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Sacred Violence and The Cabin in the Woods¹



[1] Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* is a horror movie about horror movies and their audiences. Whedon and Goddard's meta-horror allows us to consider the underlying catalysts that make the horror genre one of the most prolific (and popular) fictive acts. I left my initial viewing of *Cabin* concerned that the movie had exceeded the horror genre's (admittedly extensive) capacity to poke fun at itself and its audiences in a good-natured way and strayed from playful parody into that more mocking parody most similar to Juvenalian satire. Could *Cabin* be, in essence, an anti-horror horror movie—one which belittles both its genre and its audience? I rewatched *Cabin*, mostly because I believed it was possible to recognize an affirming purposefulness behind the self-referential techniques deployed in the movie. After quite a bit of further consideration of what may be happening in *Cabin*, I have convinced myself that the movie's metafictional focus on sacrificial violence can be seen as a valuable commentary on contemporary horror movies and on American society in general.

[2] One of the things I like about *Cabin* is how it foregrounds the human sacrifice of the college students, and violence in general, as a valuable and necessary commodity in our postmodern world. Citizens of the United States, especially, live in a society where they often think of violence as entirely negative, or at best "regrettable." So, how is it that *Cabin* can posit a world where violence is necessary, productive, and even sacred? Those who see violence through simple "civilized" vs. "primitive" binaries may regard physical violence as an indication of cultural immaturity and regard violence as irrational and harmful, but their disavowal of violence may betray a far too limited definition for violence. Although "civilized" cultures claim to reject overt physical violence, citizens of first-world countries (such as the United States) still experience and tolerate cruelty of numerous kinds. Surely, the minor injustices U.S. citizens habitually tolerate can be referred to by names other than violence, and hopefully, citizens are not regularly the recipient of harsh, harmful physical treatment by others. Generally they endure very little, if any, real violence in their first-world existence. They probably endure slights, snubs, egotistic

personalities, paternalisms, tough love, maybe even the occasional exposure to “road rage,” but not “violence.” Being civilized may seem to have exorcised the real violence from our society, but perhaps that is merely a matter of definition. The “civilized” world can still be a difficult place owing to individuals’ actions towards each other—and could they not consider these actions, which negatively affect them, a type of violence? Civilization protects one from physical harm, generally, but maybe not from violence.

[3] I have always enjoyed horror and I take the genre’s ability to comment upon contemporary society seriously, but my ruminations on horror do not often lead me to post-structural theorizing about the nature of existence. Nevertheless, *Cabin* incites me to philosophize about the generative nature of violence and the degree to which “civilization” may be predicated upon violence.² Possibly this is what is so interesting and disconcerting about Whedon and Goddard’s deconstruction of the horror genre; it foregrounds the violence which makes civilization possible. In the remaining pages, I want to focus on some ways that *The Cabin in the Woods* serves as a commentary on the violent nature of not only horror movies, but “civilized” societies in general. Specifically, I’ve been thinking about *Cabin* in relation to three different questions which the movie inspires me to contemplate. 1. How might *Cabin* be enacting some of the ritual elements of Rene Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* and why? 2. How is the violence of horror—especially as laid bare in Whedon and Goddard’s deconstruction—reminiscent of the argument between Derrida and Levinas over the violent nature of metaphysics and knowledge? 3. How might *Cabin*’s apocalyptic ending serve as a meditation on horror’s capacity to promote ethical reflection by its audience?

I. Sacred Horror

[4] Horror is often preoccupied with the supernatural, or its possibility. So much of the genre revolves around uncanny storylines which defy rational explanation that it is easy to overlook horror’s potential to explore the irrational underpinnings of everyday experience. One thing that makes *Cabin* so noteworthy is that it exposes the cultural forces generative of the horror genre while it enacts and foregrounds the sacrificial spectacle traditional to the genre. The horror genre frequently relies on its followers’ acceptance of and desire for violent spectacle, although this acceptance is sometimes problematized by the genre’s predisposition toward self-aware meta-commentary. René Girard’s

