ELEMENTS OF SATIRE IN GOOD OMENS

PODOBY SATIRY V DIELE GOOD OMENS

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Abstrakt

Hoci existujú dôveryhodné štúdie ktoré analyzujú aspekty diela Good Omens, ako sú poznámky pod čiarou alebo adaptácia Knihy Zjavenia, je ich v konečnom dôsledku málo. Obsiahla analýza celého textu, taktiež aj analýza do hĺbky jeho postáv a symbolov, ešte nebola realizovaná. Táto diplomová práca primárne analyzuje adaptáciu románu a metakomentár udalostí v rámci Zjavenia, ktorý zaberá väčšinu príbehu. Okrem toho sa zaoberá stvárnením kresťanských symbolov, podvracaním žánru apokalypsy, archetypmi jeho postáv a jednotlivými satirickými prvkami v rámci textu. Aby som vykonala tento druh analýzy, prevezmem si metodológiu blízkeho čítania, čo je technika literárnej analýzy, ktorá sa sústreďuje na drobné detaily pasáže alebo textu, aby odhalila akýkoľvek skrytý hlbší význam. V teoretických častiach tejto práce uvádzam najdôležitejšie časti svojich zdrojov, ktoré sa týkajú témy satiry ako literárneho žánru, významu Knihy Zjavenia a typického použitia poznámok pod čiarou, ktoré mi neskôr pomáhajú pri môjom analytickom procese. V analytických častiach sa ponorím hlboko do rôznych prvkov diela Good Omens, napríklad adaptácia a podvracanie žánru apokalypsy, adaptácia a podvracanie filmu The Omen, stav a vývoj jeho primárnych postáv a spôsob a ako vzájomne ovplyvňujú svoj rast, úloha a evolúcia Antikrista a napokon postmodernistické využitie poznámok pod čiarou v románe. Výsledky tejto analýzy zdôrazňujú skutočnú povahu diela Good Omens, ktorá spočíva v tom, že hoci sa prezentuje ako priama a zábavná paródia na Armagedon, v skutočnosti ide o humanistickú adaptáciu, ktorá oslavuje ľudskosť a uisťuje nás, že sme oveľa cennejší než obyčajná zábava pre nadprirodzené bytosti.

Kľúčové slová: satira, Kniha Zjavenia, Antikrist, poznámky pod čiarou, apokalyptická literatúra

Abstract

Although credible studies analysing the aspects of Good Omens, such as the footnotes or adaptation of the Book of Revelation, exist, they are ultimately scarce. A comprehensive analysis of the entire text, as well as some in-depth analysis of its characters and symbols, has not yet been realised. This thesis primary analyses the novel's adaptation of and meta-commentary on the events within Revelation, which takes up most of the story. In addition, it deals with the portrayal of Christian symbols, the subversion of the apocalypse genre, the archetypes of its characters, and individual satirical elements within the text. To aid this type of analysis, I will be adopting the close-reading methodology, which is a literary analysis technique that concentrates on the minute details of a passage or text to reveal any hidden deeper significance. In the theoretical sections of this thesis, I recount the most crucial parts of my sources regarding the topic of satire as a literary genre, the prominence of the Book of Revelation, and the typical uses of footnotes, which I later use to aid me in my analytical process. In the analytical sections, I will delve deep into the different elements of Good Omens, such as the adaptation and subversion of the apocalypse genre, the adaptation and subversion of the plot of The Omen, the state and evolution of its primary characters and how they affect each other's growth, the role and evolution of the Antichrist, and finally, the postmodernist use of the novel's footnotes. The results of this analysis highlight the true nature of Good Omens, which is that while it presents itself as a straightforward and entertaining parody of Armageddon, it is actually a humanist adaptation that celebrates humanity and reassures us that we are much more valuable than mere amusement for supernatural beings.

Keywords: satire, Book of Revelation, Antichrist, footnotes, apocalypse literature

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1. LITERARY SATIRE – AND ITS HELPERS

In the world, there exist many definitions of satire. Many of these definitions overlap, many of them are short, and sometimes they're credible. However, to attempt to briefly define the genre of satire is a difficult challenge (perhaps even an impossibility) since with each attempt, they do not include everything that is regarded as a satirical feature. For instance, Merriam-Webster defines satire as "a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn." Oxford English Dictionary defines satire as "poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary." Cambridge Dictionary defines satire as "a way of criticizing people or ideas in a humorous way, especially in order to make a political point, or a piece of writing that uses this style." These definitions by themselves serve their function decently when briefly informing someone unfamiliar with the topic about the genre of satire for general purposes. However, in terms of using them for analysis, each definition is too brief and under-represents what constitutes a satiric literature. Two of them do not primarily define the literary genre of satire and serve a general purpose, and all of them are too broad.

Priestley (1929) asserts that

> a humorist is not simply a joker, who thinks about men sitting on pats of butter or smelly cheese. He is a man with an unusual mental makeup, who is held in a curious sort of balance, for while he is intellectually very acute and perceives that life is incongruous and men are pretentious and absurd, he is also unusually sympathetic and warm hearted, and this combination of qualities produces humour, which is perhaps more an atmosphere than anything else. (pp. 542-543)

In his paper, Weisgerber (1973) mainly focuses on observing and defining crucial characteristics of satirical works in literature. In his in-depth analysis of the functions of satire (and irony), Weisgerber goes on to declare five apparent characteristics of satire:

1. Satire communicates a positive message by pitting an ideal or norm against a legitimate but supposedly undesirable circumstance. A positive ideal and a negative actuality can be reconciled through the use of satire in writing.
2. The communication is indirect because it appears to be an assault that sheds light on the exact opposite of what is being advised.
3. The reader is compelled to reflect on the victim's position and determine the aggression's roots, whether or not he is the one being attacked. From his perspective, satire encourages research – it exposes the reader to reality at the cost of an intellectual effort that involves turning the circumstance on its head.
4. The written performance created and directed by the author, performed by the persona and the victim, and witnessed by the audience – this entire process possesses some theatrical quality.
5. Satire usually identifies the disease while only alluding to the remedy. The satirist can use a wide range of rhetorical devices to enhance the message, with irony playing a significant role in many of them.

Irony is used as one of satire's standard weapons, therefore they share a few similarities, although, they are not always found in conjunction. Weisgerber (1973) states that irony primarily conveys a message that encourages others to seek an undiscovered truth. It is also an indirect attack on communication; however, irony's attack on the reader is veiled. In addition to educating the reader about the truth at the cost of intellectual effort, it also reveals the way to the truth. Finally, there is also something theatrical about irony in its writing.

