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'Enough is a Myth:' An Exploration of the Politics of Consent Within the Hellraiser Franchise

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University of Tennessee

‘Enough is a Myth.’

An Exploration of the Politics of Consent Within the *Hellraiser* Franchise

Ivy Kiernan

English 498: Seniors Honors Thesis

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Introduction

Horror as a genre, particularly within literature and film, represents itself as a space that explores and deconstructs societal fears and desires, allowing audiences to interact with potentially subversive or taboo subjects with a rush of adrenaline. The *Hellraiser* franchise, consisting of the original novella, Clive Barker's *The Hellbound Heart*, eleven films, further literature sequels, several comic books, and additional merchandise in the forms of toys and more, serves as a perfect example of this tendency in horror. It offers this analytic space by producing the enigmatic figures known as the Cenobites, both antagonists and often the mode in which other antagonists might be subverted and punished. Part of a religious sect known as the Order of the Gash, Barker's novella introduces the Cenobites as post-human beings that inhabit a dimension commonly referred to throughout the franchise as some form of Hell. There, they pursue experiments regarding the extremes of pleasure and pain on themselves and their subjects. Others perceive these beings as genderless and described with pronouns like "it," seemingly having foregone identities formulated around gender in their pursuits. When gender is potentially identifiable, the Cenobites still maintain a cool distance from identification with gendered or sexual characteristics, instead represented as androgynous beings through their extensive mutilations. For the Cenobites, sensation itself is the region in which boundaries must be violated, and what is frightening for the audience is their sadomasochistic drive to bring new subjects into the fold, summoned by a puzzle box into our realm to drag their victims into their ecstatic practices. In addition, they continue to mutilate their forms beyond what the human body could potentially stand, and the body modifications render them almost recognizable as human but further removed from the arrangement we expect for the body. For most installments within the franchise, the narrative conflict arises when the protagonist discovers the puzzle box and

solves it, becoming potential victims for their demonic pursuers as each protagonist seeks to understand or negotiate a way to escape. Able to appear anywhere and rendered in grotesquely beautiful aesthetics, the Cenobites provide a target of fright and appeal for their victims and their audiences.

The following argument primarily concerns the original 1986 novella, the 1987 film adaptation *Hellraiser* (written and directed by Barker), and the 2022 reboot *Hellraiser* (directed by David Bruckner). Both films adapt the novella's original source material and provide the closest similarities in thematic content without deviations found within the later sequels and comics. With each installment, *The Order of the Gash* embodies the interplay between sexuality and death, and the three chosen installments illuminate the complexities of adaptation, specifically surrounding the idea of consent in each text, that remain unexplored within the scholarship on the franchise. Most critical readings of the franchise focus primarily on the aesthetics and queer politics within each text, but the scholarship lacks a critical lens analyzing the politics of consent as the Cenobites manipulate, assault, and seduce their targets into mutilation. The majority of academic work concerns the original *Hellraiser* movie, such as Brigid Cherry's reading of queer politics of the film. Predominantly, works like Cherry's examine the alignment between the audience and the Cenobite aesthetic, noting the seemingly contradictory artistic philosophy as the scenes "serve to highlight the objects of morbid fascination and the strong contrasts between the beauty and the repulsiveness of the images" (11). Her work mainly engages these aesthetics in the context of a female audience, highlighting a potential form of spectatorship within the audience where the morbid draws fascination and the separation between the horrific and the beautiful seems flexible. This queering of the boundaries between beauty and disgust, much like pleasure and pain, forms a core academic interest within

the discourse surrounding the film, often sourcing their arguments within the queer history and aesthetics displayed within the novella and the original film. Much work has additionally focused on the film's sexual identities and politics, with scholars such as Mark Richard Adams and Giorgio Paolo Campi discussing the kink and queer sexualities as inspirations for the franchise's meditations on the nature of pleasure. In Adams's work, the Cenobites exist as queer saviors who offer an escape from heteronormativity, and the human antagonist's discomfort with potential homosexuality leads to an inability to accept the Cenobites' gift. Campi showcases the influence of counterculture, whether sexual like the S&M (sadism and masochism or sadomasochism) community or bodily like the Modern Primitives, on the aesthetics of the Cenobites as well as its general effects within Barker's early writings.

These readings perform analyses of the thematic material available within the franchise, but without an in-depth examination of the dynamics of power and violence, the scholarship ignores the critical importance of consent as a conversation rather than the frightening transaction depicted. The release of the 2022 reboot offers a fresh perspective on the franchise's politics while allowing viewers and scholars to reinterpret both the original novella and its film adaptation. By focusing on elements of addiction and coercion, the reboot complicates the binary of consent and assault within the framework of choices the Cenobites offer in prior works.

Consent, as defined by the University of California Riverside CARE Program, "is an unambiguous, affirmative and conscious decision by each person to engage in mutually agreed-upon sexual activity," and while this argument will extend this definition beyond the sexual, it remains a useful starting point in understanding how consent is commonly defined. In essence, the three literary and film installments offer related but complex opportunities to engage in a

comprehensive discussion regarding the glamorous horror of the Cenobites and the cycles of power and violence they enact in conversation with the personal and bodily boundaries of others.

Within the selected installments in the *Hellraiser* franchise, the corporeal body is the final boundary for the Cenobites to experiment upon, a religious exploration culminating in bodily sensation beyond what humanity can conceive. What varies within each installment, however, is the mode in which potential penitents, opening the puzzle-portal to allow the Cenobites into our world, can agree and participate in the experimentation conducted by the Order. The Cenobites are inspired by aesthetics and practices found within the BDSM community in addition to other alternative/countercultural communities like the Modern Primitives, a subculture that developed by utilizing body modification and piercing elements (Campi 75-77). Each *Hellraiser* installment varies the consent granted by each subject of the experiments – ranging from explicit permission to refusal despite coercion – creating choices or the lack thereof for each character to negotiate. These choices reflect evolving discourses regarding sexual and bodily consent and acceptable methods of pleasure-seeking. While most *Hellraiser* scholarship centers on sexuality, the themes of personal consent remain unexplored territory. The conversation around the original film focuses on the kink and sadomasochistic communities concerning the Cenobites, but the politics around the questions of autonomy within the social and sexual context is often eschewed for discussions regarding the depiction of queer sexualities and what that entails, including social liberation. Without analyzing the power of choice and, more importantly, the power of knowledge behind a choice, queer readings of the franchise lose critical context to understand what frightens audiences about the Cenobites' experimentation in addition to what intrigues them. The lack of autonomy prompted by a potential misunderstanding or complete ignorance ensures that the fascinating aesthetics of the

Cenobites are tinged with the fear that someone's body is not theirs alone to control, but that others might be able to dictate what happens to your corporeal form.

Through social and film theory regarding consent and kink within popular culture, such as the work of Steven Allen and Catherine Scott, I argue that these texts arrange characters into four distinct categories: misinformed consent and the ramifications of manipulation, the impact of assault, the precariousness of negotiation, and the alluring power of coercion. By having the Cenobites negotiate, refuse, and violate the boundaries of consent, the franchise queers the idea of acceptable pleasure while providing a space to discuss the sexual politics regarding consent and the autonomy of the body. Each installment reflects complex discourses surrounding bodily limits, but rather than reflecting draconian social limits placed upon the body by external forces, each text frames consent as the personal boundaries that govern personal expression and pleasure-seeking. In what can simultaneously be read as both a punishment and as a gift, the Cenobites' experimentation and the machinations of their supplicants reframe assault, pleasure, coercion, and violence not as simple binary matters, but complex terrains that must be negotiated and revised within the boundaries of the individuals that participate. This argument begins by engaging with the original supplicants in each text, with Frank Cotton in the original novella and from the first film adaptation, and Roland Voight from the reboot. After discussing the initial encounters with the supplicants, the protagonists, Kirsty, her film counterpart Kirsty Cotton, and Riley McKendry, are introduced in their unwitting encounters with the box and the Order. Finally, I will showcase the entangled conflicts between the protagonists, the supplicants, and the Cenobites and the theoretical ramifications that emerge from the recognition that limits, established between consenting partners, ethically have to be respected for healthy relationships regardless of nature despite the Cenobites' mission to push the boundaries of experience.

Our “Knowing” Supplicants

In each installment analyzed, a supplicant to the Order of the Gash seeks out the puzzle box to gain unearthly pleasures. Often marked by hedonistic impulses, these characters fall in over their heads, becoming victims to the Cenobites in some fashion as their bodies become sites of excruciating pain blurring with pleasure. These characters, warped from these experiences, become antagonists to the protagonists of each text, such as Kirsty from the novella and film or Riley from the reboot, pushing the protagonist towards discovering the box and must somehow be vanquished at the hands of the Cenobites and in opposition to them. This juxtaposition between monstrosity and hedonism arrives from Clive Barker’s personal experiences as a sex worker, where he describes his inspiration in an interview, saying “Sex is a great leveller. It made me want to tell a story about good and evil in which sexuality was the connective tissue...Hellraiser, the story of a man driven to seek the ultimate sensual experience, has a much more twisted sense of sexuality” (Hoad). Here, the horror novella and film adaptation helmed by Barker draws from the experiences of sexuality being conflated with and indicative of moral expressions of good and evil. While his interview does not grant any details regarding his experiences as a ‘hustler,’ he describes his inspiration arising from the way the people engaging in the trade performed. This exploration of morality, in the context of an intimate and highly politicized subject such as sexuality and sex work, comes with the depiction of “evil” as something that infringes upon the boundaries of others, continuing to push and consume.

While Campi’s work fixates on a queer reading of the Cenobites as almost aspirational figures of rebellion like many other scholars, he delineates the countercultural scenes like the S&M community, the Punk community, and the Modern Primitives that inspired the novella as a response to Thatcherian politics in Great Britain. Campi notes the cultural context of actions like

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 (“which banned the promotion of homosexuality,” 87) and earlier homophobic acts of Thatcher’s government. Speaking to this countercultural inspiration, Campi notes that “horror can be the most effective countercultural tool: through horror, a culture shapes a representation of the alterity that threatens and erodes its established norms and categories” (88). By drawing on queer communities like S&M, Barker artistically resists against socially conservative and homophobic measures taken against the British public, while showcasing the horror enacted by those who continue to encroach on the personal liberties and boundaries of others. In this scenario, the novella was born, opening with a man named Frank Cotton who seeks the gifts of the Cenobites for their mythic explorations into pleasure.

