Alzheimer's Disease as Demonic Possession in Adam Robitel's *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (2014)

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> As memories are taken one by one, it soon becomes clear that you can't run from Alzheimer's. You can only face it head-on, hopefully with dignity and hope. (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*)

Adam Robitel's *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (2014) is a horror film which documents the story of Deborah Logan (Jill Larson), a woman who is in an early stage of Alzheimer's disease. Mrs. Logan lives with her daughter, Sarah (Anne Ramsey), who is her full time caregiver. Due to the fact that they need financial aid, they both agree to participate in an academic study about mental disease carried out by a PhD student, Mia (Michelle Ang), who, together with her audiovisual crew, goes to live with the family in order to record the daily life of Mrs. Logan.

The originality of Robitel's film stems from how he resorts to the theme of possession to frame the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease such as progressive memory loss and gradual deterioration of the capacity to control bodily basic functions, something that is quite innovative

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when it comes to horror cinema. It is along these lines that this essay aims to examine both the impact and the implications of the appropriation of a severe brain disease like Alzheimer's in the context of horror cinema. Cinema has the power to approach cultural and social issues in metaphorical ways and Robitel's work follows this trend when he ventures into the medical field to tackle the controversial subject of demonic possession.

In truth, contemporary horror cinema has shown concern for the portrayal of older people affected by degenerative illnesses (M. Night Shyamalan's *The Visit* or more recently Natalie Erika James's *Relic*). These cinematic narratives tap into two of the harrowing fears that haunt humanity: the fear of getting old and of losing both agency and identity.

As the title of the Robitel's film aptly suggests, the viewer watches Deborah Logan being "taken away", thus becoming increasingly divested of her original identity and personality by some force – disease or demonic possession – meaning that the person Deborah used to be is gradually replaced by someone (or something) that is different and displays an unusual type of behavior. In this respect, Sean Moreland (2017) acknowledges a clear affinity between the filmic register that deals with mental disorder and that which focus on demonic possession:

> Whether they treat possession as a metaphorization of mental illness, or use the phenomenological characteristics of certain mental illnesses as poetic devices for conveying the horror and anxiety of possession, each of these films draws (or attempts to draw) affective power from common anxieties about the loss of self-control and self-identity, and this should be considered as a continuum of filmic possession narratives. (Moreland 2017: 47–48)

At the beginning of the film, the spectator is provided with a portrait of a Deborah Logan who appears well groomed and elegantly dressed, cleaning the fields near her manor, in the company of her neighbor, Harry (Ryan Cutrona). When the filming crew arrives, led by Mia, a medical student, she receives them warmly, while enthusiastically announcing to her male friend Harry that "They're going to do a film about [her]"

(*The Taking of Deborah Logan*). Indeed, at first glance, there seems to be nothing wrong with that nice lady busy with her garden. As far as the group of students is concerned, she comes across as a healthy lady. However, Deborah's initial enthusiasm suddenly vanishes as, minutes later, she changes her mind, telling her daughter that she is not interested in taking part in the documentary that the university students are making about Alzheimer's disease. Sarah tells her that they really need the money to keep the manor and the property. Ultimately, Deborah acquiesces and a week later the recording sessions begin.

With the aim of conveying a faithful portrait of the daily routines of Deborah Logan, the film director resorts to the cinematic technique called "found footage". This type of cinematic register suggests a reality that although fictional, feels like something real to the spectator, as it is presented through the form of a documentary. Claudio Zanini, in "Evil and the Subversion of Factual Discourse in Found Footage Films", holds the opinion that "The appeal of found footage films derives from their *referentiality* and *evidentiality*, that is, making a reference to a fact and proving it actually happened" (2019: 32). The author likewise claims that "Like other types of false documentaries, found footage is a fictional format that presents itself in the form of non-fiction" (17). The fact that *The Taking of Deborah Logan* is recorded as "found footage" highly contributes to turn the events more credible and tangible, hence giving the viewer the impression that the horror that is afflicting that family is something that actually could be true. In this regard, Maddi McGillvray adds, "The film begins by mimicking a medical documentary through a montage of supporting documents, medical charts, and seemingly 'real' hospital footage outlining the side effects and facts about Alzheimer's disease" (McGillvray 2019:75). In these terms, horror, the traditional field of the "uncanny," becomes a more familiar territory that, by means of "found footage", is transformed into something quite homely.