sociological/anthropological study of ritual violence, *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), begins with the words: "In many rituals the sacrificial act assumes two opposing aspects, appearing at times as a sacred obligation to be neglected at grave peril, at other times as a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity" (1). *Cabin* embodies these opposing forces through its depiction of two distinct, yet intersecting, storylines: the sacrificial victims punished for their indulgent transgressions and youth—who absolutely must die—and the covert government conspirators who instigate criminal violence for the good of society. For Girard, society's continued existence depends upon violence. Finding a suitable scapegoat for the inescapable violence is the means by which society maintains itself: "society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it desires to protect" (*Violence* 4). Violence in this estimation provides a cathartic release-valve of sorts, a function it similarly can serve within the horror genre.³ Girard later explains, "violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object" (*Violence* 4). One can displace violence but apparently never eliminate it because civilization is created by and dependent upon violence.⁴ Girard contends that the origin of all sacrifices must have been a founding murder, and this murder, by creating an in-group and a victim (who serves as a sort of one-person out-group) generates the society which then periodically commemorates its founding with ritual violence against an acceptable outsider (*Violence* 92). The force of the initial, society-creating violence is very strong. In explaining ritual sacrifice with regards to the myth of Oedipus, Girard asserts:

All the dangers, real and imaginary, that threaten the community are subsumed in the most terrible danger that can confront a society: the sacrificial crisis. The rite therefore is a repetition of the original spontaneous "lynching" that restored order in the community by reestablishing, around the figure of the surrogate victim, that sentiment of social accord that had been destroyed in the onslaught of reciprocal violence. (*Violence* 95)

In order for society to remain strong, it must periodically experience a "preventative" form of violence directed against "appropriate sacrificial victims" or risk "a relapse into the sacrificial crisis" (*Violence* 102).

[5] *Cabin* foregrounds the horror genre's indebtedness to sacrificial violence and its manifestations through myth and literature. From the moment the film

starts, we witness a mixture of sacred violence and its relation to the maintenance of society. Before the first instance of dialog, and while opening credits have barely started rolling, we see depictions of human sacrifice meant to evoke cave art. These pseudo-prehistoric paintings remind the audience how closely allied culture and the arts are to primitive societal violence. In a seemingly disconcerting manner, the first actual scene in the movie involves not exposition about sacrifice or an introduction of our young (soon-to-become-sacrificial) protagonists but a discussion between the Men Behind the Scenes⁵ as they talk about fertility treatments, child safety locks, and humanity's natural inclinations towards the continuance of the species. We don't get the slightest hint about our sacrificial victims until after two minutes of "water-cooler-type" discussion between two typical government workers. If we are to take seriously the underlying premise of much of Girard's work on sacrifice's essential importance to societal maintenance, we recognize that not only is the rather commonplace dialog between the Men Behind the Scenes (hereafter MBS) necessary, but it provides a partial justification for much of the violence to come.

[6] Of course we are supposed to be disconcerted by the rather banal opening, and Whedon and director Drew Goddard continually mix the elements essential to the prototypical "horror in the woods" story with elements of corporate life in a way that only upon re-examination reveal its intense purposefulness. To some extent, we're in the deconstructed horror genre of something like the movie *Scream* (1996), as rules are revealed about the nature of horror as sacrificial violence, but, unlike the *Scream* movies, *Cabin*'s meta-horror is more than just an acknowledgment of the formula traditional to the genre. The movie's "stoner" character Marty's rant against society at first might seem part of the customary practice—another paranoid stoner in a Hollywood movie who wants to bring down society. But his "Society needs to crumble we're all just too chicken-shit to let it" followed immediately by "you will come to see things my way," turns out to be entirely prophetic, and all this occurs just minutes before we meet the film's designated Harbinger character. The MBS eventually explain that "a," or "the," Harbinger must be ignored by the victims before they become ripe for the sacrifice. This explanation about the sacrificial potential of willfully ignoring the warnings places Marty's warning/rant about "society needing to crumble" in a whole new light. Marty (played by Fran Kranz), throughout the picture, prophetically sees through the artifice created by society's guardians: He realizes the danger of the cellar, demands they do not