The novella *The Hellbound Heart* begins with Frank Cotton desperately trying to solve the Lemarchand Configuration (the first of many names for this mysterious puzzle box throughout the franchise), seeking to summon the Cenobites to achieve the apex of his hedonistic search for pleasure across the world. His belief that this “would release him from the dull round of desire, seduction and disappointment that had dogged him from late adolescence” indicates not only a varied history in the pursuit of pleasure but elaborates Frank’s primary motivation to meet the religious order: no earthly pleasure seems to satisfy him as he searches for greater, more sensual experiences (6). The power and limits of his knowledge quickly become apparent as he finally solves the puzzle box and the mutilated and desperate visages of the Cenobites greet him. As he grapples with his guests, he thinks to himself:

He had thought they would come with women, at least; oiled women, milked women; women shaved and muscled for the act of love...He had expected sighs, and languid bodies spread on the floor underfoot like a living carpet; had expected virgin whores

whose every crevice was his for the asking and whose skills would press him—upward, upward—to undreamed-of ecstasies (11-12).

Frank's dissatisfaction with his predominantly sexual pursuits and his search for the Lemarchand Configuration would appear to instill a queered desire to transcend the limits of his own sexuality as he had expressed the desire to find a new path in articulating his lust. However, his ideas for this ascension replicate the same patterns of his heteropatriarchal understanding of pleasure as his ideas for the gifts of the Cenobites would not entail new, liberatory modes of sexuality, but instead subjugated women specifically prepared and "muscle" for his pleasure. Rather than an exchange of mutual sexual pleasure, Frank's desire for gratification warps his expectations into a replication of patriarchy that reduces his partners into sexual objects under his heel. There is no question of whether the women want to participate in his idea of a "living carpet;" asking their consent never enters his mind. Instead, his desire for sexual gratification positions women as tools for pleasure, lacking agency. Furthermore, the idea of the "virgin whore" assures that the women are objects for the pursuit of his pleasure. While Adams's work focuses specifically on the film adaptation, he notes that Frank's need to encompass a conventionally masculine, heteronormative sexuality ensures that he rejects a queered form of sexuality of pleasure because it does not align with his expectations (135). Frank's conception of sex transforms a shared act of pleasure into an extension of his ego as he conforms to the structures he purports to want to escape.

However, to frame any "sadistic" or "masochistic" sexual impulse as indicative of moral or psychological dysfunction would be antithetical to the tenets of the S&M community, a complicated tension throughout the franchise and showcases the dangers in highlighting moralistic undertones within these sexual practices. What highlights the separation between kink

and the pleasures fantasized and indulged by Frank and the Order is the presence of consent. Within Steven Allen's *Cinema, Pain and Pleasure: Consent and the Controlled Body*, he notes that "The controlled body, in its most invigorated incarnation, explores what might be gained by experiencing corporeal oscillation of empowerment and disempowerment...some mainstream films have considered them as utterances that unite painful pleasure with autonomy and identity" (25). While Allen's work primarily focuses on depictions of sadomasochism in film and will be discussed further, this early argument highlights the appeal of sadomasochist pleasures as well as the demarcation between the controlled body as freely given or as taken forcefully. The exchange of power matters here, but Frank's desire for his partners to completely lack agency illuminates the separation between him and those within the S&M community. The willing submission and eventual reclamation of power and autonomy allow consensual kinksters the ability to explore these pleasures without indulging in the violence propagated by the Order, a factor often ignored in Hellraiser scholarship when discussing the supposed liberatory gifts offered by the Cenobites. Unlike the model of queer liberation discussed by Adams and Campi, the restoration of power acts as a balancing act in the process of kink, allowing submissives to not only establish their parameters but to freely refuse an unwanted development.

Frank's initial interaction with the Cenobites utilizes the interplay between his desperation and the dreadful appearance of his guests to display the dangers of misinformed consent, particularly in the harsh conditions imposed by him regarding the nature of his agreement. In a case of mismatched expectations, Frank's desire regarding his sexual pleasures involving the bodies of submissive women is subverted by the queered bodies of the Cenobites, described as "these sexless things, with their corrugated flesh" (12). While the elaborate body modifications serve to discomfort him, what further marks the Cenobites as terrifying is the lack

of gender expression: in a process of self-mutilation, the absence of identifying characteristics to register these beings within the binary or even as human construes a sight that Frank cannot rationalize as appropriate to his heterosexual power fantasies. Noël Carroll notes in his essay on the biologies of monsters that there must be an element of “impurity.” He writes, “impurity involves a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories” and notes that a method of this conflict is “fusion,” or “on the simplest physical level, this often entails the construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside– outside, - living– dead, - insect– human, - and flesh– machine” (137). The Cenobites are not only monstrous because of their status as heavily mutilated beings but additionally because they violate the boundary between conceptions of man- and womanhood. This gender-queering highlights a fascinating complication in the common scholarly narratives regarding sadism and masochism, where scholars often argue that they fall into a highly gendered dichotomy. The sadistic, dominant impulse becomes masculinized, and the masochistic, submissive impulse becomes feminized. All other expressions and arrangements of gender, sex, and kink become viewed as deviant or falling into the gendered hierarchy subconsciously, an argument kink scholars refute as being too focused on a psychoanalytic active/passive binary (Allen 27-28). Even the dominatrix, or the archetype of the female dominant, remains either too frightening and deemed ‘graphic’ or played for comedic effect as the male masochist remains the butt of the joke (Allen 36-37). Instead, the Cenobites defy standard gender presentations and roles, creating a new paradigm in which their explorations in the body evolve beyond the binary into an all-encompassing presentation of both sadism and masochism, pain and pleasure, male and female.

Furthermore, as he discusses his hopes for a fantastical sexual experience, he is interrogated by the Cenobites before they immediately position themselves as the

knowledgeable, giving party by stating, “We understand to its breadth and depth the nature of your frenzy. It is utterly familiar to us” (15). By referring to Frank’s pleasure as familiar, the Cenobites establish a limit to Frank’s understanding, a stable and measurable field that the Order understands. This measurable pleasure, this observable sexuality is antithetical to their mission for surpassing the limits of sensual pleasure, and their establishment of Frank’s limitations recognizes not only an obvious candidate for their experiments but also their need to establish Frank’s ignorance as something to be manipulated almost teasingly. As Frank inquires whether they might be able to provide pleasure he seeks, “The thing’s face broke open, its lips curling back: a baboon’s smile. ‘Not as you understand it,’ came the reply” (15). The Cenobite’s smile illustrates an understanding that Frank would not willingly consent to their offer, they maintain a calculated omission to ensure his compliance. This position, where the Cenobites understand that their experiments would be unsavory to humans but are willing to obfuscate their sadistic urges, offers a complicated stance on consent primarily because they refuse to fully elaborate on the nature of the pleasures they offer. Instead, they take advantage of Frank’s distress to secure a victim while ensuring that Frank willingly agrees to their delights despite his lack of information. The Cenobites seemingly offer a possibility for Frank’s refusal, but their careful manipulations ensure that his consent is never informed but instead carefully coerced.

If the Cenobites take advantage of Frank’s heteropatriarchal expectations, they could not have found a more easily deceived target. Their attestation that his “most treasured depravity is child’s play beside the experiences we offer” is a clue to understanding the pleasure beyond humanity’s tastes and the exact moment that their offer becomes irresistible to the hedonistic Frank. His belief in his understanding regarding what the Cenobites are willing and their

willingness to validate his belief enables the Cenobites to step around the bounds of informed consent. As Frank muses about their offer, he thinks:

that there was nothing left out there to excite him. No heat, only sweat. No passion, only sudden lust, and just as sudden indifference. He had turned his back on such dissatisfaction. If in doing so he had to interpret the signs these creatures brought him, then that was the price of ambition. He was ready to pay it (17).

Consent becomes, in Frank's conception, not a shared agreement between eager partners but an understanding of the Cenobites' underhandedness in what he assumes to be a contract of good faith. Instead, there exists a transaction that he must complete if he is going to be able to satisfy his lust, and he must pay the price to fulfill his desires. Furthermore, consent transforms into interpretative work as the Cenobites are unwilling to communicate as simply as possible. His eagerness to transcend his conventional lust becomes an arrangement where he feels that he cannot be spoken to plainly and instead must unearth the hidden meanings behind the words of the Order. Consent becomes a trial, then, in rooting out the intention behind the language, almost a test to prove his worthiness. Frank's acceptance of these terms, then, ensures that the Cenobites can take their victim with a concrete power imbalance because of his ignorance. Subverting his earlier desires to subjugate the bodies of women for his pleasure, Frank's position as the unknowing submissive highlights the importance of knowledge and desire in negotiations of sex and bodily pleasure. Even as the Cenobites specify that "There's no going back. You do understand that," consent is not an evolving discussion between partners able to revoke it at any time, and the Cenobites offer conditions predicated on Frank's inability to step away. In this negotiation, consent lacks an exchange of mutual power, instead creating a Faustian agreement that Frank cannot escape (17). This interplay between the lack of agency he desires with his

partners and the agency he exchanges with the Cenobites determines a sense of powerlessness that extends beyond irony. Frank's inability to recognize his own controlling behavior ensures that he falls into the same imbalanced power structure, and he cannot anticipate his own victimization as one of the Order's victims: specifically, as the Cenobites violate his senses and his body, leaving him as a flayed shade trapped by their overindulgence in pleasure and pain.

Jack Halberstam's work in horror analysis, while primarily focused on postmodern film, also focuses on the corporeality of the monster as facilitated in Barker's novella, and further notes the standard classification of horror's subjectivity. He notes that in horror, particularly in Gothic horror, "Monsters have to be everything the human is not, and in producing the negative of human, these novels make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual" (165-166), and this demarcation of what makes the monster is fascinating in comparison to Frank's own inner monstrosity. Although he remains a victim of the post-human Cenobites (themselves beings who forego gender or presentation), he himself functions as a white, heterosexual man who becomes burdened by the yoke of heterosexist power dynamics. He does not become heroic because of his identity, rather, his contributions to the systems of power and violence ensure that he remains the victim. Frank's conception of the gender binary as additionally being an active/passive or dominant/submissive binary embodies the sort of gender essentialist rhetoric that both Halberstam and Allen refute, and because the Cenobites exist outside of this binary, Frank's adherence to patriarchal power does not save him from his fate. His flayed remains remain animated by his desire to return to his body and his position as a heterosexual man.