Presenting the spectator with a supposedly true documentary, Robitel tries to call attention to the suffering of a woman, Deborah, who not so long ago was in the possession of her intellectual capabilities and now, due to the effects of Alzheimer's disease, is suffering from memory loss, slowly losing her sense of identity and the capacity of spatial ori-

entation as well. To thoroughly document Deborah's routine, the crew installs cameras in several parts of the house. In the introduction to her documentary, Mia refers to Alzheimer's disease in a credible way, calling the viewers' attention both to the seriousness of the ailment and the role of the caregivers, thus highlighting that "The story of Alzheimer's is never about one person. My PhD thesis film posits that this insidious disease not only destroys the patient but also has a physiological influence on the primary caregiver" (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*). Addressing the audience, she proceeds, by providing a scientific account of the disease:

> Alzheimer's occurs when abnormal protein fragments accumulate in the hippocampus, killing neurons. The disease then creeps towards the front of the brain, wiping out neurons responsible for logical thought and problem-solving. It then assaults the sensory region, sparking terrifying hallucinations. Eventually, it erases a person's oldest and most precious memories. In the end stage, Alzheimer's destroys the part of the brain that regulates the heart and breathing. When swallowing goes, death is not far behind. (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*)

The language employed to depict the surge and escalation of the disease aptly ties in with the horror story that is about to unfold, as the disease appears as some type of evil which creeps, assaults, erases and destroys, thus culminating in the demise of the debilitated patient. These remarks pave the way for Deborah Logan's nightmare.

In order to accomplish a solid documentary, Mia starts by interviewing Deborah. Underlying this inquisitive look upon Sarah's mother lies the intention of conveying the image of a normal woman, who, despite the threat of an impending degenerative disease, still attempts to maintain the independence and autonomy that she once had. Owing to the fact that she lost her husband while she was still raising Sarah, she became a switchboard operator, having a phone station installed at her

home.[2] Working from home, she could take care of her child, manage her domestic chores, as well as pursue an active lifestyle.

Throughout the film, Alzheimer's disease is not portrayed in derogatory terms, as the university crew tries to support the contents of the documentary resorting to medical evidence and providing it with a scientific background, in an attempt to somehow "normalize" Deborah's delicate health condition. As Mia narrates, "Deborah's brain is much like the switchboard she so adeptly worked on for decades [...] her misfiring synapses like the phone lines being pulled from their jacks, losing connections" (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*). This comparison plays an important role in the film, because, as Deborah herself remarks, she used to be "the nexus" (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*) of the town, that is to say, by being a professional switchboard operator, she managed to establish connections between people and process a lot of varied information. Ironically, she operated as a sort of brain, establishing the communication (neural connections) between the dwellers in Exuma.

The fear of aging that torments the majority of women is strongly addressed in Robitel's film. In more than one scene, the viewer perceives Deborah scrutinizing her image in mirror-like surfaces. This behaviour points to a double loss: on the one hand, she seems to be looking for distant memories that refuse to come back to her mind, while on the other hand, she also seems to be searching for her long-lost youth. Deep inside, Deborah seems to be looking for herself, her identity. The fact that sometimes she is seen quite agitated and wandering about the home is also a projection of this imbalance she feels growing inside of her, this phantom of forgetfulness that persists on haunting her. In this sense, she appears really disturbed by the loss of some memories that, in the past, had really been meaningful to her. For example, in a scene in which

2 Given her past as a switchboard operator, it is important to emphasize the importance of Deborah Logan as an intermediary in terms of the communication process. She comes across as a "channel", an image that equates her with permeability and, later on the film, provides sustenance for the emerging phenomenon of possession.

she is talking about her bedroom decoration, she forgets that she had been to Germany and that she had brought some souvenirs with her.