read the Latin incantation, wants them to stick together, and believes they are being played with like puppets. Marty's prophetic abilities probably qualify him as an alternative harbinger to the movie's proclaimed Harbinger, Mordecai (played by Tim De Zarn), who points out Marty's potential to upset the rituals associated with the sacrifice. Mordecai tells Hadley, "The fool nearly derailed the invocation with his insolence."⁶ From the very beginning, Marty has recognized his own potential to upset the status quo with strangely ominous lines, as in the scene where he rolls up to the house smoking his collapsible bong and explains: "Statistical fact, cops will never pull over a man with a huge bong in his car. Why? They fear this man. They know he sees farther than they, and he will bind them with ancient logics." Not only is it true that Marty sees farther than other characters do, his "huge bong" later serves as a means of defense against the Zombie Redneck Torture Family. All of these facts about Marty might merely result in one's considering Marty the movie's real Harbinger, but Cabin wants to unsettle us from any one-to-one switch between Marty and Mordecai. Cabin differs from the standard horror deconstruction set up by movies like *Scream*—the point isn't just that Cabin seems aware of itself as a horror movie; this movie seems aware that we know it's aware of itself. (This probably puts Cabin in contention for a designation as a meta-deconstructive horror, or deconstructive meta-horror, movie.) The movie wants us to re-examine and rearrange its constituent parts; in fact, it demands that we do so. In this re-examination we become the unknowing sacrificial victims (sometimes), and we are the cold-hearted guardians of society (sometimes).

[7] We, along with the characters in the movie, take up multiple roles with regards to the three basic roles of "victim" (the sacrificial scapegoat), "community" (the unanimous society warding off violence through sacrificial rites) and "gods" (the supposed recipients and authenticators of the sacrifice) delineated by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*. The literal choice of young adults as sacrificial victims is explicated throughout the movie. Within the horror genre in general, teens often serve as exemplars for the viewers—their punished transgressions educate us in right action. For Girard, "In some societies whole categories of human beings are systematically reserved for sacrificial purposes in order to protect other categories" (10). But more intriguing than the generic use of teens as sacrifice is the viewers' potential to serve as sacred victims, if they do not see the hidden signs soon enough to avoid going willingly to the slaughter. If the viewers are the victims, then Cabin may be reproaching passive audience

members for being sacrificial lambs. And the interchange of roles between the viewers and the teens would be merely a neat little trick, if that were the end of the exchanges, but Whedon and Goddard take the extension to the roles of sacrificial victims, community/celebrants, and recipients of the sacrifice much further. For example, on what would seem the most literal level, the “young adults” serve as sacrifice, the MBS represent the community offering the sacrifice (and constructing the elaborate ritual machinery which enables it), and the gods are the mandate and justification for the sacrifice. But as the tables turn with Marty’s “escape,” the MBS’s community takes on the role of victim, Marty and Dana (played by Kristen Connolly) become the celebrants, and the gods or, possibly, the viewers are the recipients of the sacrifice. Other permutations of these three main roles between the four possible participants—“young adults,” “MBS,” “gods” and “audience”—are entirely possible and encouraged by the meta-deconstructive nature of the movie. Who is sacrificing whom is one of the puzzles of this movie. Moreover, I believe that the “why” of sacrifice and the “for whom” are areas of investigation for which the movie offers multiple rewarding possibilities.

II. The Meaning of Violence

[8] Violence is a frequently recurring element in many types of horror, and as I mentioned earlier, may be a common aspect of our everyday lives, depending on what we believe constitutes violence. For Girard, “There is a common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices. . . . This common denominator is internal violence—all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress” (4). Girard casts a broad net in defining violence to include “dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels,” and he is not alone in the world of French critical thinkers. Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida famously argue about the omnipresence of violence within the meaning-making process itself. Derrida in many ways agrees with Levinas’s beliefs about the inherent violence of attempting to know or understand something; for Derrida violence is “the necessity from which no discourse can escape, from its earliest origin—these necessities are violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence” (“Violence” 128). For Levinas, and to some extent for Derrida, there is no meaning without violence. Although I am most interested in Levinas’s formulation of an ethical response which rejects, or attempts to reject, violence rather than

Derrida's understanding of this formulation, it is worth mentioning that Andrew McKenna's 1992 *Violence and Difference* outlines specific similarities between Girard's ideas about violent sacrifice and Derrida's assertions about the role substitution plays in language. In discussing similarities between how language and sacrifice function, McKenna explains: "This 'practice of substitution' [which occurs in both ritual sacrifice and language] is representation—substituting a word for a thing, different words for different things, one word for another thing (metaphor), and so on—and results in the fragile construct of language. Its deconstruction shows that ritual sacrifice is a supplement to divine presence, to which, in the expulsion of the victim, it only defers, which it only displaces" (77). McKenna contends that Derrida in *Of Grammatology* "has the same understanding of [violence's] structure and its sacrificial effects as does Girard. As [Derrida] says, 'the structure of violence is complex and its possibility—writing—is no less so'" (McKenna 88). Interviews with Girard and writings by him from after the release of McKenna's book reveal his deep respect for McKenna's analysis, but Girard ultimately rejects the post-structural refusal to posit transcendental truth or a fixed origin for language and civilization.⁷