The circumstances surrounding Frank's inclusion within the Order's experiments illuminate the Cenobites' liminality by eliminating boundaries within the physical space of his

makeshift altar. This space becomes one layer tied to yet separate from his body. First, solving the Lemarchand box violates spatial boundaries when Frank contorts the puzzle box into revealing its mirror-like interior with “Frank’s reflection—distorted, fragmented—skated across the lacquer” (2). Frank’s image, reflecting but not inhabiting his corporeal body, is refracted within the box as he continues to solve it, breaking not only the boundary between the outer and the inner but between the real and the reflected, echoing his fate as a body to be used by the order. As his body becomes the fodder for experimentation and is deconstructed physically, this deconstruction also involves a demolition between expectation and reality. Frank’s image, reflected in the box’s fundamentally broken and warped perspective— the box required to summon those who will break and warp him— visualizes the distance between what he expected and what he unknowingly agreed to. Instead of actualizing the space in which his sexual imagination flourishes, the box prefigures the broken and warped machinations of the Cenobites.

Furthermore, the progress in solving the puzzle allows for the overlapping and merging of spaces, with the human world momentarily merged with the realm of the Cenobites as a bell tolls in the background. In a moment, Frank “saw the east wall flayed; saw the brick momentarily lose solidity and blow away; saw, in that same instant, the place beyond the room from which the bell’s din was issuing” (7). This merging of spaces violates the boundary between dimensions as the wall is transmuted and destroyed, a literal indication of the Cenobites’ intrusion into the space and their destructive presence. The description of the flayed wall becomes an ironic foreshadowing of Frank’s eventual fate as a flayed and deconstructed victim of the Cenobites. While the Cenobites violently destroy the walls separating them and Frank, what further complicates this destruction is the fact that the Order of the Gash was invited by Frank’s call. Rather than an unwarranted invasion of Frank’s space, the intrusion by

the Order is precipitated by Frank's invitation, an offer for negotiation despite Frank's ignorance of their true motivations. Frank's desire for the pleasures at the fingertips of the Order ensures that while they violate his space, he welcomes the transgression because of the explicit summoning through the box. The combination of violent restructuring and desperate summoning ensures that this forceful violation of space is received with anticipation regardless of the physical destruction entailed. Although willing, Frank's call lacked the foreknowledge to be able to truly consent to the violation of his body and the space that represents an extension of his personal agency, creating friction between the desire and the opportunity to refuse offered by informed consent.

What follows after his acceptance is an experience of phantasmagorical climax, and this assault on his senses allows him to realize the unfortunate fate of negotiating with the Cenobites: becoming their plaything as they violate his body beyond human comprehension. Sights, smells, and physical sensations assault his nerves, and when he achieves orgasm due to overstimulation, he is greeted with the site of a Cenobite atop a mountain of human heads. The very sight of this connection between sex and rot repels him, leading him to think that his informant "had lied to him—either that or he'd been horribly deceived. There was no pleasure in the air; or at least not as humankind understood it. He had made a mistake opening Lemarchand's box. A very terrible mistake" (27). Frank's reliance on his informant led to a perception of the endless pleasures associated with the Order of the Gash, but he feels that it was his own mistake in his misapprehension of the Order's conceptions of pleasure. Instead, the text suggests that because he had no true understanding of the consequences, he could not consent to the Cenobites' experimentation. Furthermore, the Cenobites' understanding of pleasure, warped as it is, encapsulates (through their knowing smiles and careful refusal to explain) the understanding that

humanity will not enjoy it as much as they do, creating a Faustian bargain in which Frank can accept but cannot understand until it is too late. In what becomes an assault on Frank's senses and body, the Cenobites render themselves as violators because they never allowed for the proper conditions for consent. Their unwillingness to allow Frank to revoke consent and their refusal to explain their experimentations ensure that Frank's ability to give consent was always disadvantaged. The novella's twisted sense of justice, or more appropriately Frank's hubris, reads tragically as the Cenobites enforce Frank's agreement in letter, not spirit. While the novella emphasizes the Cenobites' manipulation, the undercurrent remains that Frank's arrogance also prompts the treatment he receives, a quasi-punishment.

Unlike the novella, the original film adaptation *Hellraiser* obscures the conditions surrounding the exchange between the Cenobites and the penitent at the beginning of the film. Additionally, the exchange is not adapted as a conversation between Frank (portrayed by Sean Chapman) and the Cenobites; instead, it appears to be almost a mistake on Frank's part that transforms into an assault upon his body as he solves the puzzle. With a slow zoom that moves from the front of him to above his head, we see Frank kneeling within a square of candles as he begins to solve what the film refers to as the Lament Configuration. Accompanied by an eerie, haunting score, the editing of this scene provides an almost voyeuristic look into Frank's space and body as darkness obscures everything except for his shirtless form at the center of the waxy square. With close-up shots and the warm low-key lighting provided by the candles, we see sensually evocative shots of the sweat on his face and chest to his hands caressing the box as he looks for the secrets of his puzzle. His sweaty hands push and shift the box into new shapes as he grows closer to solving the puzzle, and his efforts are heralded by creaking walls. The camera cuts to the glow of blue light shifting behind the walls, pouring through the slats of the walls into

the smoky room. As he lustfully shifts the puzzle into its final form, blue lightning becomes hooked chains that shoot from the box, piercing and digging into his flesh as Frank screams. The practical effects make the experience even more painful to witness as we see the flesh tear and hear him scream, followed by a shot of his face as he screams into the camera. While the camera shifts to an establishing shot of the home with the sound bridge of the lingering scream, the look of shock and horror on Frank's face remains in spectatorial memory.

In contrast to the outwardly civil yet deceiving conversation between the Cenobites and Frank in the novella, the film displays the opening of the box with a frightful manifestation of pain. There is no negotiation or convincing for either party and while Frank does choose to open the box, he makes no visible choice to participate in the experimentation of the Order. Instead, the box entraps him literally as the hooks dig into his flesh, ensuring that he is unable to escape from the Cenobites as he howls in pain. The jump-scare creates a physical anxiety and seeing the hooks pierce Frank's flesh allows for the audience to feel the corporeality of the horror. We, like Frank, are shocked and unable to escape the hooks as we watch the tearing, and although we are distanced from the physicality of the sensation itself, we are not distant from the effect of the physical experience. The assault on the senses for the audience in addition to the assault on the body for Frank reads like a rape in the sense that there was no agreement, unknowing or not, between the recipient and the perpetrator. Without any consensual exchange, the film ensures that the audience feels as violated as Frank's surprise at the hooks. Furthermore, Frank's masculinity and abjection at the hands of the Cenobites represent a general trend in film where the male masochistic position is demonized as deviant or forced. Film's discomfort with male masochism influences the transition between Frank's misinformed consent in the novella into an

experience explicitly forced upon him, where his masochism must be negotiated as something frightening or horrific (Allen 36, 39).

It is not until about halfway through the film that there is another scene in which Frank (portrayed in this flayed form by Oliver Smith), now rendered fleshless by the Cenobites but recuperating with the help of Julia (Claire Higgins), his brother's wife and his lover, discusses the circumstances behind his engagement with the Cenobites. After a medium close-up shot showcasing Frank tasting a cigarette and remarking that "It's been a long time since I've tasted anything," Julia demands an explanation regarding how he came to be a horrifically flayed vampiric being who must subsist on the life force of others to reconstitute himself. In a close-up shot of the Lament Configuration, Frank explains that the box "opens doors...doors to the pleasures of Heaven or Hell, I didn't care which." While the light reflects off the box and bathes Julia in a golden radiance, the camera returns to the box and the movie screen seems to tear into a transition back to the familiar shot of Frank within his square of candles, with his skin intact. With Frank's voiceover explaining how the Cenobites pushed him beyond the limits of pain and pleasure, quick cuts showcase the mutilated Cenobites and then a close-up shot of Frank's face hanging upside down. Each Cenobite is displayed, ranging from the obese "Butterball" (Simon Bamford), the Chattering Cenobite (Nicholas Vince), the Female Cenobite (Grace Kirby and an exception to the genderless rule), and the lead Cenobite known by fans and later installments as "Pinhead" (Doug Bradley). Butterball is grotesquely swollen, and its dark glasses seem to bulge from its face. The Chattering Cenobite's eyes appear to be missing as its lipless, exposed mouth chatters away with its teeth. The Female and the lead Cenobites both appear to be the most human-like, with pallid gray skin and bald heads. However, they differ in the type of mutilations they have undergone: facial and throat mutilations for the Female, and the rows of pins for the

Lead Cenobite (hence his moniker, Pinhead). Cutting between Frank's hanging body and close-up shots of the Cenobites' faces, we hear moans of pain and pleasure with the rattling of chains before a shot of a hooked chain reaches toward the camera and pierces his flesh. With wooden blocks spinning with bits of viscera nailed to them, we have a match cut to Frank's body spinning. The front of his body is covered in bright, candy-red blood dripping down. The scene ends as Frank finishes his tale, restoring us in a reversed tear back into the present to see Julia gasping in the golden light before she agrees to assist Frank in restoring his body and escaping the Cenobites.

By juxtaposing Frank's obsession with pleasure and his eventual fate with the motives and appearances of the Cenobites, the film draws parallels between their desires as well as their methods for achieving gratification through misinformation in the establishment (or lack thereof) of consent. For Frank, a hedonist and sensation-seeker thus far, to take a drag of a cigarette to taste something after his experience envelopes the previous hedonistic mindset within a context of need rather than desire. His physical existence as a person half-alive and skinned, needing to take sustenance from other people's bodies, directly compares him to the mutilated bodies of the Cenobites who need to experiment on other people's bodies to further their exploratory goals. Furthermore, his affiliation with the Lament Configuration, particularly as he shines its reflected light onto Julia, ties him to the doors that open to the Order, doors that he wanted to open to achieve his personal gratification. Even as the movie screen tears itself to transition back to the Cenobites' experimentation, the camera's choices in match cutting between Frank's face and the Cenobites' faces, or his spinning with the spinning of their tools, ties the two together as more similar than different; both mutilated figures who deceive others to achieve their desires. While Frank remains a victim of the Order's assault, both the novella and film's Frank replicate the

Cenobite's violent strategies to achieve their desires. However, the film focuses on Frank's transition from victimhood to violent perpetrator rather than elaborating on Frank's inner desires to dominate his partners. In this case, cycles of violence victimize and transform Frank just as much as the Cenobites do. While both texts utilize the Cenobites as perverse justice, the film does not explore Frank as truly violent until after his transition into monstrosity. Without specifying the patriarchal violence found in his fantasies like the novella, the film blunts Frank's violent brand of hedonism, instead portraying him as selfish and unsatisfied but not monstrous.