According to Diehl (2013), satire commonly employs **analogies** for two purposes. Firstly, satire employs analogy in order to assist the reader in identifying the target of the satire. Secondly, satire frequently employs analogy as a crucial aspect of its rhetorical strategy to encourage the reader to develop or strengthen a critical attitude towards the target. It is possible to combine the two functions of analogy in satire to create a recognizable argument structure. Firstly, satire frequently employs analogies in order to establish a connection between the fictional depiction and the real-world object of the satire. By establishing a connection of similarity, these satires achieve their crucial goal by getting the reader to observe how the analogy continues. Consequently, moral satires and philosophy share an identical theme (applied ethics) and structural element (argument by analogy).

Upon first glance, satire and **allegory** seem like two incompatible modes that should be held separately. Satire is a licensed insult intending to reprimand the flaw, whereas the objective of allegory is to guide the person seeking virtue towards his objective. “The appeal of satire is to the intellect, of allegory to the emotions.” Leyburn (1948, p. 323) However, the two are commonly seen together, Leyburn (1948) asserts, as satire often uses allegory to express itself. Firstly, both of them are techniques of indirection (other-speaking) and overall lack straightforwardness. Secondly, making an abstraction or general truth vivid is the purpose of indirection in both techniques. Although personal satire does exist, its survival depends entirely on how extensively it is used. Thirdly, a central affinity between satire and allegory is concreteness and economy of words through immediacy of impact. Finally, in each author’s writing, the writer not only has a moral code that is significant to him but also assumes that his audience, who are morally sound people, will embrace his moral code as just and appropriate.

2. THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“The Apocalypse of John claims to be a direct prophecy of the future of man and of the world, and the boldness of its imaginary sets it off from all other examples of biblical writing. It is immediate and real.” (Smith, 1950, p. 296)

According to Britannica (2022), the final book of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation, also known as Revelation to John or Apocalypse of John – the single one that classifies as apocalyptic literature, as opposed to educational or historical in its purpose. Although it claims to have been written by a person called John (one who calls himself “the servant” of Jesus), Revelation appears as a collection of discrete sections written by unidentified authors who lived during the end of the 1st century. The book is divided into two main segments, of which the first (chapters 2-3) has individual letters written to the seven Christian churches of Asia Minor with moral admonitions, but lacking visions or symbolism. The second segment (chapters 4-22:5) is laden with visions, allegories, and largely unexplained symbols, forcing exegetes to interpret it differently.

Smith (1950) asserts that The Apocalypse of John has inspired Western art and thought more than any other topic in history, possibly with the exception of the Gospels. For at least 1500 years, it was important to the everyday lives of regular people, as well as artistic expression. For millions of people, the revelation of the terrible calamity through which God would annihilate humanity in His wrath and final battle with Satan was a present reality. There have been repeated scares of impending doom throughout history, and the final weighting of good and bad deeds continues as a core concept in Christian doctrine, as well as in much of the Western attitude towards moral behaviour (though in a more symbolic sense), regardless of the individual's religious beliefs.

On the other hand, Ropes (1919) details the struggles of Revelation for prominence over the centuries. In the distant past, it was a favourite among specific groups. “The dreamers about

the future have enjoyed it and used its prophecies to frame their own pictures of what they hoped for. The insurgents against established order have turned to their own account its fierce reproaches against a tyrannous civilization. The oppressed found in it comfort." (Ropes, 1919, p. 404). In the early centuries of the Roman Church, this document was held in high regard, and it was through the Roman influence that the Greeks accepted the Apocalypse of John at last. However, from the third to the fifth century, it is clear that our spiritual ancestors were presented with similar difficulties Revelation poses to many of us in the present day.

The key reason for this drastic disparity is that their early descendants (and us) inhabited different intellectual worlds than the initial readers for whom the book was written. Only a portion of the material they read has survived, and the concepts that formed their foundation have made way for new ones. This form of prophetic vision was familiar and adored to them because they grasped its intent and approach. However, for us, these identical things are alien and we must use our imagination and erudition, which is frequently derived from outside but infrequently accessed disciplines, to reconstruct all of these events. "As a heaven-bestowed eternal calendar, the book proved a failure; as a philosophy of modern history, its point of view was indeterminable." (Ropes, 1919, p. 407)

Smith (1950) reports it is speculated that modern scholarly interpretations of Revelation may have begun with the Dutch scholar Grotius of the seventeenth century. Only a single document remains of the earliest depictions of the Apocalypse that were solely and deliberately illustrative. According to Bede, Benedict Biscop carried pictures of the "images of the visions of the Apocalypse of John" back from Rome around the year 680 to decorate the walls of his church of St. Peter. Of these, nothing is left today, and we know very little about their Roman counterpart. Our knowledge is severely restricted and what solely remains is the fact that a collection of apocalyptic illustrations existed in Rome and was brought to England at least as early as the seventeenth century. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, among other symbols, persisted in popular imagination, however, the book gradually lost favour with commentators and historians. In present times, other blueprints are guiding our interpretation of world history.

3. THE THEORY OF THE HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

According to Benstock (1983), at their most basic level, footnotes in scholarly writings act as commentary on or references for the passages of text that they are keyed to. They are inherently marginal: not integrated into the text but attached to it, much like introductions, critical prefaces, appendixes, and afterwords. As annotations, they are also inherently referential: reflecting on the text, engaged in conversation with it, and frequently performing an interpretive and critical act on it while also addressing a larger, extratextual world. Simultaneously, they attempt to relate this text to others; to negotiate the common road between this author and other authors, and between this author and the reader. He goes on to state that

> by definition, footnotes are physically more constrained than the primary text: they are minimal, skeletal, succinct, their purpose being to elaborate on the text without engulfing it; at the same time, they are freer to adopt a new line of rhetoric. (p. 204)

In order to understand the bearing of footnotes on the notion of authority in fiction, he chose to examine the notes within fictional texts. Because fiction itself assists in obscuring the dialogue between self and other that is present in all writing, the traces of the scholarly dialectic between text and note (i.e., the dividing line between what is written and what is present through the writing), are less conspicuous. Fiction writers use narrative personae to conceal their presence and to separate the personal motivation behind the act of creation from the creation itself. The interaction between author and subject, text and reader, which is constantly present in fiction, is highlighted by the footnotes in a literary work, allowing us to consider self-reflective narration as a component of textual authority.

In *The Footnote: A Curious History* (1997), Grafton asserts that all historical footnotes appear to be very similar at first glance. For instance, articles on modern history typically start with a lengthy note in which the author thanks their professors, friends, and co-workers—the modern-day counterpart of the ancient invocation of the Muse. Footnotes serve a different purpose, which varies depending on the reader. Credentials serve what guild membership or personal recommendations once served: they lend legitimacy in today's impersonal society where people must depend on strangers for essential services. Contrary to other forms of credentials, footnotes occasionally provide entertainment—typically in the form of daggers stabbed into the co-workers of the author, some of which are politely inserted. Historians need only identify a work's author, title, location, and publication date. But frequently they discreetly place the deadly "cf." ("compare") in front of it. This suggests that an alternative viewpoint occurs in the cited work and that it is incorrect, at least to the expert reader. However, not every reader of the text will be aware of the code. As a result, the strike occasionally needs to be more cruel and overt. For instance, one can decisively and unambiguously reject a work or theory with a single set phrase or carefully chosen adjective. The English do this by using the typical sly adverbial phrase "oddly overestimated". This essential type of abuse takes the same prominent place and executes the same scholarly assassination. Anyone who has read a typical professional biography that was recently published in Europe or America can provide information on these and similar processes. They appear to be used universally and have a narrow range of appeal, according to the expert codes and methods behind them.