[9] All this emphasis on the unavoidability of violence could lead one to believe that Girard contends that violence is positive and unavoidable, but Girard, in his later work especially, makes clear that the violence concealed within ritual is something which it would be desirable for society to outgrow. In his discussions of the "sacrifice" of Jesus recounted by the Gospels, he argues, "The Gospels speak of 'sacrifices' only to reject and deny them any validity. . . . The passages that are invoked to justify a sacrificial conception of the Passion both can and should be interpreted with no reference to sacrifice in any of the accepted meanings" ("The Nonsacrificial Death of Christ" 178). For Girard, Christianity offers a nonviolent way to escape the endless cycle of sacrificial violence endemic to, purportedly, all other cultures. Although I might argue against Girard's conception of Christianity as the solution to the endless cycle of violence, escaping the violence which underpins western notions of civilization seems desirable (even if one finds it an impossibility). *Cabin*, by implicating the viewers in numerous roles and responsibilities within the movie, may suggest a possible solution to the violence inherent within American society. For me, Levinas's ethical solution to escape the violence inherent in post-structural understanding of meaning-making seems convincing. Levinas's struggle with "understanding" as a type of violence could supply a more post-structural, ethical turn for both

Girard and for this present reading of *The Cabin in the Woods*. For Levinas, the process of attempting to understand the meaning of another is itself subject to a degree of violence. Understanding entails approximating an "other's" meaning to ourselves, and for Levinas—this is an act of violence. He explains: "Knowledge is always an adequation between thought and what it thinks. There is in knowledge, in the final account, an impossibility of escaping the self" (*Ethics* 60). Elsewhere he explains that "knowledge is a re-presentation, a return to presence and nothing may remain other to it" ("*Ethics as First Philosophy*" 77). There is disrespect and violence in the ego's attempt to know something about the other because knowing makes what was the other's mine. Hence, it is impossible to understand spoken or written discourse without an act of violent egotism that takes away the other's distinctiveness.

[10] Levinas contends that it is quite difficult to avoid violence in relation to the other, but what may be even more horrible for him are the moments when the ego becomes aware of its existence in solitude. If we exist by ourselves (as opposed to "being-for-the-other"), we are all alone. In *Time and the Other*, he explains: "What remains after this imaginary destruction of everything is not something, but the fact that there is [il y a]. The absence of everything returns as a presence, as a place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plentitude of the void, or the murmur of silence" (46). There is, for Levinas, a dread associated with solitary existence. Without an ethical openness to community, which Levinas calls "sociality," a person is violently unethical. The only way to avoid violence for Levinas is to exist in anticipation of the "other." When one recognizes the other and says "here I am," instead of trying to understand the other, one leaves behind ego and exists in sociality with the other (*Ethics* 52). I think *Cabin* recognizes the potential power of sociality as a way to escape the cycle of sacrifice. When the ghost deployed by the "gods" fails to destroy the Japanese school children, we see a group triumph over evil, not by fighting violence with violence, but by holding hands and singing, as a group, the traditional children's song "A Rolling Acorn."⁸ Hadley wrongly implies that their success has some tie to traditional Asian religion, accusing them of singing "What a friend we have in Shinto," as opposed to seeing their creation of a "happy frog" from the ghost as a product of non-violent social interaction.⁹

[11] So how does a recognition of the violence that underpins knowledge help us to understand the violence and sacrifice endemic to the horror genre?

Horror may acknowledge an individual's inability to relate to society without violence. Even if understanding, knowledge, and meaning do not always entail violence, the violence in horror movies seemingly communicates opaque messages concerning our relationship to culture and society. Through unsettling images of uncivilized behavior and the monstrous, horror testifies to the underlying violence that sustains at least some elements of our society. Experiences of radical alterity are an integral part of the horror experience. We sit in the dark and experience our separateness from the world which surrounds us. In a manner similar to Heidegger's interpretation of the *unheimlich* (or uncanny), Levinas refers to the horror of recognizing the solitariness of one's existence as wakefulness or insomnia (Santilli 180). Levinas's emphasis on sociality and non-egotistical, ethical acceptance of culture is what occasions Paul Santilli in "Culture, Evil, and Horror" to posit that Levinas sees horror as the binary opposite to culture (174). Culture and horror are inseparable; what exists at the borders of culture is horror and the monstrous. We experience the ominous, rumbling sound of our existence and can only mitigate the horror of it through ethical interactions with an "other." In Levinas's philosophy and within the horror genre, Santilli argues, "The totalizing dream of modernity [to know all] is . . . bound to fail" (186). In this way horror acknowledges the violence inherent in all attempts to know.

