 362.

³⁹ John Emma, "Damien Echols: How I Survived Death Row," *The Guardian*, May 25, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/may/26/damien-echols-i-survived-death-row>.

⁴⁰ Nathan and Snedeker, 264.

already told them all about it. If you've ever tried to make a preschool age child sit still for more than five minutes, you can imagine how quickly these youngsters would begin to invent wild tales just to be allowed to go outside and play.

The accusations that the preschoolers made were, unsurprisingly, childlike, yet blended with the sexual suggestions that adults supplied to them. The resulting narratives veer between the horrific and the horribly amusing. Children claimed to have been forced to eat the feces of their alleged Satanic abusers, to have been penetrated with silverware,⁴¹ to have seen their teachers both fly like witches⁴² and play the piano naked.⁴³ While the stories of the children were often laughable, when blended with the fevered imaginations of terrified adults, they became extreme, often involving bondage, sadomasochism, ritual murder, torture of animals, large scale production of child pornography, secret tunnels,⁴⁴ and Satanic churches.⁴⁵ To put it plainly, if these imaginings had any validity at all, scars, welts, bruises, corpses, photos and videos, and entire building structures should have been found. Indeed, part of the immense cost of the McMartin trial was due to the excavation of the ground under the preschool in search of supposed secret tunnels. Yet, except for some medical testimony that was later discredited, there was never physical evidence to support the allegations. Regarding that testimony in particular, the doctors who examined the children of the McMartin trial at the time had no real baseline of what a normal child's body should look like.⁴⁶ They had mistaken innocuous symptoms such as diaper rash for signs of sexual assault, perhaps because the reality of children's bodies differed from their expectation of what Kristeva might call a "clean and proper" body.⁴⁷ The construction of the child's body during the Satanic Panic could be the topic of an entire book. Based on the horrific marathons of abuse that these children supposedly endured without a mark left on them, the child's body was imagined as oddly resilient, almost rubbery. In reality, brutal assaults like the ones described against children so young nearly always result in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 357.

⁴² Ibid., 288.

⁴³ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 382.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 339.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 601.

⁴⁷ Kristeva, 8.

death of the small victim.⁴⁸ At the same time, children were treated as angelically pure and fragile, devoid of any inkling of sexuality.

Fear of the abject sexuality of children lies near the heart of the panic. No adult likes, or should like, thinking about childhood sexuality. Nonetheless, we now know that childhood sexuality exists and is normal. At the time, however, many parents panicked when they caught their children engaged in masturbation or playing doctor. These things were deemed certain signs of abuse.

A playground taunt caused quite a stir at McMartin:

*What you say is what you are,
You're a naked movie star
And if you say it back to me,
You'll be naked on TV.*⁴⁹

This rhyme was meaningless, the equivalent of “I’m rubber, you’re glue” or “boys go to Jupiter to get more stupid-er” or any of the litany of other mocking chants that were flung about. Nonetheless case, the “naked movie star” chant was interpreted as evidence of the production of child pornography, which is a bit like assuming “I see London, I see France, I can see your underpants” proves that children are being jetted around as international lingerie models—an extrapolation well within the capabilities of Satanic Panic logic.

Humor aside, there indeed can be something unsettling about these rhymes. Childhood sexuality is abject; it will never be comfortable to hear preschoolers calling each other “naked movie stars,” no matter how blithely unaware of the pornography industry they must be. Here we see the abject as the intrusion of the Real. Childhood sexuality is extant but repugnant. There is no place for it our construction of the symbolic order. In the ‘80s, it was even less possible to accept the proto-sexual behavior and taunts of children as natural. By treating these things as signs of abuse, parents, and therapists projected/abjected this distasteful behavior onto the imaginary figure of an adult abuser. (See again: the scapegoat.)

Did the children of McMartin, and of all the other daycares and communities where the Satanic Panic took hold, continue to happily run

⁴⁸ Nathan and Snedeker, 125.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

around making mud pies after their sessions with misguided therapists? No indeed. Tragically, many of these children began to exhibit real signs of trauma, such as night terrors.⁵⁰ We now know that memory is unreliable. For the very same reasons that it is impossible to accurately recover repressed memories, it is all too easy to implant false ones. Those little minds had been poisoned with the abject, not by the actions of non-existent Satanic child pornographers, but by the frantic interventions of well-meaning therapists, social workers, and parents. Abuse did indeed occur—but it was during those interminable, coercive interviews, in which imaginary horrors were described to them and implanted in their minds and memories, rather than the real infliction of any such horror on their physical persons.

Those falsely accused during the Satanic panic represented a broad slice of society. Childcare providers were the most popular scapegoats, especially when they were somehow “other”—for instance, immigrants,⁵¹ or LGBT.⁵² Tragically, family members of the victims were often accused as well,⁵³ leading children to be separated from innocent parents and relatives. Edgy-looking teenagers (like the West Memphis Three) and occasional Wiccans, Thelemites,⁵⁴ and other occult practitioners were targeted too. In one or two cases, actual child sexual abuse was occurring—but it was projected, abjected, from the real perpetrator onto a convenient “Satanic” scapegoat.