In their paper about the theoretical aspects of footnotes, Stevens & Williams (2006) refer to Grafton's *The Footnote: A Curious History* and recall the essential elements he observed. We rely on footnotes to persuade us that the author has adequately covered the field, gathered sufficient evidence, and thoroughly questioned the legitimacy of that evidence. The traditional recognition of the work of like-minded scholars, as well as awareness of their place in the field, one's standing within the field, and the field's status as a field of study are all necessary for the profession. The footnote is written by an individual whose voice has been combined with the voices of several writers with comparable educational backgrounds. To become a member of this professional collective, the individual author purposefully loses their writing style in the footnote.

For many centuries, Clark (2015) asserts, the footnote has been the hallmark of academia. It was a primitive tool, used by both pedants and populists to spread information, although, it was also rarely used to provoke opponents with obtuse rhetorical jabs. Nevertheless, it would be several hundred years before authors picked up the footnote once more for other, more artistic purposes. They did so after finding this tiny technique's emotional and intellectual depth, which went far beyond the merely experimental. "Footnotes must be read, not because all footnotes are important, but because one may be vital," Meyer (1959, p. 381) states. He believes that some appear to contradict what is stated based solely on the words themselves. Those that are typically on the declarations are replaced by different ones. Others include significant additional information. A few simply restate verbatim what has been said on the comments in text form.

4. THE SUBVERSION OF THE APOCALYPSE GENRE

According to Lerner (2021), the genre of **apocalyptic literature** constitutes supernaturally-inspired prophecies of catastrophic events that will occur at the end of the world. Such literature originates from a Judeo-Christian tradition and many of its works are written under a false name. It adopts a narrative style, conveys a pessimistic view of the present time, utilises esoteric terminology, and portrays the end times as imminent. Since the Middle Ages are long past, the apocalypse genre has largely disappeared. However, a sort of 'apocalyptic

mood' appears in many modern literary works, such as Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939) and Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust* (1939). While not fitting the description of a typical apocalypse work, *Good Omens* (1990) is deemed by many as a great and unique subversion of the genre, as well as one of the best adaptations of Revelation. As Clemons (2017) explains,

> in its movement from sacred to secular and from prophecy to fantasy novel, the novel provides a forgiving response to the cultural situation it finds itself in – a climate in which apocalyptic texts seem to thrive and humanity seems perpetually damned. (p. 87)

Works typical for the apocalypse genre possess characteristics such as a pessimistic tone and view of the present, the end times being imminent and unavoidable, and sinners being perpetually damned while true worshippers are saved. On the other hand, a common, clear, and widely believed interpretation of *Good Omens* is that the story is a celebration of humanity and the individual worth of humans. It teaches us that taking initiative to improve our lives and those around us is preferable to passively waiting around to see what occurs or if things improve on their own. It shows us what it means to be human and to embrace ourselves – accepting our flaws and continuing to better ourselves. This exact aspect of the novel is what differentiates it from other adaptations of the Apocalypse of John – the aspect of acceptance and celebration of humanity and a second chance.

4.1. The Omen

Alongside Revelation, the novel draws inspiration from the movie *The Omen* (1976) – mainly the baby swap plot and the movie's title – which naturally draws plenty from Revelation as well. The movie follows the story of the Thorn family consisting of Robert (an American Ambassador) and Kathy as they raise their son Damien, who is, in fact, the Antichrist. Five years following his birth and secret adoption, a series of strange occurrences affect the family and the people around them: a menacing Rottweiler shows up at their house; Damien's nanny hangs herself in front of everyone at his fifth birthday party; a new nanny named Mrs. Baylock shows up without warning; Damien violently resists going to church. During his personal investigation into Damien's true identity, Robert discovers that the hospital where he was given to them burned down as soon as they had left – including all records of births and some members of staff who were present that night.

A similar pattern of events and elements revolving around the baby swap plot is integrated into *Good Omens*, with some subtle differences. On the night the wife of the American Ambassador (Thaddeus J Dowling) goes into labour, the birth is orchestrated by hell and the satanic nuns of The Chattering Order of St Beryl to occur in Tadfield Manor. Their baby does not die (as it does in *The Omen*) and is meant to be replaced by the Antichrist. However, due to a misunderstanding between Sister Mary and another nun, the Antichrist had been handed to the Young family that had come in for labour around the same time that night. Once both families leave and the Antichrist is assumed to be in place, the hospital is set on fire and burns down all records within the building. Both Damien and Adam grow up with strange circumstances surrounding them – for example, Damien suffers no illnesses and causes death to people around him (his first nanny, his mother's unborn child) and Adam inadvertently warps reality around him (causing his village eleven years of optimal microclimate, which was remarkably resistant to change). Both of them receive a dog, a servant of hell, to protect and serve their master – although Adam's dog takes a more passive role for its master than Damien's (since his more so guides him). Adam's dog also follows Adam's whims and transforms into a smaller and more normal dog than the hellhound he is supposed to be.

However, there are quite notable differences between them. The Antichrist in *The Omen* was named Damien – not of biblical origin but derived from the Greek name Damianos

(meaning "master," "overcome," or "conquer"), whereas in *Good Omens*, he was named Adam (of Hebrew origin, meaning "son of red earth") – after the first man. This name change serves as a sort of irony since he is supposed to be not human and also to destroy humanity. It ends up fitting him quite well because he grows up incredibly human, despite his devilish genetics. While the investigation into the baby swap event is done by the father of the Antichrist himself in *The Omen*, it is instead conducted by Aziraphale and Crowley, two unaffiliated beings meddling in Heaven and Hell's affairs for their personal reasons, in *Good Omens*. Following the death of his nanny, Damien receives a new one; a disguised servant of hell, tasked with protecting the Antichrist. Warlock – the son of Thaddeus who is believed to be the Antichrist by everyone, except perhaps God – also receives one of hell's servants disguised as a nanny; however, this particular servant is acting in his own interest, is not sent by hell, and is working together with the heaven's servant disguised as the new gardener to make him as human as possible. Damien bore a birthmark in the shape of three sixes, which exposes him as the Antichrist. As far as we know, Adam bears no such birthmark, although what points to his identity as the Antichrist in the novel is the address of his residence – Tadfield 666.