In an interview she gives to the university researchers, she informs them that she tries to engage herself in many activities as possible in order to slow down the disease's progression. She mentions doing puzzles and physical exercise, activities that, according to the medical expertise, will help stave off the disease. She ends the interview with a kind of hopeless remark, as she tells them: "Stave if off. There is no cure" (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*).

Actually, in one particular scene, we see Deborah nailing the windows as if wanting to stop something from getting into her house. For Sarah and the crew, this tempestive attitude means that she is increasingly becoming emotional and psychologically imbalanced. However, from a symbolical point of view, this attempt at shutting the windows permanently seems to point towards the desire of postponing the disease or keeping it at bay, thus refusing its access to both her body and mind.

In another scene, Deborah is seen disoriented, in the kitchen, desperately looking for her gardening spate. She furiously accuses the members of the crew of stealing it and, in the end, has a hysterical fit, thus becoming aggressive towards the members of the filming crew. This disturbing episode will be one of the first clues liable to signal Deborah's descent into the most severe stages of the disease.

In the beginning of the film, the spectator is informed of the intimate relationship that Deborah nurtures toward nature. She is filmed while she tends to her garden or when she is swiping off the old leaves of the manor's yard. These images seem to reiterate the symbolic feminine bond with nature and its natural cycles. Later on the film, this natural connection is gradually replaced by the medical and scientific context imposed by the severity of Deborah's mental health.

Elizabeth Bronfen, in *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992), highlights this bond women share with nature and the consequences of this ontological connection. As the author remarks, nature, much like women, frequently appears associated with unruly disorder and uncivilized wilderness (66), construed as Other in opposition to cul-

ture. The author observes that in the vulnerable position as the Other, woman is positioned as "object of intense scrutiny to be explored, dissected" (*Ibidem*), terms that are reminiscent of medical procedures.

While the audience accompanies the crew as they become familiarized with her routines, it learns that one of Deborah's pastimes is painting. She enjoys painting the woods surrounding her house, which, as previously mentioned, ties the feminine with the natural landscape. In her beautiful, but eerie creations, there is a pervasive shadow that, in the most recent paintings, seems to be getting bigger and closer. This shadow not only epitomizes Deborah's Alzheimer's disease, but also the upcoming phenomenon of demonic possession that she is about to encounter. One of the manifestations of possession occurs when Deborah develops a strange rash in the neck, that threatens to expand itself to her whole body. This dermatologic problem evokes the image of a snake shedding off its skin, a medical episode that can metaphorically be read as a metamorphosis. Given the circumstances, Sarah and Mia decide that it is better to take Deborah to the hospital, where she will be given medical attention. After having observed Sarah's mother, Dr. Nazir (Anne Bedian) tells them that skin problems are not usually related to the Alzheimer's disease and, as a result, Deborah is discharged from the hospital.

In another scene, that focuses upon another one of Deborah's nighttime wanderings, the crew finds her in the attic, alienated and naked, trying to use the old switchboard station.[3] She then starts to speak French in a voice that does not resemble her own. When she sees the crew, she starts unplugging cables from the station and, as a consequence, a short circuit occurs. Before the image of the camera completely fades off for some moments, the audience is able to discern the horrible figure of a monstrous man whose open mouth displays scary protruding teeth. This phantasmagorial apparition assumes the shape of a subliminal image, typical of those which intrude in horror

3 The scene in which Deborah is trying to use the old switchboard is highly reminiscent of the Victorian madwoman who, due to her mental problems, was confined to the attic.

films, such as William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). While analysing the recorded episode, on the crew's computer, they find out that Deborah was trying to reach the number 337 that belonged to someone named Henry Desjardins, a fact that would explain her use of the French language. Sarah informs Mia that Desjardins is quite known in Exuma, since he was an infamous serial killer who killed four children in the 1970s. Sarah tells her that there is a documentary on the subject and they both decide to watch it. In the end, both women find out that Desjardins suffered from a lethal disease and wanted, by all means, to achieve immortality. Dabbling with the occult, he decided to perform a Monacan ancient ritual that required the kidnapping and killing of five girls. The girls, referred to, in the documentary as "bleeding flowers", would be killed during the time of their first menstruation and their blood would be offered to a demon as a dark trade for immortality. The documentary provides a visual gruesome description of the girls' bodies, reporting that the girls were each found with serpentine carvings on their foreheads. Some parts of their bodies were cannibalized, and traces of rattlesnake venom were found in their blood. However, the ritual was not complete because Desjardins failed to murder the fifth girl. Before he could proceed with its sinister mission, he suddenly disappeared. In the documentary, it is said that he might have gone to Quebec or even taken his own life.