Mark Richard Adams's analysis on the original film (along with the novella it adapts), much like works by scholars like Campi, attempts a queer reading regarding the Cenobites as liberatory figures represented in a dark mythos by Barker, but his argument lacks critical components relating to Frank's personal autonomy. Within Adams's framework, the queer angels/demons represented by the Order offer Frank the opportunity to surpass his heteronormative limits, but his own refusal to become fluid in his identity leads to further displacement:

while he appears to seek to return to his previous masculine identity, it is clear that this would still not satisfy him. The closest Frank gets to restoring himself is stealing and wearing the skin of his brother, after which he finally has sex with Julia. This act attempts to reaffirm his heterosexuality, but he soon dispatches her and attempts an incestuous rape of his niece, unable to be satisfied with a stabilised sexuality (135).

While the novella supports a reading of Frank's attempts to hold onto a patriarchal, heteronormative expectation of pleasure, what Adams fails to account for is that the Cenobites never intended for Frank to escape in order to become the fleshy wraith within the film. It is not the heteronormative crime of attempting to regain his masculine identity that causes the

Cenobites to recapture him (134-135) as described later in both novella and film, it was that he dared to escape in the first place. Frank's reappropriation of his own agency, despite the fact that he ensures that by stealing the agency and life force of others, creates a thorn in the side of the Order's absolute domination. Adams's focus on the Cenobites as ambiguous figures queering morality and sexuality forgets the fundamental aspect of the Order's modus operandi involves not transforming their experiments into sexually liberated beings to be freed, but fodder for their own pursuits in the mysteries of pleasure.

The reboot film's plot focuses on an entirely different set of characters than Frank and Julia, instead choosing to focus on themes ranging from class conflict and substance abuse as it articulates the pursuit of pleasure as more than a sexual experience. Instead, the reboot braids sexual, economic, and narcotic pleasure together as it comments on what separates appropriate pursuits of pleasure in relation to the people around the subject. The audience's first interaction with the human antagonist and wealthy hedonist Roland Voight (played by Goran Visnjic) depicts his sacrifice of his final victim, a sex worker named Joey (Kit Clarke). To gain an audience with the god of the Cenobites, the Leviathan, Voight must sacrifice five victims to the puzzle box. These gifts are based on the configurations of the box. At a party held at Voight's estate, the wealthy man's lawyer, Serena (portrayed by Hiam Abbass), directs Joey to . As he steps through the threshold into an expansive room, the camera follows his gaze to the immaculately designed geometric patterns throughout the room, and chimes play in the non-diegetic soundtrack. Close-up shots of the room reveal artifacts like torture implements placed sparsely within the room, culminating in the shot of a single box-like puzzle placed on the pedestal at the center of the room. In foreshadowing, the mise-en-scene glorifies violence and pleasure. The meticulous yet sparse decor creates further discomfort, as torture instruments

appear in close-up cuts, a warning about the owners' intentions. In another close-up shot, Joey's shaking hands reach out to grasp the puzzle, while Voigt's voice interrupts the chimes, proclaiming, "Beautiful, isn't it?" The two interact awkwardly, with Roland stating that the puzzle is almost finished for Joey to solve. When Joey begins to solve it and Roland watches eagerly, a blade juts out of the box to penetrate Joey's hand, and the young man stumbles back, yanking the box from his hand. The combination of Voigt's voyeuristic gaze and the sudden appearance of the blade highlights the horror and also perverse pleasure Voigt takes from the violence he facilitates. As bells toll in the background, a point-of-view shot shows Joey's vision growing blurry, and the puzzle begins to shift into a new configuration. The walls split open to reveal a soft blue light, and chains begin to erupt from nowhere to hook into the screaming Joey. While Joey is strung up by these hooked chains, Roland places the newly diamond-shaped puzzle on the pedestal and kneels with his arms outstretched. He begs for an audience with the Leviathan and requests a boon as Joey continues to scream and moan in pain before the glowing red letters of the title card appear in a black void.

Unlike the Lemarchand or Lament Configurations of the novella and the original film, the reboot's method of sacrificing other victims to feed the box forces the intended penitents of the Cenobites and their god to become predators themselves, complicating the original depictions of misinformed consent with coercion and the removal of others' bodies and autonomy. Unlike Frank's attempts to reconstitute himself, Voigt's sacrifices are a part of the invocation itself, not an accident because a victim was able to cross over to the human world. For the reboot, the religious explorations of the Order of the Gash include sacrifices and the presence of the Leviathan deity, which appeared in the second film, *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* (Tony Randel, 1988). The performances of Joey and Voigt establish a fascinating dichotomy between the two

as Joey's nervous, shaking performance complements the cool but predatory smiles of Voight's performance, particularly because the penitent of the box is no longer the only victim of the Cenobites. Instead, any innocent pierced by the puzzle's blade is subject to the disorientating effect of the box, with their perceptions being manipulated through the tolling bells and their vision getting blurry. As he begs for his reward from the Leviathan, the audience understands that Voight is not the unwitting party that Frank was, or at least not in the same way. For Voight, he realized a price for the gifts of the Cenobites, and he chose to pay it with the blood of his unwitting victims. Instead of the vampiric monster that the film's Frank became, Voight is a monster of his creation in the pursuit of his pleasures. He exemplifies the attitude of carelessness towards the boundaries of others, showcasing the sheer dedication he has towards his own gratification. While this singleminded pursuit of personal pleasure manifests throughout the franchise, the reboot pairs with current scholarship around kink and pleasure in regards to the understanding of the implications of class in sex work, particularly as Voight exploits the body of Joey for his pleasure.

Our Unwitting Protagonists

While the original supplicants in each text have some understanding of the Order, if flawed or misinformed, each text's protagonist remains wholly unaware of the Cenobites before their encounter. These protagonists become involved not because of their own desires to traffic with the Cenobites but because the desires of others affect them through the presence of the box. Without intentionally seeking out the gifts of the Order, the protagonists allow the audience an identification in ignorance and fear regarding the threat represented by the Cenobites. If the Cenobites were willing to grant Frank an obfuscated choice to entrap him, they do not offer the same illusory option to the protagonist of the novella, Kirsty. A friend of Frank's brother Rory,

she becomes entangled with the box as she attempts to catch Rory's wife Julia cheating, and instead encounters Frank's flayed revenant in the Cottons' attic. Kirsty learns Julia's dark secret: luring men to kill and feed them to her lover to reconstitute Frank's body. His attempts to rape Kirsty thwarted, the vampiric Frank instead attempts to murder her before Kirsty's grip on the Lemarchand Configuration allows her to escape the house. When she awakes in the hospital after her escape, Kirsty is fascinated by the box, and she begins to solve the puzzle in her hospital room, slowly coaxing the intricate box into showing its reflective interior. She notes that the box had "polished surfaces which scintillated like the finest mother-of-pearl, colored shadows seeming to move in the gloss..." and after she conjures the Cenobite through solving it, "she caught fresh glimpses of the polished interior, and seemed to see ghosts' faces—twisted as if by grief or bad glass—howling back at her" (202, 204). What once was an obfuscated "colored shadow" became the faces of the damned as Kirsty finally encounters the Cenobite, and rather than a reflection of her fate-to-come like with Frank, the interior of the box reflects warning figures of previous victims. Instead of a sign of misinformed consent, Kirsty encounters warped reflections of the ones who encountered the Cenobites and became unwilling victims of their experiments. Compared to Frank's reflection, Kirsty recognizes her victimhood, before she can negotiate her position with the Order. This difference in perceptions regarding the interior of the box reflects differing modes of interactions with the Cenobites: Frank's pursuit of pleasure reflects his warped image while Kirsty's perception of ghostly victims reflects her unwitting and unwilling negotiation with her Cenobite. In relation, discourses of consent, particularly in kink communities, often focus on articulating and expressing consent regarding the body. In Catherin Scott's *Thinking Kink: The Collision of BDSM, Feminism, and Popular Culture*, she notes in her chapter on safe-words and establishing consent that "Consent isn't something that just happens

once and is then irrevocable, all-encompassing, and non-negotiable – because then pretty soon it no longer is consent, but simply a matter of one person pushing to see what they can get away with” (91-92). This conversation intertwines both Frank’s and Kirsty’s narratives in relation to the Cenobites, as the Cenobites make it clear that they will not accept a later refusal once a “participant” grants an initial agreement. Furthermore, consent cannot be a warning of something to come that one must endure, instead being something that should be granted enthusiastically and consistently.

In both scenarios, the Cenobites quickly establish themselves as the party in power, but while Frank is offered a choice, however obfuscated, in joining the experiment, the demonic being does not offer Kirsty a choice, instead forces Kirsty into negotiation. The Cenobite explains the mechanics of the Lemarchand Configuration as ““a means to break the surface of the real,”” acknowledging the box’s purpose to violate both the body and the space around it, constructing and deconstructing reality (205). The puzzle’s ability to shatter the expectations for how the body and space works creates a discourse about a reality constructed by sensorial limits. The Cenobites seek the boundaries of material experience located through the body and push these boundaries. For the Order, subjective boundaries we impose on ourselves constrain humanity’s understanding of reality, and without violating those boundaries, humanity remains trapped by these limitations. The special powers and manifestations of the Cenobites originate from a continual refusal of the limits of the body, seeking further understanding as they continue to warp their bodies and minds into new, grotesque configurations. The Cenobites, then, can operate because they follow a system that facilitates communication beyond the conventional reality of the senses, seeking victims for their experiments. The corporeal and psychic limits of subjectivity help establish the monstrosity of the Cenobites both as they lay outside of it and how

they continue to violate it, as scholars like Elizabeth Grosz establishes the physical and mental spaces monsters occupy as at or beyond the limits of normality (272-273). However, while the Cenobites may or may not consent to their own personal mutilations, they seem to lack an understanding of how this capacity for consent works for their victims. While the Cenobite acknowledges Kirsty's ignorance regarding her accidental summoning, this lack of understanding offers nothing to protect her as much as Frank's mistaken knowledge offered him nothing, as it states, "Don't try to fight. It's quite beyond your control. You have to accompany me" (205). What was an imbalanced negotiation with Frank becomes an assault on Kirsty as the Cenobite ignores her pleas, politely yet firmly refusing her assertions of autonomy. It is not until she offers the information regarding Frank's escape from the Cenobites that the being pauses, considering a trade between Frank's whereabouts for Kirsty's freedom (208-210). While arguing for her fate, Kirsty's threatened position ensures that she must seek a way to operate within the mentality of the Cenobites.