4.2. The Bible and Armageddon

"We were just a couple of guys, okay? We still are. It was a summer job. We had a great time doing it, we split the money in half, and we swore never to do it again. We didn't think it was important." (Pratchett & Gaimain, 2015, p. 1) As explained on a number of occasions by both Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, the novel Good Omens began as an unfinished story idea Gaiman pitched to Pratchett. About a year later, Pratchett rang him and told him he did not know how it ended, but he had ideas for what happened next. Back and forth they individually wrote and rang each other to brainstorm the rest, as well as write footnotes for each other's parts – sometimes even writing footnotes for their footnotes. What began as a personal project between friends sharing the same witty humour, between authors who were yet to become so widely renowned and respected as they are presently, currently stands as a cult classic for millions of people all around the globe.

Despite both authors being atheists, it is clear throughout the book that they harboured a deep fascination and extensive knowledge of Christian theology and history. Even as they mock their inspiration and source materials, they also deeply respect them, and there are many examples showcasing this attitude within the pages. The novel opens (as it does according to Genesis) in the Garden of Eden just after the eviction of Adam and Eve due to their sin of eating from the forbidden tree, where the angel with the flaming sword appears. Armageddon unfolds in a manner that is as realistic as it could ever have been if it were to happen – starting off with a huge storm sweeping over the nations, followed by a nuclear world war breaking out, threatening to obliterate everyone and everything until nothing but dust remained. While being summoned, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – War, Famine, Pollution, and Death – receive items that are accurate in accordance with Revelation. A sword for War, a set of scales for Famine, and a crown for Pollution (Pestilence). However, when Death is summoned, no object is handed to him. Rather, he receives the message "Come and see" (p. 188). Lipert (2019) notes that the same message can be found in chapter six of Revelation:

> And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, 'Come and see'. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.

This is a detail that only avid readers of the Bible, namely Christians, would recognise, and since most of the readers of the novel were not Christians, it is a curiosity as to why such a detail was included. As Gaiman and Pratchett mentioned, *Good Omens* began as a personal project between the two in order to make each other laugh. Perhaps the majority of the readers who picked the novel up did not get all its references, but that did not matter – the authors did.

Another instance of this genuine interest and care for the work they have written are the footnotes, which are later analysed in depth. To summarise briefly, in the past, footnotes were the hallmark of academia and were very distinct, professional, and a favourite device among many writers. In *Good Omens*, the footnotes are a postmodernist feature and are used as another satirical element to further complement the novel. They are mainly used to inform the reader about unfamiliar (usually very British) concepts, items, names, and such. In addition, they also provide direct authorial narration; they expand on the story (or explain certain lore) within the footnotes themselves in the same narrative style of the book, most of which are additional quips or even punchlines to certain statements. While writing the book, Gaiman and Pratchett wrote footnotes for each other's sections, and in some cases even wrote footnotes for one another's footnotes.

Clemons (2017) defines the novel as a faithful adaptation of Revelation into comedy, despite lacking the criteria of an apocalypse novel. She asserts the text should be regarded as a sort of mixture of revision and meta-commentary – a celebration of the original text. What most notably demonstrates that is what was previously mentioned – unlike many other adaptations of Revelation *Good Omens* is adapting from, "the novel does not move from apocalyptic to horror but from apocalyptic prophetic." (Clemons, 2017, p. 90) It provides us with a "gentler apocalypse" because it focuses more on the humorous side of the apocalypse in place of the horrific one. Instead of understanding history as fixed and humans as evil, it portrays a more forgiving view of human nature that urges the audience to abandon the system of prophecy and revelation, which is dangerous for the future. This is the very reason *Good Omens* is considered among many as a "comfort read" because despite dealing with the difficult topic of impending and forever doom, it reminds us that, despite the disasters life thrusts upon us and the horrors we inflict upon one another, humanity is worth saving. In its attempt at satire, it takes a widely known and popularised source material and enriches it in the best attempt at an adaptation of the genre.

Finally, *Good Omens* is a great adaptation because it sheds a new light on the Biblical story most people, Christians and not, have been familiar with for thousands of years – Genesis. The serpent tasked with convincing Eve and Adam of committing their first sin is unsure if his temptation was actually a good thing instead. The angel of the Eastern Gate giving away his flaming sword to the exiled humans worries he had gone against God's wishes to protect them. With these slight shifts, the novel poses fresh and important questions about the original story. Namely, what was the purpose of the Forbidden fruit? Isn't God aware of the natural nosiness and rebellion of humans? Hasn't he seen the human rebellion, and the angel's giving of the flaming sword, coming? Furthermore, why is the acquirement of knowledge so terrible? (Klein-Nixon, 2019)

5. THE ETHEREAL AND THE OCCULT BEINGS OF GOOD OMENS

> 'Now then, Adam Young,' said the Metatron, 'while we can of course appreciate your assistance at this point, we must add that Armageddon should take place *now*. There may be some temporary inconvenience, but that should hardly stand in the way of the ultimate good,' 'Ah,' whispered Crowley to Aziraphale, 'what he means is, we have to destroy the world in order to save it.' (Pratchett & Gaiman, 2015, p. 356)

5.1. Aziraphale and Crowley

Once again, *Good Omens* is essentially a story about the celebration of humanity, and this can be best observed within the primary protagonists regularly – the angel Aziraphale and the demon Crowley. Although they were created as a divine and a demonic being, they go through significant growth during their lengthy stay on Earth. They are no longer entirely

demonic or angelic, instead, they eventually evolve into complex people (beings), obtain some humanity, and develop a sort of free will – just as humans have.

This **aspect of their humanity** can already be observed at the very beginning of the story (pp. 5-7). After the temptation of Eve and Adam, Aziraphale and Crawly (before his name change) meet at the Eastern Gate and converse. Even before they spend the 6000 years on Earth they eventually do, they already have their doubts about their place in the affairs of Heaven and Hell. As the angel of the Eastern Gate, Aziraphale was given the flaming sword to prevent humans from returning to the Garden of Eden. From Genesis 3:24: "He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life." Despite his orders, Aziraphale defied them because he sympathised with the humans and wished to see them survive. Because of this, he felt extremely guilty and could not settle his mind until Crawly inadvertently assured him about it. Later on, it is revealed to us that Aziraphale (under the name Mr A. Ziraphale) edited the Bible – at least the Buggre Alle This Bible – by adding three additional passages to the third chapter of Genesis:

> 25 And the Lord spake unto the Angel that guarder the eastern gate, *saying* Where is the flaming sword which was given unto thee?
>
> 26 And the Angel said, I had it here only moments ago, I must have put *it* down somewhere, forget my own head next.
>
> 27 And the Lord did not ask him again. (p. 49)

From this, we figure out that Aziraphale got away with his action and that God never asked him about it. On the other hand, while Crawly doesn't mind the task of temptation he was given, he expresses doubts about the purpose of testing the humans and questions God's intentions. At most, he wonders if the punishment is a bit harsh and an overreaction, and while Aziraphale internally sees the situation from a similar point of view, he insists there must be a purpose to the testing that neither of them could fathom since they cannot comprehend ineffability. In this instance of perceived injustice, the demon is the one who questions the harsh treatment the humans were subjected. Additionally, while the angel is the one who defends such cruelness, he has also assisted the humans in the savage world outside of the Garden by granting them a powerful item for protection.