Later on, Deborah starts feeling unwell and vomits earth mixed with worms, and is, once more, taken to the hospital, in distress. While at the hospital, she tries to kidnap a little girl, who is suffering from cancer. As a result, doctors are forced to restrain her to her bed. Seeing her mother's health rapidly deteriorating, Sarah decides to seek unconventional help, outside the doctors and science's sphere.[4]

In fact, when Sarah sees her mother in the hospital bed, hysterical, screaming in a voice that does not resemble hers, she confesses to Mia that "There's something else going on" (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*). At

4 Sarah manages to speak to a priest, but to no avail since he displays a sceptical opinion regarding the existence of a paranormal phenomenon at the origin of Deborah's health deterioration.

that moment, Sarah decides she must do something to understand the nature of these unusual episodes that verge on the paranormal, so as to help her mother.[5] Mia agrees and starts researching in order to find someone who could be able to give them some answers. Later, they manage to meet with the Professor of Anthropology, Dr. Ernest Schiffer, who was featured in the Desjardins's documentary. First, the anthropologist tries to come up with a logical explanation, dismissing the events as being the result of Deborah's obsession with the serial killer. But, in the end, he offers Sarah and Mia an alternate explanation. He claims that the weaker minds of the infirm, the old or the children, are susceptible to attract spiritual parasites, vengeful entities, seeking a fragile host to invade. Dr. Schiffer, then, tells them about the ancient ritual that took place in the caves of the mines, in the Monacan mountains, near the river Rouge.

The fact that the anthropologist speaks of possession, employing medical terminology, claiming that it is caused by a spiritual parasite, ultimately means that, like Alzheimer's, a demonic assault can also be viewed as a type of disease. Indeed, the man's words imply that Sarah's mother could be possessed by the spirit of Henry Desjardins. In fact, Desjardins himself was suffering from a degenerative disease at the time of the crimes, more precisely, he had Lou Gehrig's disease. With the aim of keeping the disease at a distance, or "stave it off" (if we choose to use Deborah's terms), he turned to black magic with the intention of performing a ritual. In the film both diseases, Alzheimer's and Lou Gehrig's disease, appear as degenerative ailments that are strongly tied in with the phenomenon demonic possession.

Later in the film, it is revealed to the viewer that Sarah was indeed the fifth girl, the one that would enable Desjardins to accomplish the last stage of the ritual. At the time, Deborah apparently became acquainted with the evil man's intentions and, together with her neighbour and

5 Contrasting with previous horror films that focus on demonic possession, in *The Taking of Deborah Logan*, it is the feminine partnership developed between Sarah and Mia that will gather efforts to attend to Deborah's possession, instead of a male priest or exorcist.

best friend Harry, decided to set the doctor up, hence killing him and burying him in the forest adjacent to Deborah's manor. However, this action comes with a price because the doctor's demonic spirit is later able to possess Deborah. The fact that she was a "professional communicator" turns her into the perfect shelter for a hostile spirit because, to a certain extent, she can be seen as a channel, due to her professional past as a phone worker. In the film, Mia's account echoes this thought as she states, referring to Sarah's mother, "Deborah's brain is much like the switchboard she so adeptly worked on for decades… her misfiring synapses like the phone lines being pulled from their jacks, losing connections" (*The Taking of Deborah Logan*).

In this respect, Carol J. Clover observes that, in horror films, the female body is liable of being colonized by external entities (102), due to its inherent physical and emotional openness. As the author observes, "… occult films code emotional openness as feminine, and figure those who indulge it, male and female as physically opened, penetrated. The language and the imagery of the occult film is thus necessarily a language and imagery of bodily orifices and insides (or a once removed but transparently related language of doors, gates, portals, channels, inner rooms)" (1992:101). According to Clover, then, "satanic possession is gendered feminine" (1992: 72) precisely due to the latent permeability that characterizes the female body.