In these two negotiations, the Cenobite retains the power to cajole or control targets into relinquishing their bodily autonomy but must abide by certain conditions. The playful manner in which Kirsty's aggressor taunts her, particularly its memetic phrase "No tears, please. It's a waste of good suffering," creates the pretension of rule and order behind the intentions of the Order of the Gash, but the specific byzantine bylaws remain a mystery as the Cenobites manipulate their targets to ensure their compliance (208). What part of their organization, then, remains attached to a contract of behavior? The hidden system ensures that their victims cannot attain an equal footing within their negotiations. As Scott discusses, "The frightening truth is that a safe word is no protection at all if a top or a dominant doesn't give a shit about your boundaries" (99), and while this represents a general discussion around kink and sexual violence,

it applies to the Order. This pretension of refinement and law, one that scholars continue to argue denotes the Cenobites' violence as voluntarily enforced, means nothing when the Order will ignore the boundaries of their victims in order to gain what they want. Despite Kirsty's pleas and the Cenobites' rules, they will continue to press their advantage as they choose to pursue their own ends. While the Cenobites portray and adhere to a hidden order, they refuse to elaborate because it would grant their potential victims ways out that they cannot control. This sense of play within the interactions integrates not only sexual or physical sadism in their experiments, but emotional sadism as well. The Cenobites utilize their emotional manipulations to incite emotional experiences to enhance physical sensation. Frank's agreement without knowing the specifics is particularly brutal, but what renders it paradoxical is that he was granted, or at least led to believe that he was granted, a choice while Kirsty is not granted the same opportunity. Kirsty's encounter reveals a condition in which the Cenobites seem to operate, as it says "No way to seal the Schism, until we take what's ours" (205). The Cenobites thus follow some semblance of order, noting that they cannot seal their tear between worlds and return to their dimension without taking someone back, claiming them as their property. The additional tension between a subject having a choice and property having no autonomy creates further complications: how is Frank allotted a choice and Kirsty is not? Does Frank automatically fall under the Cenobites' claim as theirs? The presentation of a gendered binary in which Frank may have the pretension of control while Kirsty is granted nothing provides a commentary on sexual violence as it manifests along the binary in that they both remain victims. Both may have different means and presentations of their victimhood, but the text engages with the assumption that despite their situations, they both remain targets of the Order through their intentional or unintentional engagement with the box. This example of a potential clause in the manner in

which the Order of the Gash must conduct themselves offers further complications within their depiction, particularly as the Cenobite seems willing to negotiate with Kirsty's autonomy when she provides a potential fulfillment of their contract in her stead. The necessity of taking a victim when summoned creates a complex web of interactions that maintains the feeling of powerlessness when facing the Order, but it also is what grants Kirsty the opportunity to participate in her emancipation.

Within the film, Kirsty acquires the Lament Configuration in a way similar to the novella, through crucially emphasizing Frank's monstrosity by adding the threat of incest. Kirsty (played by Ashley Laurence) is the daughter of Larry Cotton or Rory from the novella, and she follows Julia, now her stepmother, into the family home to investigate her cheating. As she ascends the staircase to catch her stepmother in the act, she instead encounters one of Frank and Julia's grotesque victims, pleading for help. While the man reaches out to grasp Kirsty, Frank slinks from behind to subdue him. The camera depicts the skinless Frank, and while he attempts to soothe her by invoking his relationship to her as uncle, the camera grows closer to her fearful face in close-up shots as she stumbles backward. The cuts between the disfigured Frank and the disgusted Kirsty highlight Frank entrapping Kirsty, and the close-up shots give Kirsty and the audience no room to escape the frame. After Frank corners her into the attic, Frank closes the door and stalks forward like a hungry wolf. With the soundtrack's suspenseful tone with church bells, Frank comments on how much Kirsty has grown and how beautiful she is. When Frank traps her against a wall, the camera closes in to see Frank and Kirsty's faces as he forces her into an embrace, his finger tracing along her jawline. As Kirsty tries to resist and escape, Frank utters a disturbing reflection on his own experiences, saying, "Some things have to be endured, and that's what makes the pleasures so sweet." Then, in close-up, Kirsty punches through his gut,

grips the box and throws it out of the window. The scene ends as she runs out of the house to Frank's guttural "No!" before fading to her running away from the home. Both refusals, whether Frank's or Kirsty's, showcase an effort to thwart them, and while Kirsty escapes, Frank's will remains compromised because he sought to enforce his own desires onto Kirsty without her agreement. Kirsty refuses, and while Frank attempts to push beyond her discomfort, she can escape with the box in hand.

Unlike Frank's attempts to reconstitute his body and assault Kirsty in the novella, the film adaptation adds an additional dimension of predation by combining intimate camera shots and the incest narrative. By making Kirsty Larry's daughter and Frank's niece, the film further villainizes Frank for his incestuous attempts to sexually assault Kirsty. Camera work enhances the sense of taboo and perversion, as slow, intimate shots show their bodies pressed against each other, which provokes a startling question: how can Frank force intimacy, an assault, on someone in his own bloodline? The close-up shots of their bodies showcase Kirsty's fear and discomfort even as Frank gloats about his reclaimed power. In addition, Frank's dialogue recounting his "enduring pain" after the experiments of the Cenobites reflects another parallel between Frank and the Order, as both neglect the autonomy and consent of other parties involved. Adams points to Frank's repression as what enables this assault, stating:

The Cenobites are not destructive, they are creators who attempt to unlock Frank's potential and it is Frank's own reluctance and resulting displacement which causes the film's narrative conflicts... Frank is rendered monstrous by the repression of his 'queerness' and the inability to obtain any specific identity, whether it is straight, gay, bisexual, or any other of the myriad human sexualities (135-136).

Adams claims that the Order offers fully realized potential for their penitents, but Frank's inability to accept this gift lies in his refusal of accepting queerness in its full liberatory possibility. This queer argument seeks to cast the Cenobites as saviors, deconstructing only in order to reconstruct in full corporeal glory. However, the Cenobites (as discussed later) do not offer real freedom, but instead trap their victims in their realm after manipulating or assaulting their targets. Rather than blaming Frank for his reluctance to engage with the Cenobites, one should anticipate that Frank could never revoke his consent even as he solved the puzzle box. While Frank remains a victim of the Cenobites, his insistence on trying to force Kirsty to endure pain for his sweeter pleasure marks him as just as much of a sexual predator as the members of the Order of the Gash. As Allen notes that "BDSM is certainly not about releasing bottled-up rage but sharing pleasure" (162), Frank's monstrosity comes not from the repression of his sexuality but because the Cenobites warped his body to their pleasures without accounting for his boundaries. This release of violent anger is not an expression of sexuality through the lens of sadomasochism. Frank may have always been a hedonist who was willing to use people to get what he wants, primarily showcased in his relationship with Julia and her acceptance of his desires throughout the film, but the intervention of the Cenobites transforms him not only into a physical monster, but reveals him as a social and sexual monster as well. The cycle of violence created and perpetuated by the Cenobites, particularly in connection to his warped perspective of consent and endurance, crafts Frank into a willing abuser like the Order.

After being brought to the hospital, Kirsty solves the puzzle box as she does in the novella, but the film represents the experience far more as an assault on her person and senses than in the source material. The scene begins with Kirsty exploring her room after solving the puzzle, witnessing the walls disconnect to manifest a hallway much like the novella describes.

Her first experience with the Cenobites involves meeting the bestial Engineer in a space behind the walls, in which the sound of a baby crying accompanies the creature, chasing her back to her room. Suddenly, the hallway seems to disappear as if nothing had happened. As she peers around the room in fear, a number of signs manifest that the world is not quite as she left it: light glows through the spaces between the tiles on the wall as smoke issues from the cracks, a television plays an image of a blooming red flower intercut with closed white flowers as static rages on, and blood fills up her IV bag before bursting. As she pounds on the door in an attempt to escape, the camera closes in on the blood dripping down the wall and the light fixture explodes before returning to Kirsty's fearful face. Fog billows throughout the room as the Chattering Cenobite manifests in the corner in the blue energy, stalking forward to force its fingers down Kirsty's throat in a grip that terrifies and immobilizes her in its violence and sexual overtones. The other three Cenobites seen before in Frank's description manifest as well, explaining to the yelping Kirsty her fate in having opened the puzzle box. As Kirsty begs for her life, we see medium close-up shots of the Cenobites being alternatively lit and covered by the windy fog of the room, particularly with the Female Cenobite seemingly pleasuring herself by running her fingers along the vagina-like perforation in her throat and Butterball licking his lips, slowly but surely. Even as Kirsty attempts to negotiate with the Cenobites regarding Frank's whereabouts, the messy, teary performance by Laurence complimented by the austere and uniform demeanor of the Cenobites, culminates in a shot of the Female, Butterball, and Pinhead looking onward as the light and fog billow around them. Pinhead seems to accept Kirsty's offer, ending the scene with it threatening to "tear your soul apart" as the movie screen zooms into a close-up of his face which is oversaturated with white light.