Other **cases of their humanity** develop throughout the six millennia of their Earth lives. For instance, Aziraphale has taken a liking to collecting books of all sorts; he specialises in prophecy books, most of which are first editions, and all of which are signed by their author. By establishing his own bookshop sometime in the 18th century, he created a place to store his books (in a sort of roundabout way). Although he technically runs a bookshop, he does everything in his power to deter people from buying any one of his books, usually by using his angelical miracles (p. 48). He is also quite fond of many delicious types of human food and consumes meals (despite not needing to, as he is an immortal being), often visiting the same restaurants and becoming a regular known by the staff (p. 45). In the scene of Warlock's eleventh birthday party, we find out he has also picked up the hobby of (fake) magic, sometime in the 1870s by taking a workshop class held by John Maskelyne (famous English stage magician, as well as Victorian-era inventor) (p. 73). As for Crowley, he became attached to many material things in the human world, the most important ones being his 1926 black Bentley and the many pairs of dark sunglasses he uses to hide his snake eyes. Briefly mentioned is his expensive, custom-made watch that shows the time in twenty-one different world capitals (p. 16). While Aziraphale liked to eat but did not need to, Crowley enjoyed to sleep while he need not do so. It was another simple pleasure of life he enjoyed, and sometimes he slept for quite a long time, such as most of the nineteenth century (p. 37). Although his flat was very modern and elegantly furnished, he mainly used it as a place to stay while he was in London. He even had a sleek computer and fax machine which he did not use simply because he felt it was

something the sort of human he tried to be would own (p. 241). He did, however, devote plenty of his attention towards the houseplants he kept. They were the most luxurious, verdant, and beautiful in London – as well as the most terrified since Crowley less so took care of them and more so put the fear of God into them (pp. 242-243).

As was explained in the book, Aziraphale and Crowley got accustomed to each other and had sort of **become friends**, since they have been around each other for about 6000 years. Otherwise, they would not have chosen each other's company due to them being enemies, as both of them assert (Crowley: pp. 38-39, Aziraphale: pp. 42-43). However, it is clear throughout the book that due to their unusual circumstances – a shared liking of Earth and what humanity has to offer in terms of simple pleasures – they become sort of attached to one another. They can understand each other better than whatever their respective sides get up to, which is how they develop a friendship that tends to be unusual in some cases while quite authentic and strong in others. This is the reason each of them were a significant figure in the other's development. A significant instance of this is revealed early on (pp. 43-44) when we learn about the **Arrangement** (c. 1020) – an agreement between them to occasionally do each other's biddings and to divide up the parts of England they personally sought to develop. Therefore, whenever one of them was in the same place a temptation and divine blessing needed to be done, he would be the one to do both and save the other one the trouble. It ensured that while neither really triumphed nor lost, they were both able to prove to their superiors the significant progress they were making against a crafty and knowledgeable foe. They concluded that all Heaven and Hell cared about was the task getting done and did not care much for the doer. Evidently, Aziraphale was very hesitant to agree to this initially, however, the more time he spent on Earth, the more humanised he became – and rebellion is sort of humanity's thing. Additionally, the more time he spent with Crowley, the more disassociated he became regarding the wishes of Heaven (and Hell). Thus, he eventually eased into the Agreement anyway.

Aziraphale possesses many typical traits we can observe in angel archetypes – kindness, vast amounts of knowledge, naivety, gullibility, classic tastes in arts, firm morality, strong faith in God, general respect towards others, reliability, etc. However, as mentioned, he has also become more humanised. He has developed traits, habits, and tastes other angels do not share, since they see themselves as superior to humans and do not bother to associate too much with them. Of course, he still is an angel of Heaven and lets such tendencies he had learned to emanate from his superiors every once in a while. For instance, when Crowley reveals to Aziraphale that the Antichrist has been delivered to the world and Armageddon is a decade away (p. 44), he initially reacts apathetically to the entire ordeal, insisting that Heaven will naturally prevail over Hell. When Crowley presses him by pointing out everything he would lose if that were to happen – he would have to listen to the only two first grade musicians Heaven gained (Edgar and Liszt) over and over again for eternity, there would be no more delicious human food or little restaurants where they know you, no more bookshops, and much more. Aziraphale protests, trying to insist that after the Apocalypse passes and Heaven wins, life would be better. Crowley did not refute him, just said that it will not be as interesting. Throughout their conversation, Aziraphale tries to keep a wall of apathy while mimicking the typical angel's response. Once Crowley breaks through that wall by appealing to the sympathetic being that was the Aziraphale hiding behind it. Aziraphale continues to insist that they cannot defy Heaven's and God's wishes or the Ineffable plan, dejectedly admitting that Armageddon is something his side really desired (p. 46). They would keep having conversations like this many times in the story and we can accurately assume they had had such conversations throughout the six millennia of their familiarity. Crowley kept trying to permanently break that wall down, but it always came back up – Aziraphale always returned to believing in Heaven and mimicking their responses and behaviour. Another good instance of this would be when

Crowley assumed Heaven disapproved of guns (p. 100). Aziraphale clarified that current thinking favours them since, in the right hands, they lend weight to a moral argument.

He does his best to behave accordingly and adhere to his responsibilities, however, he cannot help himself from questioning both Heaven and the Great Plan at the end of the day – even without Crowley's questioning. He tries to dismiss such thoughts and silence his voice of reason, insisting both to himself and Crowley that they simply cannot comprehend the overall ineffability of such decisions. Sometime in 1020, around the forming of their Arrangement, Aziraphale explained to him that the point of humanity's free will is that they can choose to be good or bad and that one could not become truly holy if he also did not have the capability to be definitely wicked. When Crowley challenged this point by asserting that that only works if everyone started off equal, "You can't start someone off in a muddy shack in the middle of a war zone and expect them to do as well as someone born in a castle." (p. 38), Aziraphale explained that the lower you started, the more opportunities you had. "Crowley had said, That's lunatic. No, said Aziraphale, it's ineffable."