Near the epilogue, the spectator sees Deborah walking through the corridors of the hospital. In one of the walls, we can glimpse the drawing of a snake, confirming that the old lady is, indeed, possessed by the spirit of the killer. The snake, a symbol for health is also transformed, in this horror narrative, into a beacon of sin since it signals the possession of Deborah Logan by the demon that was previously lodged in Desjardin's body. Ultimately, she manages to leave the hospital facilities, thus taking Cara (Julianne Taylor) a little girl suffering from cancer, with her, with the aim of coming to terms with the ritual that was left unfinished by the doctor. She then carries the child to a dark cave beneath the old mines, located in the mountains, which, in allegorical terms, is equated with a feminine space that resembles the womb. The scene in which Deborah is at the cave with Cara, hints at her intimate desire of becoming

young again, of restoring her lost youth. The fact that the old woman is seen with her stretched mouth, trying to devour the girl's head, strongly evokes a wish for assimilation, of bodily fusion that verges on the abject. Deborah's fragile and emaciated body combined with her bloodied mouth, points to a dual image where the (pre) menstruated young body intersects with the menopaused old body, an image which results in an abject and monstrous depiction.

On a symbolic level, the cave configures a feminine space that metaphorically evokes the womb. Moreover, according to James Marriot, being inside the cavern or the cave, figuratively points to the risk of "being assimilated, losing one's identity, being devoured" (Marriot, 2013:40), an aspect that is clearly at stake in *The Taking of Deborah Logan*.

In the specific context of Robitel's cinematography, this uterine space of the cave is likened to the Alzheimer's disease and to demonic possession since both ailments threaten to swallow and erase Deborah's identity. In horror films that tackle feminine issues, Barbara Creed argues that such a uterine-like space signals the presence of the archaic mother, a mythical being which is never clearly seen on screen, but whose presence can be perceived through special metaphors, such as the cavern. The scene in the cave hints at the presence of the archaic mother, since that the dark, confined, and damp space summons the figure of the mother "as originating womb" (Creed, 1992:26). Creed defines the archaic mother as the "parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and the end" (Creed, 1992:17). It is pre-symbolic; it represents the negative counterpart of the nurturing mother and constitutes a pervasive reference in the horror film. Her visual presence is felt subtly and indirectly though, as it is depicted through a certain type of iconography such as dark humid underground spaces, tunnels, cobwebs, cellars, steep stairs, blood, earth.

Notably, in *The Taking of Deborah Logan*, the initial pastoral landscape conveyed by the placid image of Deborah working in her garden, comfortably embraced by the all-encompassing forest, is later replaced by a cavernous environment, a visual transformation that can be said to figuratively mirror Deborah's growing mental deterioration caused by the disease. It is precisely in the cave that Deborah physically displays her

monstrousness by becoming a reptilian figure, with her mouth, tainted with blood, stretched in a gruesome and unnatural manner. Drawing on Linda Williams' seminal essay "When the Woman Looks" (1984), we can say that, by virtue of the phenomenon of possession, Deborah Logan's gaze becomes convergent with the monster's, thus paving the way for a perfect identification between both. Nevertheless, the monstrous figure can allow some space for the old female character to express herself free from constraints or taboos. In this respect, Rikke Schubart reminds us that the monster "can be seen as a dynamic site of meaning-making (…) and also as a method to enter a position of dialogue with what is outside society's norm, what is strange, foreign, 'Other'" (Schubart 2019: 195). This otherness then surfaces on screen due to Deborah's monstrous body and via Alzheimer's. It can be said that the monster and the disease both converge towards her corporeality, therefore rendering her identity uncanny. Amelia DeFalco, in *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative* (2010) states,

> Dementia provides caregivers, storytellers, with dramatic lessons of uncanny identity. Not only is there the obvious uncanniness of the victim whose deteriorated memory produces a frightening strangeness, but there is often self-revelation for the storyteller who comes to recognize his or her own otherness in the process of collaborating with the afflicted (DeFalco 2010:59-60).