[12] If all attempts to know the world/society/truth are bound to involve violence, the violence of movie horror may represent one honest attempt to recognize how violence both creates and reinforces civilization and culture. Girard argues, "If sacrifice resembles criminal violence, we may say that there is, inversely, hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice" (Violence 1). Whether it is the sacred violence that creates civilization or the violence of the ego in attempting to "know," and hence subsume, the "other," violence is essential to the perpetuation of our society. *The Cabin in the Woods* foregrounds how western society only comes into existence, as we currently experience it, through violent acts. Girard recognizes the importance of how cultural artifacts (like tragedies, or for our world, possibly, horror) reflect many of the hidden fears and desires of society. While discussing the Oedipus myth he asserts: "All these motifs ['the crimes, perversions, and monstrosities with which mythology abounds'], and others as well, serve to conceal and disguise rather than reveal the violent elimination of difference. It is this particular violence that is the suppressed matter of the myths; not suppressed desire, but terror, terror of absolute violence" (Violence 117).

[13] In discussing Levinas's thought in relation to horror movies, Santilli argues that: "Art-horror is a cultural product through which the culture imagines the other that menaces its central norms and categories. Although art-horror, unlike tragedy, traditionally has received little attention from philosophers, it is worth looking at in order to learn how our culture envisions its rejected or abjected other" (176). Moreover, since Levinas's ethics is committed to an acceptance of the other as one would accept God, I think it is worth considering how horror with its endemic violence offers viewers a relatively innocuous experience of radical alterity which could translate into ethical growth. For Levinas, images, as in artistic works, offer the potential to experience others or objects without the violence inherent in knowing. In "Reality and Its Shadow," he explains:

The most elementary procedure of art consists in substituting for the object its image. Its image, and not its concept. A concept is the object grasped, the intelligible object; we grasp it, we conceive it. The image neutralizes this real relationship, this primary conceiving through action. . . . An image is interesting without the slightest sense of utility, interesting in the sense of involving, in the etymological sense—to be among things, which should have had only the status of objects. (133, 134).

As with the sociality of the ethical reception of the other's face, one does not attempt to know an image, one experiences it. It may be the ethical potentiality of images (especially horror images, which conceal the real hidden terrors of the community) that allows Whedon and Goddard's deconstruction of the horror genre to reveal horror's capacity to evoke our ethical relationship to others and our society.

III. The Ethics of Horror: or, Are We the Gods?

[14] *The Cabin in the Woods* does an excellent job of forcing the audience to consider its own responsibility for instigating the violence of horror. As it shifts the roles of victim from the young adults to the Men Behind the Scenes, the audience becomes aware that it has something at stake in this violence. Their possible identification with the society which empowers the MBS becomes ethically troubling. If the audience is represented by the community which supports the MBS, then, as that group falls prey to the myriad of monsters it sustains, perhaps

the audience has become the sacrificial victims. Viewers failed to heed the harbinger warnings of Marty and have doomed themselves to “crumble” along with society. Of course, if the audience identifies itself with the desire to sacrifice the young adults for the greater good (like the MBS), then it also must accept responsibility for the sacrificial violence which purportedly has served to maintain all the societies throughout the film’s world. Moreover, as I’ve already intimated, the audience might very well be expected to identify with the deities destined to receive the sacrifice. After all, it is the audience, not the Gods, that is the driving force behind the horror genre; viewers made all this violence necessary through the price of admission.