The combination of unnatural details in the mise-en-scene as well as the varied performances establishes the warped power dynamic that further clarifies the Order of the Gash as stalking predators in the film rather than the complex negotiators of the novella. First, the inclusion of the Engineer as a beast that solely chases after Kirsty while the disturbing sound of a baby's cries ring out in the background frightens both Kirsty and the audience, lacking the terrifying glamour of the fellow Cenobites. Furthermore, the way the Cenobites warp the hospital space implies warped sexuality and gore as the Cenobites invade Kirsty's space for recuperation. The blood pooling in the vessel meant to keep her from dehydrating, combined with the color of the flower on the screen changing to a vibrant red plays at the associations of pleasure suggested by the flowering bloom in combination with the symbol of gore and flesh. In essence, Kirsty's deflowering at the hands of the Cenobites, or recoloring based on the appropriate visual, is one predicted to be bloody and painful in addition to blooming into a new form. Kirsty's virtual innocence transforms from the virginal white to a bloody red, but rather than a manifestation of natural menstruation or cisgender femininity, this queered symbolism showcases artificial mutilation. She transforms not from a girl into a woman, but she instead would transform from a human into a post-human, a lingering shade tormented by the extreme sensations offered by the Order. By subverting traditional associations with cisgender ideas of womanhood, Kirsty's transition into the hands of the Cenobites promises a new mode of being with blood and violence. The body would become queered through the interventions of the gender-nonconforming Cenobites, despite the fact that this would be a forced transition much like Frank's own experience.

While the Cenobite from the novella playfully toyed with Kirsty, insisting on her powerlessness, the Chattering Cenobite's physical assault on Kirsty's mouth and gripping her

throat to restrain her in the film carries a far more visceral fear. This fear is reflected in the teary performance given by Laurence, a stark contrast from the cool yet eager performance of the elegant Cenobites. The way that Butterball licks his lips and the Female pleasures her throat gash displays their eagerness to claim Kirsty as a victim, but this eagerness is tempered by Pinhead's stoic yet frightening delivery as he stands motionless. His deep, harsh voice carries a menacing and taunting intent, but his restrained performance complicates their predatory plans with a sense of refinement hinted at within the novella. While Frank sought pleasure at the hands of the Cenobites, Kirsty had no prior knowledge or stake in the goals of the Order, but that is not enough to save her. Furthermore, her emotional pleas mean nothing to those who remove themselves from those limited experiences, instead leading these beings to have complex relationships between desire and the order imposed upon them. Adams claims that "the Cenobites do not seek to invade, nor do they seek to force themselves upon anyone beyond those who have called out to them" (135), implying that the Cenobites simply come forward to those who have solved the puzzle. However, Kirsty's ignorance regarding the intentions or even the existence of the Cenobites complicates the scholarly narrative of the Cenobites as queer liberators. Instead, the film articulates Kirsty's experience as an assault, one where she had no opportunity to confirm or refuse consent but instead was forced into a negotiation in order to save her skin. Despite claims of the Cenobites' gift in a "transgressive, queer sexuality" (Adams 135), both the novella and the film adaptation highlight the danger found in the Order's willingness to push past their victim's boundaries, insisting on their own vision of pleasure-seeking as the correct mode of expressing sexual and corporeal pleasure.

The reboot offers a more complicated protagonist in Riley McKendry (portrayed by Odessa A'zion), a young woman recovering from addiction. She assists her romantic interest

Trevor (Drew Starkey) in stealing the puzzle box from Voight's abandoned warehouse, without knowledge of the box before the theft nor while guarding the box while Trevor purports to find a buyer. Later the film reveals Trevor is working for Voight and is using Riley as a "mark." This misinformation regarding the box's true nature echoes the misinformation surrounding the Lemarchand Configuration of the novella. After her brother Matt (Brandon Flynn) kicks her out for relapsing on alcohol, Riley takes some pills while trying to figure out what to do. Eventually, she enters an abandoned playground with the puzzle box as her only companion. The establishing shots showcase the dark, muted colors of the playground at night, reds and blues overshadowed by streetlights. As she settles onto the playground's carousel, the establishing shots highlight her isolation. While she initially only investigates the strange geometric patterns of the box, she begins to solve it as she fiddles with the pieces. Close-up shots alternate between her intent face, with flaring nostrils and licking her lips, and her fingers' slow, intentional movements. These intimate shots reinforce the familiar feeling that Riley has with the box, and as she begins to solve it, these shots indicate a certain alluring, recreational pleasure in solving the puzzle. While each text has implied the protagonist somewhat desired the box, the reboot cements Riley's satisfaction with the configurations. As Riley succumbs to the drugs she took, the editing's transition between her intent face and her calculating fingers captures the box's seductive capacity as recreation, pleasurable without knowledge of the temptations of the Cenobites. Like the drugs Riley took, the box symbolizes a seemingly innocent recreational pleasure with dangers lurking unseen. The camera grows closer as she continues to solve it in close-up and extreme close-up shots, and the music slowly builds to two jumpscare: one as the puzzle transitions to another phase, and another as the blade narrowly misses her as she solves the first configuration.

While the blade serves a literal function within the film by piercing and marking the sacrifice, it also models the film's engagement with pleasure via substance abuse. Much like the hypodermic needle, the puzzle's blade inflicts a perception-altering experience upon its target, warping their senses as they prepare to be fodder for the Cenobites. Unlike substance use, the blade sacrifices someone else: instead of using a needle on yourself to experience the rush of the drugs, the box ensures that you manipulate or stab another so that the Cenobites capture them. This makes the victim an offering at the shifting altar of the Order. However, victims of the Order experience a similar loss of control that one suffers under drugs' influence, with their perceptions distorted as their vision grows blurrier and they see the oncoming Cenobites. The film utilizes this metaphor between the supernatural powers of the Cenobites and the disorientation of substance use, as addicts are compared to the victims and perpetrators within the grand scheme of the Cenobites: people being pushed further in the pursuit of experience. The impulse experienced by those suffering from substance abuse to take more and more of their drug of choice to chase their high reflects the victims' experience the perception-altering effects of the box as the perpetrators sacrifice more and more people to gain their boon from the Order. After Riley intently studies the blade, she groggily lays down on the carousel with the wind picking up and begins to spin, with shots alternating between her perspective and her face as cut closer and closer to a panning shot of a Cenobite. Jolting upright, Riley looks around to see the Gasp (Selina Lo), a Cenobite with similar modifications to the original film's Female Cenobite, with a mutilated throat, pierced face, and skin overlaying her skullcap. Proclaiming that the blade should have pierced Riley, the Gasp disappears as her words carry on the wind. As the light changes to a colder, blue tone, Riley is frightened again by the Gasp before realizing that she is missing the box. Looking up, a close-up shot reveals the finger-nail-less hands of the Priest

(Jamie Clayton) manipulating the box. Reminiscent of Pinhead's design from the original movie, the Priest serves a dual purpose: alluding to Pinhead's celebrity after the first film as well as reimagining the role closer to the novella. This reimagination allows for fans of the prior work to engage with the reboot as an adaptation of the original in addition to discussing the themes and symbolism found within the novella. As the Cenobite winds the box forward, an intricate circle manifests on Riley's chest. The Priest's chest is flayed and its skirt seems to be made from skin, culminating in the intricate pins appearing on its bald head. Blood seeping down her chest, Riley tries to plead with the Priest as the deformed being commands Riley to bring them another sacrifice. Even as Riley repeats the word "No," a slow-motion shot appears as the Priest clicks the box in place, the circle in Riley's chest revealing itself to be a hole. Hooked chains shoot out of the void in Riley's chest and toward the movie screen, and the scene cuts to a bird-eye view of Matt laying in his bed with his boyfriend, Colin (Adam Faison) as the chains descend. They hook into his flesh before yanking him forward, waking him up as he stares into the camera.

Compared to the prior versions of Kirsty, Riley offers shifting layers of accountability in regard to addiction struggles and how it affects her relationships; however, her interactions with the Cenobites reveal another unwitting victim, this time one who does not want to hurt others who may become entangled with the Order. While Riley steals and solves the puzzle, she has no prior knowledge of what the box is and treats the box almost reverentially as she slowly turns the pieces of it. Even as the blade misses her, she marvels at the blade with deference, looking at its intricate markings. In comparison, her treatment at the hands of the Cenobites is rough, with the Gasp effectively screaming at her to come with them before the Priest forces Riley, in a manner of choosing with her metaphorical and literal "heart," to summon Matt, the closest person to her within the film. In this manner, while Riley may have hurt people in the past with her struggle

with substance abuse, we see that she fundamentally does not want anything to do with the machinations of the Cenobites. Despite the Priest's insistence for her to bring another victim to the slaughter, Riley continues to plead against it before the choice is ripped away from her much like the flesh in her chest, unleashing the hooked chains to summon another in her place. The Cenobites seem to operate under similar rules to the ones within the novella and the original film, ensuring that someone must always pay the price in blood when the puzzle is solved. Furthermore, the reboot complicates the binary between the pursuit and avoidance of pleasure, integrating the community around Riley rather than her alone as an individual. Almost as if by a biological or emotional connection between the two, Riley and Matt are bound together throughout Riley's journey to recovery through addiction. The Priest uses this connection to summon Matt through the hooked chains. Contemporary scholarship regarding addiction evolves past understandings of substance abuse as purely a situation affecting or involving the substance abuser, often focusing on how community interacts with addicts in both ways that help and harm each party. Bruce Jennings notes that "Liberty and autonomy are not primarily about protection from other people. What they require is much more relational: an interdependent life of agency lived in an institutional and cultural environment of nondomination" (12). Riley is ultimately accountable for her own actions, but she does rely on and share relationships with other people who create their own boundaries. While the novella and the original film denote the Order's ability to manipulate the body and the senses, the Order's ability to reach into the mind itself to interact produces a new dimension of terror as the material dimensions that governed the Cenobites falls away to total domination at the hands of the reboot. Compared to the duplicitous misinformation of the novella and the physical assault provided by the original film, the reboot offers a model of coerced consent that affects the mind in conjunction with the body. This

development articulates a model of consent as a conversation between two people who possess the capacity to make such decisions. Instead of transactional sacrifice made by reaching into the mind, consent must be facilitated with clear intentions and the ability to refuse. Furthermore, consent remains articulated through the frame of mind able to accept or refuse sexual and physical advances, a position that substances may affect in their capacity to reduce inhibitions and physical control. Whether through alcohol, date rape drugs, or other substances, consent requires the ability to exhibit conscious thought regarding what one wants or can refuse. By having the Priest reach into Riley's metaphorical heart to pluck Matt out of her emotions, the film showcases the horrific conditions of having one's mind manipulated for supposed "consent."