It is precisely this frightening strangeness that emanates from the vision of the altered Deborah that ultimately transforms her into a monster.[6] Fred Botting, in his seminal oeuvre *Gothic* (1992), argues that monsters "give shape…to obscure fears and anxieties, or contain an amorphous and unrepresentable threat in a single image" (Botting: 8). In fact, the fear elicited by Deborah's possession allied to the disease and its effects turn her into a monstrous figure that becomes more frightful in the

6 Deborah's cinematic descent into possession can indeed epitomize the current cinematic phenomenon that Elizabeth Herskovits deems the "monsterizing of senility" (Herskovits 1995:153).

sense that it turns a mirror to the audience whereby it shows the phantom of old age lurking ahead, waiting for them as a potential threat in the future.

The fact that Desjardins's ritual involved young girls about to experience their first menstruation, heavily contrasts with Deborah's old age. In a symbolic plan, we have female menopause as an omen of lack of strength and physical and mental deterioration, while the surge of menarche suggests life and the capability of reproduction and subsequent renovation. Nevertheless, in an intelligent twist, the film's director can be said to craft a subversive visual narrative, since he also endows Deborah with reproductive powers, as she is able to transmit her possession to the little girl. From an non reproductive status afforded by her biological age, Deborah becomes productive and fertile again, thus playing an active role in the transference of Desjardin's evil to the little girl.

At some point, when both Mia and Sarah are chasing Deborah through the cave system, the first woman informs the latter "Whatever this is, it is not your mom." This form of disavowal is liable to be applied to Deborah to the degree that she is victim of demonic possession, and Alzheimer's, a double threat, as both phenomena (paranormal and scientific) rob the person of their identity, leaving them divested of their personality traits. In other words, the possessed woman and the Alzheimer's patient have been robbed of their selves; they are turned into mere vessels. Both body and mind reflect that "lesser status" of a person who is on the verge of losing full autonomy and whose memories are liable to become fractured and unreliable. In this regard, Deborah can be said to face a double battle, as possession also involves dispossession, to the extent that her memories and identity are held hostage to an entity or degenerative disease.[7]

7 A fundamental difference between traditional films which tackle possession and Robitel's film is that in the former, symptoms of the demonic possession are read as if they were a disease whereas in *The Taking of Deborah Logan* this logic is reversed: Deborah's disease degenerates into a possession case.

In a more benign perspective, this alliance between demonic possession and the Alzheimer's disease can be said to forge the phenomenon of 'transaging' that conveys a fluid image concerning the perception of the aging process. In "Un/re/production of Old Age in *The Taking of Deborah Logan*" (2018), Agnieszka Kotwasińska, appropriates Helen Moglen's concept of transaging and adapts it to Deborah Logan's peculiar situation. According to Moglen, transaging encapsulates "the constant, erratic movement that takes place in consciousness across, between and among the endlessly overlapping stages of life" (Chen & Moglen 2006:139). It consists of a dynamic concept which entails aging as something fluid and not compartmentalized into stages. Deborah Logan, due to the effects provoked by Alzheimer's disease, loses herself in her memories and is able to inhabit both the past and the present simultaneously. In this way, Kotwasińska contends that the phenomenon of possession makes possible the co-existence of different personas such as the single mother, the businesswoman, the murderess and the elderly lady that form part of Deborah's self. In the author's viewpoint, the several identities "are not temporarily disengaged from each other but form one vibrant mesh that Deborah experiences simultaneously through her body memory" (Kotwasińska 2018:188). Indeed, in Deborah's case, bodily memory prevails over the vulnerable cognitive memory, a reality that heavily contributes to render Deborah's body a place of meaning. As Magrit Shildrick contends, "The body […] is not a prediscursive reality, but rather a locus of production, the site of contested meanings, and as such fluid and unstable, never given and fixed" (Shildrick 2002:10). In Robitel's film, Deborah's body comes across as a site of inscription and revisitation of selves that co-habit her simultaneously forming a fluid path between the past, the present and the future.