The one thing that didn’t happen was the widespread persecution of actual Satanists. Indeed, only Michael Aquino of the Temple of Set was ever accused of Satanic child abuse.⁵⁵ This is rather fascinating because, by the ‘80s, bona fide self-identifying Satanists were actually present and vocal in society, which was apparently not the case during other historical Satanic

⁵⁰ Ibid., 293.

⁵¹ “A Summary of the Frank Fuster,” PBS, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wqgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/frank/summary.html>.

⁵² John Brecher, “Judge Clears Records of Wrongfully Convicted ‘san Antonio 4,’” *NBC*, December 4th, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/judge-clears-records-wrongfully-convicted-san-antonio-four-n943751>.

⁵³ Nathan and Snedeker, 319. The Kern County case in particular is full of accusations against parents and relatives.

⁵⁴ Nathan Bjorge, conversation with author, 2019.

⁵⁵ Van Luijk, 363.

panics. Why, with actual card-carrying, pentagram-wearing Satanists available for persecution, were so few targeted?

Returning to the theory that the stereotypical Satanist represents the Christian abject, the breakdown between self and other, one might posit that real Satanists simply were not close enough to home to serve this symbolic purpose. The anxiety motivating this type of moral panic is fundamentally anxiety about the self, and by extension, people like oneself—neighbors, preschool teachers, members of the community. Hence the imaginary Satanist, the secret Satanist, the one who lives in your neighborhood and looks relatively normal, but covertly practices blood ritual and sexual abominations. Openly practicing Satanists did not fit into this necessary narrative. They were too strange on the outside, too disappointingly mundane on the inside. People like LaVey, with his shaved head, black clothes, and pet lion, were about as abject as the Addams Family—creepy and kooky, mysterious and spooky, but not very threatening. Further, the open practice of Satanism was restricted mostly to urban centers, chiefly San Francisco, birthplace of the original Satanic church. These were places with liberal and irreligious attitudes not conducive to belief in ritual abuse. In short, Satanists were simply too far away from the people who might have feared them.

So why was Aquino targeted? One has only to place a picture of him side-by-side with a picture of LaVey, examining both through the lens of the abject, to see the answer. LaVey exudes self-conscious theatricality and open freakiness in every photograph. Per Kristeva: “He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality.”⁵⁶ Aquino, on the other hand, is relatively normal looking, aside from his flamboyant eyebrows. He is a military man, and most photographs show him in uniform, not in black robes. A Satanist infiltrating that most hallowed of American institutions—her armed forces? That is crossing a line. That radiates impressions of hypocrisy, conniving, contamination—in short, of abjection. As a scapegoat for othering, he would do.

In 1992, supervisory special agent Kenneth Lanning of the FBI released a report entitled “Investigator’s Guide to Allegations of ‘Ritual’ Crime.” Lanning specialized in investigating the sexual abuse of children,

⁵⁶ Kristeva, 4.

but, with all the resources of the FBI at his back, he had been unable to find any evidence of child-abusing Satanic cults within the U.S. His report thoroughly debunks the idea of Satanic ritual abuse, and, coming from an institution of such revered authority, it did much to put the panic to rest. Yet on the first page of this report, he mentions that he has been accused of ulterior motives: “In response to accusations by a few that I am a ‘satanist’ who has infiltrated the FBI to facilitate a cover-up, how does anyone (or should anyone have to) disprove such allegations?”⁵⁷ This sentence is revealing. It proves that there are those who will always believe that monsters lurk next door, and that demons burrow into the very heart of society’s most respectable institutions. This persistence of this belief demonstrates the psychological necessity of the abject, particularly for certain personality types who tend to be inordinately concerned with the pure, the clean and the proper.

Conclusion

Satanic panic is about fear of the evil within, not the evil outside. We can see this in every case of blood libel—the accused is always nearby or within the community, whether it is a strange new sect called the Christians who’ve been popping up in the Roman empire, or the grumpy little old neighbor lady whom you suspect of witchcraft, or the Freemasons whose lodge you see every day, or the Jews who occupy the ghetto of your local town. The result is profound paranoia. The terrified attempt at a moral purge which follows inevitably fails. Since the evil it battles is its own reflection, projected onto the harmless other, the crusade itself becomes a source of cruelty, monstrosity, and inequity, destroying innocents instead of preserving them, corrupting rather than purifying society. And so, in Satanic Panic—as in every witch-hunt—the community tears itself apart to expel the abject from within.

Jonathan Truant is an MDiv student at Starr King School for the Ministry. He is also co-founder and head pastor of Church of the Morningstar, a multireligious Left-Hand Path ministry based in San Francisco.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Lanning, *Investigator's Guide to Allegations Of "Ritual" Abuse*. (Quantico, VA: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Behavioral Science Unit, 1992), 1, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/136592NCJRS.pdf>.

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