Later in the film, after Riley's brother and her friend become victims of the Cenobites, she talks with the Priest as she attempts to dispose of the box. The scene begins after Riley takes the box to a bridge to toss into the water, and the low-key lighting and cool tones of the darkness leave her barely visible as she lifts the puzzle over her head. While the darkness obscures the background, the lighting illuminates Riley enough to shift the focus directly to her, and the Priest's stoic voice interrupts this calm, saying, "Wait, not yet. Accept the pain that you have wrought. Greater delights await; we wish to see you proceed." These words establish a connection between Riley's previous experiences with addiction and the unintentional pain she has caused through her experiences with the box. The camera cuts to the river water, with the Priest standing atop of the water's surface much like Jesus, a dark inverse of the compassionate messiah envisioned by Christianity. While Riley protests that she did not ask for this, a cut reveals that the Priest has appeared beside her, refusing to acknowledge her refusal of the box. The conversation continues on each's face in close-up shots, with Riley's teary, wavering

expression cutting to the Priest's stoic demeanor, and the Cenobite continues to attempt to seduce Riley into sacrificing more to the box, offering her brother's resurrection as a potential reward. As revealed in a previous expository scene, the box takes on six shapes with six potential gifts, with the "Lazarus Configuration" offering the resurrection of whomever the supplicant chooses. Each cut highlights the stark contrast in their emotional experiences, and the Priest's inhumanity through its emotionless face marks how far removed from human emotion the Cenobites have become. Riley's refusal, however, prompts the Cenobite to gesture, telekinetically shifting the box to produce the blade and stab into Riley's hand. With this, the Cenobite explains that Riley can be claimed as a sacrifice at any time, but they wish to see what she will do with her life at stake. As the voices of Trevor and Colin grow louder in the distance as they call out for Riley, the Priest has disappeared, leaving Riley alone on the bridge and bleeding.

The Priest's attempts to seduce and then threaten Riley's life represent a new paradigm in understanding the effects of coercion on consent. While the Order withheld information in their discussion with Frank and blatantly assaulted him in the film, the Order within the reboot pushes their supplicants into the same modes of sacrifice that they themselves practice. The use of close-up shots, as well as the Priest's seeming omnipresence, not only raises the horror-film stakes but also showcases the separation the Cenobites experience from humanity as they've centered on different experiences than their average victims and how it separates them from personal consent. This displacement from the limits of humanity is not viewed as a burden; instead, the Cenobites push their supplicants as if they want to share this experience as a gift despite the clear refusal by Riley. While ignoring Riley's agency, the Priest attempts to entice Riley into solving the puzzle further. Despite Riley's refusal, the Cenobite cannot or will not accept that those in

contact with the box might not want to pursue their gifts. The Priest's insistence on Riley's continuation in progressing through their puzzle, as the soft tones suggest, creates an effort at seduction that, when rebuffed, turns into a threat. Consent, in this case, becomes something to wear down or threaten because the Cenobites remain convinced that their gifts are worth receiving, and the film showcases the monstrosity of the Cenobites as they continue to ignore the boundaries of their penitents. Even if they believe they have their penitents' best intentions in mind, consent must be agreed to and enthusiastically accepted. This extends to the relationship found between Riley and the Priest as she refuses, and while the film attempts to showcase a thematic similarity between Riley's substance abuse and her current predicament, the metaphor falls flat when the presence of another agent pressuring her is introduced. By penetrating Riley's body with the box's blade and stealing her blood, the Priest attempts to force Riley into perpetuating the cycles of violence. In contrast to the force of an external agent's pressure, Bruce Jennings notes in his essay regarding the bioethics of autonomy, in relation to choices made about the body:

Autonomy in bioethics means freedom from outside restraint and the freedom to live one's own life in one's own way. To be autonomous is to live according to your values and principles, as these are refined in the light of informed, rational deliberation and settled convictions that are your own. It is to be self-sovereign. It is to be the author of your life, your self-identity, and your actions (12).

Rather than a mode in which one might succumb to an external agent with the Cenobites, Riley's experiences with drug use function in accordance to her own will. Instead of being forced into a situation in which her options are inherently limited, Riley's substance abuse functions as an extension of her choice to facilitate what happens to her body, but her inability to account for her

impact on the community around her troubles the relationship between her autonomy and the impact of others. This potential relationship between Riley's inability to account for her consequences and the Priest's refusal to accept Riley's refusal both complicate consent as they struggle to account for the interconnectedness between personal boundaries and agency between systems of peoples.

Trapped and Entangled

Within the novella, Kirsty's negotiation with the Cenobites means that she must encounter her attacker in Frank once again, but the circumstances of her trauma manifest with the cycles of domination and violence of the Order. As she leaves the hospital to try and earn her freedom, she thinks to herself:

She had opened a door— the same door Rory's brother had opened— and now she was walking with demons. And at the end of her travels, she would have her revenge. She would find the thing that had torn her and tormented her, and make him feel the powerlessness that she had suffered. She would watch him squirm. More, she would enjoy it. Pain had made a sadist of her (215).

While Kirsty's circumstances opening the box differ significantly from Frank's, her identification with his "journey," much like her own, consists of adopting the mentality of the sadist. The trauma she endured, both at the hands of Frank and at the machinations of the Order, transforms her into someone who craves violence and pain. While Frank's dreams of domination may have consisted of subjugating women in the service of his pleasure, his encounter with the box renders him as someone who seeks dominance over his reality. He thinks to himself about the Lemarchand Configuration, "This new addiction quickly cured him of dope and drink. Perhaps there were other ways to bend the world to suit the shape of his dreams" (90), and he

notes that he wants to warp reality to match his fantasies rather than escape the world through temporary acts of pleasure. Both Kirsty and Frank maintain a drive, or addiction in the context of the reboot's themes with Riley, to enact their own fantasies onto the world and others around them, but the novella characterizes their drives separately in their roles as protagonist and antagonist. For Frank, pleasure comes from the exploitation of others, and his model of deriving pleasure after his encounter from the Cenobites comes not in getting revenge or justice, but by lying in wait like a parasite and assaulting those he believes he can overpower. Kirsty, on the other hand, derives pleasure from the thought of inflicting pain onto the one who hurt her, a transaction in blood separated by punching upwards. In this scenario, the Order might be hanging her fate over her head, but they are overarching threats compared to the personal vendetta Kirsty brings against Frank. This adoption of the mantle of "sadist" within the novella's language marks Kirsty as a victim of the cycles of violence perpetuated by the Cenobites. Without the agency to be able to refuse the manipulations of the Cenobites, Kirsty must become a monster to sacrifice another in her place, and the lack of consent cultivates an environment that must thrive on unyielding domination and unwilling submission. As the Cenobites refuse to acquiesce to Kirsty's boundaries, Kirsty engages with the violence that culminates when there remains no option to passively refuse. Kirsty's reestablishment of autonomy engages with the system of violence because the Cenobites do not grant any other option for her refusal.

The Order's cycles of violence and Frank's desire for power depict a reality in which the denial of consent breeds victimizers who refuse to acknowledge personal boundaries. Kirsty comes back to the home to see Rory and Julia, who claim to have killed Frank. Kirsty discovers this is a ruse, however, and she finds that Frank has killed Rory and claimed his skin to wear. Julia tries to hold her down for Frank to kill, but Kirsty escapes and leaves Julia to be consumed

by Frank. While Frank chases Kirsty throughout the house, the Cenobites refuse to act without her confirming that he lives through the stolen life force of others. As Kirsty is able to get Frank to confess his identity despite Rory's stolen skin, the Cenobites manifest in the room, commanding Kirsty to leave while they deal with their escaped quarry. Kirsty witnesses an unfortunate sight:

[T]he chains were drawn an inch tighter, but the Cenobites gained no further cry from him. Instead he put his tongue out at Kirsty, and flicked it back and forth across his teeth in a gesture of unrepentant lewdness. Then he came unsewn (246).

In response to the Cenobites' religious inspirations, the reference to Frank's "unrepentant lewdness," in addition to the need for Frank to confess his identity and sins before the Cenobites begin their punishment, establishes an allusion to the cycles of power that govern acceptable models of behavior for the Cenobites. However, order that governs the Cenobites lacks any significant mode of change for the better; despite their intervention, Frank's demeanor remains the same as he seeks to inflict one last trauma onto Kirsty. This elevation of the Cenobites' code over the autonomy of the victim maintains the unhealthy cycles of power by enforcing their perception of boundary-pushing limitlessness onto the healthy boundaries decided and maintained by each of their victims. Furthermore, this refusal to accept or understand the limits of those who open the box, misinformed supplicant or not, ensures that their victims model themselves under the same corruptive ideals of domination that the Cenobites traffic.

Despite the Order's mission to continually push the boundaries of sensation, their obfuscations showcase the dangers of ill-informed consent and highlight the importance of clear communication. Kirsty's journey ends after the Cenobites take Frank and Julia back to their hell, and as she wanders from the house, the leader of the Cenobites, known as the Engineer,

bumps into her and hands her the box. She observes of the Lemarchand Configuration now placed in her care:

She turned it over in her hand. For the frailest of moments she seemed to see ghosts in the lacquer. Julia's face, and that of Frank. She turned it over again, looking to see if Rory was held here: but no. Wherever he was, it wasn't here. There were other puzzles, perhaps, that if solved gave access to the place where he lodged. A crossword maybe, whose solution would lift the latch of the paradise garden, or a jigsaw in the completion of which lay access to Wonderland (251-252).

Kirsty's observation of the fates of Frank and Julia, combined with the lack of confirmation with Rory, grants her the space to envision new modes of being beyond the pain/pleasure offered by the Order. Instead, these purported locales, whether they are Wonderland or Heaven, might provide modes of being where the laws are not hidden and participation is not threatened or tricked out of people, but instead where consent is established clearly. Kirsty's musings on the topic, particularly as she wonders about Rory's fate, provide a form of liberation in which consent might be a conversation, and while the Cenobites do honor their word in leaving her be, they do charge her with caring for the Lemarchand Configuration. This burden of remembering that experience for as long as she has a memento offers not only a literalized metaphor for the lingering sensations of trauma but also serves the transactional nature of the Order. By imagining future possibilities or alternate afterlives, Kirsty imagines a space beyond power and domination, offering a new model for pleasure and recreation.

