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Contemporary Critical Theory, Contemporary Archeology of Religion

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## **Re-immersion of Religious Figured in Entertainment through A Case Study of Satan**

My thesis explores the figure of Satan at different moments in cultural consciousness. My textual content will be composed of three overlapping areas of research; the first part will focus on the original texts (The Old and New Testaments) which propagated the character(s) of Satan, as well as the Judaic myths which predated the original writings of the Tanach. In the same vein, I will also look at the figure of Shai'tan, the Islamic character of Satan, to establish a socio-historical context of the discourse on and characterization of Satan in a pre-enlightenment world.

In the second part, I will briefly explore the changes that the 'enlightenment project' had on the way religion was viewed and experienced. The disbursal of rationality and reason, and the admonishment of catering to religion, allowed the rise of atheism in the greater part of society. While religion still remains a strong influence in the lives of many today, western society retains its emphasis on secularization, empiricism, science, and the dissipation of superstition and belief.

This part of my thesis reveals the question I ultimately am attempting to answer: why is it, if this society is indeed enlightened and so distant from religious form and ideation, that we still find a plethora of examples of religious figures and themes throughout our cultural consciousness? In our entertainment of all things! Specifically, what is religion doing in non-religious contexts, in our movies, our music, our books and graphic novels? How did they arrive, why were they not eliminated entirely, and what do they say about western society's relationship to religion?

In part three lies the object of analysis, our beloved Satan. I decided to explore him as opposed to any other religious figure for four reasons. One, he does not incite worship, which assures, for the most part, that most representations of him are not marred by a religious agenda. Two, he is deeply tied, symbolically, to humanity. He brought us to civilization, and represents lust and the creative impulse in human consciousness. Three, representations of him are extremely prolific, varied, easily identifiable, accessible, and he represents a powerful figure, worthy of respect, sympathy, and fear. Fourthly, and most importantly, we as a society are enthralled and fascinated with him and his representations. Iago is one of the favorite villains in all of Shakespeare, just as the Joker is the favorite villain of Batman's fandom. The very best actors are screened to portray the Devil, and we always watch them in fascination. Satan represents the most human (although not humane) aspects of ourselves, and in some ways (at some times), reifies the image of the perfect human.

The other characters I will analyze are Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mephistopheles from Goethe's *Faust*, and Satan from *Paradise Lost*. As the project continues, more representations of Satan, or iterations of the fall story, will be found and incorporated, but those major cultural figures will be my cornerstones for 'contemporary' representations of Satan.

Ultimately I aim to demonstrate the necessity of a religious sentiment in human society, and to explore the forms in which that need expresses itself in a secular society. The immersion of religion through entertainment calls for a new analysis of those themes and figures which are being re-incorporated into cultural consciousness.