[15] All this confusion about the ultimate meaning and ultimate recipient of ritual violence is oddly enough another topic Girard comments upon: “the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of misunderstanding. The celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act. . . . It is the God who, supposedly, demands the victims” (7). And, since Girard sees the god(s) in this conception as merely a veiled justification for continuing a society established through an initial violent killing—it is hard to see the god(s) as all-knowing or all-powerful. Within Girard’s concept both the sacrificial victims and the celebrants do not understand what’s happening with or through the sacrifice; within Whedon and Goddard’s deconstructed perspective of sacrifice, it is possible that even the gods don’t fully understand the reasons for the sacrifice. On at least one level the movie seems ultimately to reject the sacrifice motif. If the audience concedes that Marty and Dana do not deserve to die, then the ritual sacrifice fails and the world ends. Cabin has manipulated us skillfully; if we choose to let the protagonists live, the world ends violently, but if we choose violence, then the protagonists die and the violence which props up society remains unchanged. There will be violence either way. Like The Director (played by Sigourney Weaver), we might calculate that a discrete amount of violence is preferable to world-scale destruction. But Cabin actually offers us a third option, and this option is eerily reminiscent of Levinas’s solution to the horror of our solitary existence. The only ethical response to existence is to just “be” without violence, not unlike the behavior of the Japanese school children I mentioned earlier. We must await the face of other (who is often God, for Levinas) with no hope of knowing god or subsuming her or him within our existence. We must welcome God with the “Here I am” of both Levinas and the biblical Abraham (whose attempted sacrifice of his son, Isaac, makes him a sort of archetype for

human sacrifice). For Levinas, God and the other are experienced through a testimony that recognizes their distinct existence and that recognition is the beginning of ethics, responsibility, and even individuality (Ethics 108). Since horror itself is a recognition or experience of radical alterity (not entirely unlike the radical otherness of God), it is reasonable to accept that the seeds of ethical behavior might be found within a meta-horror movie, like *Cabin*.

[16] Faced with a revealing account of how society is established and maintained through violence, we can testify to the need for sociality, the radical acceptance of otherness that releases us from the violent cycle of knowledge and appropriation. If we are seeking an ethical escape from violent sacrifice, we may need to sacrifice sacrifice.¹⁰ Instead of mindlessly accepting the mandate from God to sacrifice the other—or accept ourselves as the other of society's sacrifice—we, along with Marty and Dana, can determine that God will have to do his own dirty work. We can call God's bluff. As we are waiting for the arrival of a disappointed and angry god, there is nothing precluding us from hoping that, as with Abraham, God spares us as He eventually did Isaac. (After all, we actually never see Marty and Dana die.) For Levinas, ethics, and for Whedon and Goddard, horror, requires risk. The only ethical way out of the cycle of violence may be to reject violence, no matter who requires it of us, and await patiently the radically other with total acceptance.

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Notes

¹ A version of this paper was delivered at the 2013 Popular Culture Association conference in Washington, D.C.

² Editors' note: See, *Regeneration Through Violence* by Whedon's professor, Richard Slotkin, for a related discussion on violence in Westerns.

³ Although Noel Carroll in "The Nature of Horror" argues, in a nuanced way, against horror as catharsis, I continue to see purgative catharsis as a valuable product of the horror experience.

⁴ Girard is rightly criticized for universalizing his argument to all civilizations. Girard's use of supporting mythology is primarily from the ancient Greeks and entirely from western societies; Cabin's commentary on societal violence similarly suffers from its primary focus on western society, the United States in particular.

⁵ A point could be made that the term "Men" here excludes women from responsibility in the community that offers the sacrifice, but I feel that the choice to have the two main characters responsible for the societal sacrifice, Sitterson (played by Richard Jenkins) and Hadley (played by Bradley Whitford) portrayed by men serves to reinforce an attitude toward the especially patriarchal nature of institutions that underpin American society. Moreover, their continuous, easy dismissal of the most prevalent female behind the scenes, Lin (played by Amy Acker) would seem to support this. Although Sigourney Weaver's portrayal of the Director, might be seen to inevitably question patriarchal control over society, the pervasive atmosphere of the "behind the scenes" scenes is very much like that of a Good-ole-Boy network.

⁶ It is possible to read this statement as Mordecai warning the MBS about Marty's harmful potential, hence living up to his designation as Harbinger at the very moment he brings to light Marty's potential as an alternate harbinger.

⁷ A good example of both Girard's respect for McKenna and his distancing himself from the deconstructive tendency to deny absolute truth occurs in his 1993 interview by Rebecca Adams, published in *Religion and Literature* (Adams and Girard).

⁸ I am grateful to <http://www.purpleballoonhat.com/movie/315/The-Cabin-In-The-Woods> for identifying the name of the song, and my son Nicholas for suggesting this line of thought.

⁹ Hadley's derision of the Japanese children's success in transforming their ghost reinforces the society depicted within the movie's overt preference for all things American.

¹⁰ Dennis Keenan in his book *The Question of Sacrifice* actually argues that the escape from the cycle of sacrifice for Levinas involves even an additional level of sacrifice, what he argues is "sacrificing sacrificing sacrificing" (86).