Although he struggles with **his faith in God** throughout the story, Aziraphale does rebel against what he perceived God wanted (mainly giving away the flaming sword and stopping Armageddon). Despite his actions and hesitations in following orders, he instead chooses to believe that God moves in mysterious ways, and that the Great Plan they are all familiar with cannot compete with and is eclipsed by the Ineffable Plan that only God knows and can perceive. Doing so, he is able to maintain his faith in the Almighty while going against what Heaven tasked him to do and convince himself he wasn't rebelling. He was doing the good thing, even if it meant being persecuted and going against both Heaven and Hell. As such, due to his Earthly upbringing and Crowley's influence, Aziraphale gradually distances himself from Heaven with his actions as he observes their deeds and behaviour over the centuries. Just as is the case with God, he tries to believe they have good reasons for disregarding humanity and wanting Armageddon to happen. Unlike with God, they are not ineffable beings and do not have sufficient enough reasoning, he concludes. Therefore, ultimately, he does go against their wishes and attempts to prevent the end times. When he located the true Antichrist, he wanted to tell Crowley, however, he felt he ought to tell Heaven (p. 234). He tries to contact God and convince Him that they could (should) prevent Armageddon but is instead met with Metatron, The Voice of God (sort of like the spokesperson for God), who insists the war must happen and they will triumph over Hell once and for all. It is after this conversation that Aziraphale finally gives up hope in Heaven, and although his faith wavers, he does not give up hope in God. He makes his attempt to contact Crowley and prevent Armageddon themselves, however, he is inconveniently discorporate in an incident involving Sergeant Shadwell and a celestial circle, which resembled a satanic ritual to Shadwell's eyes.

Claiming that **Crowley** is an unusual demon would perhaps be the understatement of the century. Although he is a servant of hell, he is not inherently demonic and is quite capable of committing good deeds and miracles when he did not need to. As he put it (or rather, the 3rd person narration put it for him), "being a demon, of course, was supposed to mean you had no free will. But you couldn't hang around humans for very long without learning a thing or two." (p. 39). Although, he naturally possesses demonic tendencies: drowning a duck they were feeding (p. 44), giving the trainees at the Tadfield Manor Conference and Management Training Centre real guns (pp. 101-102), killing another demon with holy water (pp. 247-248). Nevertheless, as much as he dislikes his "goodness" being pointed out, he still continues to do good deeds, especially when they involve Aziraphale's opinion in the matter. Resurfacing the duck after sinking it (p. 44), reviving the dove Aziraphale accidentally suffocated (p. 76), driving Anathema home despite his reluctance (p. 90), and following Aziraphale's harsh

protests, causing the people shooting at each other with real guns at Tadfield Manor to have miraculous escapes (p. 104). Among many more, the biggest one would naturally be his efforts to prevent Armageddon and save humanity. He was in favour of Armageddon in general terms, but more so in thought than in action – the idea was fine with him, however, he did not want it to become reality under any circumstances (p. 37). This is why he did not hesitate much to attempt to prevent it. It was also because "he rather liked people. It was a major failing as a demon." (p. 37). He even furnished his London flat according to sophisticated human fashions: white, spacious, elegantly furnished. In addition, he owned an unconnected fax machine and a sleek computer, neither of which he ever used, but "felt that **the sort of human he tried to be** would have." (p. 241)

He is described to us as an Angel who did not so much Fall as saunter vaguely downwards (p. 9) by the authors in a satirical theatre script's introduction of characters. Additionally, Crowley goes on to claim he hadn't meant to Fall, but that he simply hung around the wrong people (p. 22). In contrast to Aziraphale struggling to keep his faith in God, Crowley mostly struggles with his identity – both as a demon and as an entity in general. In the very beginning, the name given to him was Crawly, but he did not feel that Crawly was him, so he ended up changing his name to Crowley. This could be an attempt of reclaiming some sort of control over his life, although on a smaller scale. A larger-scale example would be his treatment of his houseplants (pp. 242-243). He owns and tends to many plants in his flat, which are described as "the most luxurious, verdant, and beautiful in London." (p. 243). This is largely due to his method of talking to them (as he heard he should do on Radio Four in the seventies) – although, he does not really talk to them. What he ends up doing is putting the fear of God into them; specifically, the fear of Crowley. Every now and then, he would pick a dry or wilting plant and carry it around to his other plants, announcing that the plant was not good enough and would be going away. Then, he would disappear somewhere and return to the flat sometime later with an empty flowerpot. This ritual caused all of his plants to be terrified, but still grow to be the most beautiful in the city. This process allows is deeper insight into Crowley's character, namely, his inner suffering. His treatment of plants can be compared to Hell's treatment of him as their servant, since he does not quite fit into the demon Hell wanted him to be and decides to defy them. The cruel behaviour he displays over his plants is a direct result of his need to be in control of something, just as Hell is in control of him. "It was the way they talked to you. As if you were a houseplant who had started shedding leaves on the carpet." (p 275).

It is due to this cruel treatment he endured that he gradually tried to separate himself from Hell and committed small acts of rebellion (except Armageddon, which was the biggest) on the regular, sometimes consciously, other times unconsciously. Such as forming a friendship with an angel, forming an arrangement with said angel to do each other's biddings, going along and lying about his involvement with the Spanish Inquisition (p. 38). As much as he pretends otherwise, Aziraphale's opinion of him matters greatly to him – such as the Tadfield Manor and guns incident, or driving Anathema home. It is due to their attachment that he comes running to him first after delivering the Antichrist and consults the oncoming doom with him (pp. 44-47). They bicker and discuss the future of the world, then decide to get lunch together. He confides in him because Aziraphale is the only person that understand him in the matter of liking humanity and Earth as they are, even if Aziraphale has continued to be firm in his assertion that whatever God and Heaven got up to had to have some deeper (ineffable) meaning. Despite his assertions, Crowley pleads with him through drunken rambles that the world and its inhabitants did not deserve the devastating doom being forced on them and manages to convince him that they should try and stop the Apocalypse by raising the boy everyone believed was the Antichrist to become as normal and as human as possible. To do so, they mirror the

effects of their Arrangement – separately providing the boy demonic and angelic influence, cancelling each other's efforts out and balancing the boy to be sort of neutral. Somewhat like godfathers, except more manipulative. For several years, Crowley plays a mischievous nanny and Aziraphale plays a gentle gardener. Then, when Warlock turns six, they switch to playing tutors to the boy until he turns eleven. Once they figure out that Warlock is not the Antichrist, they frantically set off to search for the true one. Their joint search leads to a dead end, however, Aziraphale's personal investigation leads him to the right boy. Unfortunately, he gets discorporated soon afterward and fails to deliver his results to Crowley, who, at the time, was dealing with demons being sent after him for his mistake with the Antichrist.

Once Crowley manages to escape the grips of Hastur and Ligur, he goes to search for Aziraphale, however, he finds his bookshop ablaze and no further traces of him (p. 257). He found the book of Agnes' prophecies and picked it up, thumbing through it and Aziraphale's notes in the car, without any aim of what to do or where to go. The world was ending, Hell was after him, and Aziraphale was missing, and the M25, now a giant ring of fire, was standing in his way to Tadfield. At a loss for what to do and angered by Hell's further threats, along with six millennia of mistreatment, he drives through the ring of fire with incredible speed and sets off for Tadfield once more. Even though the world around him was being destroyed and he had nowhere to go, he still decided to try and prevent Armageddon, even without much of a plan or means to do so. "Because, underneath it all, Crowley was an optimist." (p. 297) and he felt that the universe would ultimately look after him, as it did for all of the centuries of his life.