In the end, the young girl is saved by Sarah, who is forced to shoot her mother in order to stop her nefarious action.

Following the ordeal involving the kidnapping of the child by Deborah, the journalists announce in the media that the girl was able to mysteriously fight the cancer that was consuming her. Hungry for a sensationalist story, they interview her while she is celebrating her birthday. She seems happy now that she is fully recovered. When the journalist

asks her what her plans to the future are, she enigmatically says that she has some, but she cannot reveal them yet, an announcement that leaves the audience guessing that the child might be possessed by Desjardins's spirit.

While Cara meets a joyful destiny, as she is restored to the family safe and sound, Deborah, in turn, is shown heavily debilitated, being escorted in a wheelchair by her daughter. Her semblant reveals alienation and absence. In truth, she is portrayed as if she were a vacant body, now totally dependent on her daughter. This elicits a sense of horror that has a double effect: on the one hand Cara is healed, but possessed; on the other, Deborah physical and mental decay seem to have taken root.

Moreover, this final image that the film conveys of Deborah, of a frail body absent of soul, is evocative of the cinematic zombie, an image which resonates with some scientific articles that, when dealing with health issues, such as dementia and the Alzheimer's disease, tend to compare the Alzheimer's patient to a zombie, someone "whose brain has been destroyed by the disease and who therefore no longer exists as a person but only as a body to be managed" (Behuniak 2011: 74), meaning a real walking dead. In this context, Susan M. Behuniak argues that the fictional character of the zombie has "leaked into the popular and scholarly discourse about real people who have Alzheimer's disease, constructing them as animated corpses and their disease as a terrifying threat to the social order" (Behuniak 2011: 72). Sharing the same perspective, Gerry Canavan also believes the zombie is lately being treated, in cinematic terms, as "an allegory for the disabled or infirm body, particularly, the elderly body" (Canavan 2016:17).

Apart from evoking the zombie,[8] Deborah becomes the physical repository for several iconographic characters from horror films as her personal story progresses. She can be said to epitomize the figure of the vampire, especially in the scene where we see her in the cave about

8 Following the scene in which Deborah is found in the attic, undressed, and tampering with her old switchboard, she has a fit and consequently vomits a black liquid substance in which mud is mixed with earthworms, an image that evokes the figure of the zombie or a dead body.

to attack the little girl, in which she appears impossibly pale with a bloodied mouth. She can also be said to invoke the character of the evil witch who, in the majority of fairy tales abducts children so as to cause them harm. Another mythical figure of horror that is summoned in the film is the Medusa. Indeed, when Deborah is taken to the hospital, we see her laid on the bed, with her hair spread upon the pillow, strongly suggesting the iconography of the frightening Medusa, whose look can kill. The emergence of this frightful iconography intrinsically suggests something which is much more horrible than being petrified. It has implicit the metamorphosis of a living subject into an objectified condition. In sum, it offers the onlookers the view of what it is like to be alive in a death-like state. Within this context it is important to underline the fact that Desjardins used snake-related imagery in his occult practices, a twofold symbol that both stands for health and the demonic.

By intermingling a degenerative disease with the supernatural phenomenon of demonic possession, Robitel tries to convey a vivid image of what it is like to experience a living nightmare. Throughout the cinematic depiction of Deborah's nightmare, Robitel builds an insightful commentary on the impact of a serious degenerative disease, like Alzheimer's, upon the patient and the caregiver, creatively refashioning it as a demonic possession.

Indeed, memory works as a repository of individual experience that strongly contributes to forming one's personality. The usurpation of someone's past experience, whether by means of disease or by means of possession, appears as something highly threatening to human integrity and configures an uncanny experience for the caregivers as well. As Erin Harrington (2021) contends, horror films, "offer a carnivalesque space in which to act 'inappropriately', but they also centralize the importance of women, their experiences, their fears and their relationships at the center of the story" (255). By aptly weaving the threads of the natural with those of the supernatural, *The Taking of Deborah Logan* reinforces this feeling that the patient must fight to delay the disease, that ultimately means the dis-possession of identity.

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