'No,’ she [Rosemary] said, ‘no,’ the knife hanging at her side. ‘No. It can’t be. No.’
‘Go look at His hands,’ Minnie said. ‘And His feet.’
‘And His tail,’ Laura-Louise said.
‘And the buds of His horns,’ Minnie said.
‘Oh God,’ Rosemary said.
‘God’s dead,’ Roman said.
She turned to the bassinet, let fall the knife, turned back to the watching coven. ‘Oh God!’ she said and covered her face.
‘Oh God!’ And raised her fists and screamed to the ceiling: ‘Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!’
‘God is DEAD!’ Roman thundered. ‘God is dead and Satan lives! The year is One, the first year of our Lord! The year is One, God is done! The year is One, Adrian’s begun!’

‘What do you think really happened?’ he [Dyer] asked softly. ‘As a nonbeliever. Do you think she was really possessed?’
She [Chris] pondered, looking down, still toying with the rose. ‘Well, like you say ... as far as God goes, I am a nonbeliever. Still am. But when it comes to a devil – well, that’s something else. I could buy that. I do, in fact. I do. And it isn’t just what happened to Rags. I mean, generally.’ She shrugged. ‘You come to God and you have to figure if there is one, then he must need a million years’ sleep every night or else he tends to get irritable. Know what I mean? He never talks. But the devil keeps advertising, Father. The devil does lots of commercials.’
For a moment Dyer looked at her, and then said quietly, ‘But if all of the evil in the world makes you think that there might be a devil, then how do you account for all the good in the world?’

(William Peter Blatty, The Exorcist, 1971)

**William Peter Blatty’s and William Friedkin’s The Exorcist**

‘Something almost beyond comprehension is happening to a little girl on this street, in this house,’ proclaimed the original 1973 advertising campaign for Warner Brothers’ The Exorcist ‘… and a man has been sent for as a last resort. This man is The Exorcist.’ William Peter Blatty both authored the screenplay (which won an Academy Award) and produced the blockbuster film from his bestselling 1971 novel. William Friedkin directed. The film’s release on Boxing Day was accompanied by now legendary reports of extreme audience reactions, from faintings and vomiting to other scenes of hysteria. ‘The whole country,’ as one reviewer noted at the time, ‘has gone Exorcist-crazy … it is too important a phenomenon to dismiss lightly’ (Farber 4). The Exorcist remains controversial and potent today. It was only recently that the British Board of Film Censors saw fit to grant the film a video certificate. Twenty-seven years later, The Exorcist was re-released in a director’s cut that incorporated eleven minutes of additional footage, modifying the structure and meaning of the original film. The retitled film, The Exorcist: The Version You’ve Never Seen – which I will consider in the following discussion – did impressive business at the box office, proving not only that the film retains its power to shock, its status as a contemporary American horror classic, but also that the notion of the possessed child has not lost its popular appeal. A prequel is scheduled for release in 2004. In this chapter, I examine the influence of the interplay in American culture between historic Puritanism and modern Roman Catholicism on representations of the possessed child in the 1970s.

There is a more than 70-year hiatus between The Turn of the Screw and The Exorcist. As noted in the previous chapter, The Turn of the Screw inspired several adaptations and reworkings, from Jack Clayton’s fine 1961 film of William Archibald’s play The Innocents to Michael Winner’s not uninteresting prequel The Nightcomers (1972). Novelist Thomas Tryon’s doppelganger variation on the theme of juvenile possession, The Other, published in the same year as The Exorcist, is also comparable in effect and style to The Turn of the Screw, as is Theodous Carroll’s Evil is a Quiet Word (1975). In the box-office hit, The Others,