5.2. The Antichrist

As explained, the plot of *The Omen* heavily influences events (mainly the baby swap plot) within *Good Omens*. However, the Antichrist of *Good Omens* is not placed within the family of the American Ambassador so he can cause mass destruction of the world through political means. Instead, a misunderstanding causes the Antichrist to be placed in a regular family, which resides in an ordinary, mundane fictional English village called Tadfield. As Bearup (2015) and many others point out, solely from this minor shift, Adam (the Antichrist) grows up a normal and simple life in the secluded area that is Tadfield and remains a regular boy for most of the eleven years of his life. He has a friend group he leads, who are called **The Them** (and at times by many other names), consisting of: Pepper, strong-minded and heavy feminist; Wensleydale, who gives the impression of having the mental age of forty-seven and is never referred to by his first name, even by his own parents; and Brian, a sweet boy who is very receptive to his friends' feelings. The Them frequently clashed with the only other gang in Tadfield, which were **The Johnsonites** – led by Greasy Johnson, a sad, mean, and oversized child who was described to have become a bully in almost self-defence (p. 126). The Them had formed their gang sometime in kindergarten during a scuffle between Pepper and Adam over Pepper's real and bizarre name (Pippin Galadriel Moonchild). However, deep in their hearts, they always knew they weren't a gang of four, but instead a gang of three that belonged to Adam. Nonetheless, they cherished their lowly positions in Adam's gang because he always provided them with excitement, interest, and fun activities (p. 129). He was always the one who thought of things for them to do, as well as the beliefs they shared. The first example we see of this in the story is Adam's decision that they form the new Spanish Inquisition. This grand idea is inspired by the Them finding out a possible witch has moved into the Jasmine Cottage (Anathema), and that there was no one responsible around to investigate her and perhaps set her on fire – to, as Brian put it, "it stops the witches from going to Hell" (p. 130). The three are not convinced they could be the new Spanish Inquisition since they are not Spanish, but Adam assured them that they did not need to be; they simply need to look Spanish.

That being said, once again, Adam grew up to be more or less a regularly. Despite his genetics, he became a fairly nice and empathetic boy. For example, while out taking a walk and sulking his father grounding him (p. 137), he overheard crying coming from the Jasmine Cottage and peered over the hedge to find Anathema crying her eyes out in a deckchair. Although he initially believed she was a witch, he concluded she could not be since witches, in his mind, were old, wrinkly, and wicked with a hooked nose and warts. This was the reason he felt comfortable in approaching her and asking her what was wrong. As she explained that she lost The Book, he offered his help in the search, and later offered to replace it with a book he perceived was equally as good as the one she lost – one he wrote himself. He is also a little self-centred sometimes – how could he not be? He was the Antichrist, after all, deep down, even though he was not consciously aware of that. However, his self-centredness mostly came up in his role as the leader of his friend group. Beyond that, he was mostly nice and fine. Although, during their first encounter, Anathema had the feeling that he was strange in some way and as she tried to think deeper about it, she felt as if he was very important and whenever he was around, everyone else was just background (p. 139). Additionally, when Anathema tried to observe his aura, she could see nothing – this is because his aura is gigantic and she could not see it up close, just like people in Trafalgar Square can't see England (p. 145).

Although he is the Antichrist, Adam has not been aware of that for most of his life. Despite his normalcy, the importance of his existence as the son of Satan and the instigator of the Apocalypse affects reality around him and warps it to his unaware whims. A minor instance of this is Tadfield's perfect weather – well, perfect in a child's eyes, and marvellously consistent. Every year, Augusts are long and hot, the autumns are crisp, it never rains on November the fifth, and it always snows on Christmas Eve (p. 179). Another one is the veil that keeps him hidden from prying supernatural forces as a defensive system until he was ready, causing suspicion of him and his true nature to simply slide off (pp. 107, 110). Once the day of his eleventh birthday comes, Hell sends him the biggest hellhound they have got to serve him, and once the hellhound is given a name, the last few days of Earth are sealed, and the Apocalypse is set off. When the hellhound finally makes its way to his master, however, he hears Adam talking about the kind of dog he expects his father to get him for his birthday (pp. 80-81). He describes a small, playful, intelligent, and obedient dog who is also a proper pedigree mongrel. When the Them ask what he will call it, Adam ponders for a while before deciding that he would name it 'Dog' – to save a lot of trouble, he asserts. The name of the hellhound is not only a name and instigation of the Apocalypse; it also gives it its purpose, its function, its identity. By describing him as small, intelligent, playful and such, the hellhound's appearance and function is warped to fit his master's wishes and by naming him 'Dog' its identity as a (mostly) regular dog is also sealed. This is a good demonstration of Adam's defying of nature and, subsequently, the beginning of Dog's defying of his own nature. At first, he shapes himself to be the dog his master desires, however, the longer he acts like a regular dog and not a hellhound, the more he realises that he enjoys his new identity, despite the fact that his nature is supposed to be that of a bloodthirsty hellhound. He does not desire to kill anymore; he wants to chase neighbourhood cats.

Even after the Apocalypse has been set off, Adam continues on as normal. However, after meeting Anathema and listening to talk about various conspiracies (posed as factual, not theories) regarding nuclear power stations, environment killers, whales, recycling, etc. and receiving New Aquarian Digest magazines for further reading, the inadvertent reality warps he produced became more extreme and concerned places far away outside the village he grew up in. Nuclear reactors disappears in multiple nuclear power stations (pp. 177), the Lost Continent of Atlantis rises up (p. 162), Tibetans appear underground and away from their homes to dig underground tunnels (p. 211-212), aliens in flying saucers appear all around the world to deliver

messages of peace and cosmic harmony (p. 212), whaling ships begin to be attacked by the kraken (p. 228). The more he reads those magazines, the more he realises how cruel and horrible the world is (p. 201), with tons of acres of rainforests being chopped down, holes appearing in the ozone layer, and the countless whalings going on in the world. All of this sends Adam down a spiral where he wishes he could reshape the world into being better, with both selfish and selfless intentions; his powers awaken inside him and he begins to embrace his role as the Antichrist and his function of destroying the world (p. 216). Following his existential crisis, he rants to his friend about how he was going to make the world a better place and ignores their pleas and reasoning. Even Dog is scared of this new Adam and is resistant to his wishes, since he has quite gotten the hang of being a regular dog, which he found to be more fun than being an all-powerful hellhound (p. 224). He plans on getting rid of tedious tasks in life, such as cooking or doing the dishes or having baths when you do not want to and goes on about all the exciting activities they were going to do, all the fun they were going to have and divides up parts of the world that each of the Them were going to own and rule.

What does bring Adam to his senses is his friends asking him what part of the world he was going to have (p. 304), since he handed almost everything to them. He froze for a long time before he admitted he was going to take Tadfield, along with Lower Tadfield, Norton, and Norton woods. “They’re all I’ve ever wanted.” (p. 304). The Them insist he cannot have them since they belong to all of them and dismiss him when he tries to say he would make them all better, insisting that there is nothing to improve about them and that they would know anyway. Adam snaps at them, saying that he would then make them do whatever he wanted anyway. The horror that hits him as he realises how he threatened his friends causes a conflict within him – nature vs. nurture. A fight between the regular, nice boy he grew up to be and the Adversary, Destroyer of Kings, Angel of the Bottomless Pit, the Great Beast that is called Dragon, Prince of this World, Father of Lies, Spawn of Satan and Lord of Darkness he was born as. Nurture reigns victorious in this instance as he chooses his friends (and subsequently the world and humanity) over the destruction and remaking of everything.

He explains his revelation to the Them first, and then the Metatron and Belzeebub later, alongside the others present. He compares Armageddon and the forces behind it – Heaven and Hell – to the Them and the Johnsonites. If they could properly beat the Johnsonites so that they would leave Tadfield forever, they would be the only gang in the village and much of their fun that had come up from their scuffles with the Johnsonites would go away as well. While further discussing things, the Them conclude that Tadfield would be better off without both the Them and the Johnsonites, since they would have more peace. Eventually, they agreed that it would not be good if either they or the Johnsonites won the final battle between them since then they would have to become their own deadly enemies and fight each other. The same goes for Heaven and Hell. They both have their own places in the world and their own roles to perform, however, it would not be good if either side were to beat the other, causing them to disappear. Additionally, Earth would be much better off without Heaven or Hell interfering with them.

“‘I don’t see what’s so triffic about creating people as people and then gettin’ upset ’cos they act like people,’ Adam said severely.” (p. 357). The actions and conclusions of Adam the Antichrist, as well as everyone else, show that free will must exist, that people must get along better, and that people must solve their problems before dying rather than presuming they will be resolved after death. For these reasons, Bearup (2015) asserts that Good Omens is a great apocalyptic literature and refers to it as a humanist Revelation.

6. THE FOOTNOTES OF GOOD OMENS

Good Omens was written mostly spontaneously, as explained multiple times by both Pratchett and Gaiman. In an interview with the BBC (2014) about their writing process, Gaiman stated:

> We wrote the first draft in about nine weeks. Nine weeks of gloriously long phone calls, in which we would read each other what we'd written, and try to **make the other one laugh**. We'd plot, delightedly, and then hurry off the phone, determined to get to the next good bit before the other one could. **We'd rewrite each other, footnote each other's pages, sometimes even footnote each other's footnotes**.

As Nicosia (2016) states, "one of the most successful devices Pratchett and Gaiman use to establish a polyvocality is through the paratextual conversations held at the bottom of the page in the footnotes." (p. 161). The novel is full of many silly bits that loosely relate to or don't relate to Christianity at all, and many of them are compiled within the footnotes of the book. While such an element is usually meant as an academic addition to a text, in no way does it serve such a purpose in *Good Omens*. Therefore, the footnotes are not required to be justified, purposeful, nor authentic. The element of the footnote in the novel is a very crucial addition to its other content (namely the story), and each serves one of two primary functions. **Firstly**, they provide direct authorial narration; they expand on the story (or explain certain lore) within the footnotes themselves in the same narrative style of the book, most of which are additional quips or even punchlines to certain statements. Observe the following example:

> Yes, you knew where you were with the Royals. The proper ones, of course, who pulled their weight in the hand-waving and bridge-opening department. Not the ones who went to discos all night long and were sick all over the paparazzi. (p. 31)

The related footnote states "It is possibly worth mentioning at this point that Mister young thought the paparazzi was a kind of Italian linoleum." Here, it explains the sort of inside joke going on. The text "R P Tyler drew himself up to his full height." on p. 323 becomes a joke when the footnote below provides the punchline "Five foot six". Metatron appears on p. 236 and the related note explains "The Voice of God, but not the *voice* of God. An entity in its own right. Rather like a Presidential spokesman." **Secondly**, they provide useful explanations for British items, names, concepts, and such that American readers (and international readers) would fail to understand, as well as historical things in general most readers would likely be unfamiliar with. These also often include witticisms and jokes. To name a few examples: p. 192 explains the original British monetary system; p. 113 clarifies the historical figure named; p. 58 clarifies the size mentioned, then includes a joke; p. 43 explains Milton Keynes. In particular, p. 189 explains firelighters after pointing out the absurdity that caused their innovation. These factual and explanatory footnotes are usually brief and do not grant us insight into an element of the plot, whereas in academic writing, such footnotes (explanatory) are the most common type to appear. According to Nicosia (2016),

> Reading Good Omens with attention to the footnotes is a byzantine process and requires a willingness to follow convoluted tangents. With the reader's suspension of disbelief, there is the potential for fictive complicity—where the reader chuckles, recognizes logistical absurdities, yet plays along with the illogical happenings. (p. 164)

All in all, most of the novel's footnotes function as another satirical component in their attempts to cause the reader to laugh, sometimes by causing them to get lost in the footnotes and diverge too far from the main point – the story.

On the subject of **inward diversions**, a prominent example would be the footnotes explaining the background of The Chattering Order of St Beryl. In the edition used for this analysis, the footnote is split into two, one on p. 23 and one on p. 24. However, in some editions, the footnote is one single page and takes up half of it with four paragraphs explaining the history

of Saint Beryl Articulatus of Cracow, the figure who inspired the founding of The Chattering Order of St Beryl. It leads the reader down a tangent which they believe is a factual part of world history, where in reality, it is a fictional historical piece written by the authors. As they indulge the inward diversion, they have naturally strayed away from the main story and gotten lost in a fake historical tangent. As Nicosia (2016) asserts, "despite a feigned factual tone, the specificity of these notes is meant to prompt laughter and provide intimacy at the level of minutiae and the levels of interiority." (p. 166).

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to analyse how the Bible and some of its prominent figures were satirised in the novel *Good Omens*, as well as its other satirical features. Based on the close-reading methodology of literary analysis, in can be concluded that the work heavily drew from the *Book of Revelation* alongside *The Omen* for its primary inspiration, however, it twisted their components in many different ways to fit its satirical purpose, producing a high-quality subversion of the apocalypse genre while remaining a faithful adaptation of *Revelation*. As a result, the character archetypes it adopted from the Apocalypse of John have become more humanised while still remaining biblical and believable. Finally, a closer inspection of the novel's footnotes indicate to us the typical functions they serve in the book, few of which adopt an informative purpose and most of which adopt satirical aspects. These results reveal to us the underlying nature of *Good Omens*, which is that, while it poses itself as a simple and enjoyable satire of Armageddon, it is in fact a humanist adaptation which celebrates humanity and assures us that we are worth much more than simple objects of pleasure to supernatural entities.

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