The original film adaptation offers a similar exposure of Uncle Frank and his inevitable fate, but its emphasis on Kirsty's potential capture by the Order subverts the novella's emphasis on the law of the Cenobites and focuses on the fear of clear assault in the horror film as the

movie transitions the interaction into a form of rape. Much like the novella, Frank chases Kirsty throughout the home, and the Cenobites ultimately recapture him by ripping him apart with their telekinetically-controlled hooked chains. However, as Kirsty shuts the door on this scene, she turns her back to the door and whimpers. The camera moves from a medium to a close-up shot of her fearful face, and the lighting shifts from the pale light in the attic room to hazy, warmer tones of yellow and red. In this instance, the shift in lighting allows the audience a moment to compose themselves, allowing time to wonder if Kirsty might be able to escape unscathed. As Kirsty begins to run down the stairs, however, the Female Cenobite appears in front of her, admonishing Kirsty for trying to leave while she/it runs a hook through the wallpaper. This jumpscare with the Female Cenobite cements that, unlike the novella, the Cenobites do not honor their word, turning what was a malicious transaction in the novella into a virtual rape in the film. As blood drips from this rip in the wall, Kirsty turns back into a room, pausing in a point-of-view shot through the doorway to see the Female Cenobite approaching slowly but surely. Even as the Cenobite moves through the haze, its collected demeanor fragments as it growls in anticipation, creating a hazy distinction between the calm facade the Cenobites portray and their excitement at the prospect of another victim. Rather than the liberatory figures that scholars like Adams present, the Cenobites stalk forward like hungry wolves ready to pounce on their victim. Kirsty turns to see the mutilated corpse of Julia holding onto the Lament Configuration, crackling with blue energy. As she wrestles the box away and the Female advances, Pinhead rises from behind Kirsty, claiming, "We have such sights to show you." Kirsty tries to solve the puzzle yet again, and while Pinhead commands her to stop, she furiously slides the pieces back into place in extreme close-up shots. As the house begins to crumble around her, Kirsty manages to solve the

puzzle and send each Cenobite back to their dimension, with each Cenobite crying out as they dissolve into yellow energy.

In comparison to the original novella and the reboot film's complicated discourses on the articulation of consent in regards to the body, the original *Hellraiser* focuses on a much more clearcut example of the Cenobites as rapists seeking to claim the bodies of their victims as their own in addition to their monstrous revelation of Frank. This progression from the mediated negotiations to the shock factor of the film adaptation falls into the progression of genre expectations standard to the time period, in which the horror film creates expectations of the audience in order to provide sensory fright that the written word does not rely on. For example, Valerio Sbravatti's analytical work regarding the formal qualities of silence and sound in the horror movie notes that "The startle response is usually experienced as frightful: in fact, the acoustic blast--a staple of horror films--is used in order to give the audience a 'jump scare'" (45-46). Furthermore, the horror film conventions rely on creating environments of anticipation in order to provide the startle necessary to create fright, and this is no different in *Hellraiser*, seeking to utilize the sudden appearance of the Female Cenobite in combination to sound cues to ensure that the audience is frightened despite the relative lull experienced with Frank's demise. Furthermore, works like Paul Kane's *The Hellraiser Films and Their Legacy* note the insistence by studio New World to include further "jump scares" (48). The economic investment of the movie to follow the conventions of horror ensures that the film must obey the mold of the genre in order to be funded and released for general audiences. In order to market the movie as a horror film experience, certain formal elements had to be inserted as well as steering the plot towards a direction rife with anxious anticipation and sudden ending frights.

While scholars often argue that horror conventions demonize queerness and other scholars, like John Edgar Browning, seek queer re-readings regarding the politics in horror films like *Jeepers Creepers* (dir: Victor Salva, 2001), the political readings often fail to account for the interpersonal boundaries necessitate by consent in favor of a totalizing queering of boundaries. In both Adams's reading of *Hellraiser* and Browning's reading of *Jeepers Creepers*, the antagonists and the sexuality of the creators is intertwined as aspects of the same political gesture, and while there is no doubt a relation between each creator's sexuality and the content of the film, the presence of each monster as the monster of the film complicates a queer reading of liberatory politics. Browning's conclusion regarding queerness in a director and the film "works to unfix previously stable conceptions of queer identity and selfhood...the film also...potentials simultaneously for new, ever more emancipatory forms of queerness" (17) remains a potential reading, but he chooses to emphasize a queer liberation compared to the narrative presence of the Creeper as the antagonist that victimizes unwilling participants. Where both the novella and the original film adaptation of *Hellraiser* differ from this queer reading is the acknowledgement of the Cenobites as the forces victimizing others and they must be resisted. Kirsty does not learn to appreciate or understand the Cenobites as queer liberators, and the text showcases that they focus on domination, not emancipation. Furthermore, Kirsty's active resistance in the film and negotiation in the novella refuses to demonize queerness, but demonizes predation made by those who choose to enable cycles of nonconsensual domination and violence. The highly symbolic qualities of this scene and the previous encounter with the Cenobites, in particular with the manifestation of the blood and the image of the distorted and color-changing flower highlights what Cherry refers to as the atmospheric and poetic qualities that indicate a "morbid fascination with horror, death, and monstrosity" (13) that Cherry finds with female fans of the genre. In this

connection with morbid fandom, Cherry notes that “female horror fans have found a substitute for the accepted forms of female consumption which they generally reject” (16) in the presence of a strong female protagonist who can be at once abject and triumphant over the threats articulated in horror. This model anticipates not only a denouncement of sexual violence, but one that can be explored and articulated in complex and contradictory states that allow for viewing pleasure to be found in watching Kirsty’s escape from the Cenobites.

The reboot differs from the novella and the original adaptation in regard to the original supplicant of the Cenobites, Roland, is not directly tied to Riley’s acquisition of the box. Rather than assaulting Riley himself, much like the Franks do, Roland’s manipulations extend further, offering a commentary on the distance at which the rich and powerful can engage within the cycles of violence present throughout the dealings with the Cenobites. After Riley, Colin, and Trevor are able to discover that the Cenobites themselves might be sacrificed through the box in the death of the Chatterer (another homage to the original film and portrayed by Jason Liles), they formulate a plan to sacrifice another Cenobite by trapping them in Roland’s estate (covered in fencework that, for some reason, Roland utilizes to ward the Cenobites away). While they are able to lure one Cenobite, the Asphyx (a Cenobite with a taut sheet of skin covering its face, portrayed by Zachary Hing), into the home, Roland quickly reveals himself as being alive to Riley and Colin after he grabs the box where Riley dropped it and marking Colin with it, although Roland is afflicted with a strange mechanical device. While Riley is locked behind another gate and Trevor lies on the floor, Roland explains that he sought pleasure and sensation, choosing the “Liminal Configuration” for himself. A flashback reveals close-up shots of Roland seeking to free himself only to inflict more pain upon him, revealing in a wide shot his naked body with the device penetrating his chest. This flashback and the juxtaposition between his

composed, articulate performance towards the beginning of the film and his naked and later disheveled appearance showcases the distance he wishes to cultivate. As the perpetrator of pain, Roland could inflict suffering on others while remaining cool and composed. However, his experiences with the Cenobites leads him to be the subject of suffering, no longer able to remain at a distance. Thus, he views the device the Order granted him as a trick, as it pulls on his nerves at random intervals so that he cannot grow used to the pain. He paid Trevor to find someone to sacrifice to the box, and he hopes to utilize these sacrifices in another attempt to negotiate with the Cenobites, wishing to be free from the constant pain.

As Roland begins to open the gates for the Cenobites to enter and hunt Colin down, the narrative splits to reflect both Roland and Riley's negotiations with the Cenobites, showcasing Roland's adherence to violating the boundaries of consent and Riley's refusal to become another boundary-pushing monster. With Colin on the run, Roland sends Trevor to ensure that the Cenobites dispose of him, and the Leviathan manifests in the sky once again while the Cenobites begin to appear within the building. As the Gasp and the Masque (a Cenobite with a flayed face serving as its head and portrayed by Vukašin Jovanović) begin to stalk Colin, the Priest walks calmly into the estate before each Cenobite is trapped behind another gate. Roland explains that he built the fencework in order to force the Leviathan to take back Roland's gift, hoping that by trapping the Cenobites within the mansion he might be able to negotiate his device away. As the Priest engages in conversation with Roland, Riley starts to slip her way through the gate holding the Asphyx in place, sneaking silently to grab the box away from the pedestal where Roland placed it. She sneaks over to the panel with the switches controlling the gates, throwing them open while Roland is distracted by a bout of nerve-pulling pain to seek out Colin.

As the Cenobites advance and Riley escapes, the camera cuts between shots of Colin and Roland both backing away from their respective pursuer. Both hold up their arms in a pleading motion, hoping to negotiate their fate with each uncaring Cenobite. Roland begs for some form of release, even death, but the Priest insists that there is no method for the “gift to be ungiven,” insisting that it can only be exchanged. The Priest offers Roland the “Leviathan Configuration” and with it, power, and while Roland is on his knees before the standing Cenobite, it touches his lips with its fingers while offering the exchange. Unfortunately for Colin, his pleas go unnoticed by the Gasp, which telekinetically uses wire to restrain Colin as the lighting shifts from the red of the dungeon he found himself in to the bluish light associated with the Cenobites’ realm. It is only Riley’s intervention that stops Colin’s fate, explaining that she never officially chose him as a sacrifice. Instead, she offers Trevor, who she stabs in the gut with the box in order to mark him. The camera cuts to Roland’s device falling to pieces, and as his wound begins to close itself and heal, he laughs maniacally into the sky, taunting the Leviathan as the orifice in his chest closes. The Priest explains, as a chain shoots from the Leviathan into the skylight and pierces Roland’s chest, that their “power lies in dominance,” and as Roland ascends to the sky through the chain dragging him, Trevor is dragged by wires through a table into the earth, representing his descent through a tower-like structure from the Order’s realm.

As Riley helps Colin out from the basement, the Cenobites wait for her in Roland’s exhibition chamber. In contrasting shots, the Priest and Riley converse about what her prize will be, and the Cenobites tempt Riley to choose the Lazarus Configuration with visions of her brother. Matt’s voice calls out from Riley, and as she turns, she is transported back to the playground where Matt was taken. Awash in blue light, Matt’s image calls to Riley, asking her to restore him, but as Riley turns, the background cuts back to Roland’s estate and back with the

Cenobites. She explains to the Cenobites that she refuses to have any of their gifts, believing that in some way or another, it will be twisted against her own wishes. The Cenobites seem doubtful as to why she would choose a life in which she must remain aware of the harm she has caused others, but they honor her choice, referring to it as “bitter and brief.” With the proclamation that she has chosen life, or the “Lament Configuration,” the camera showcases the now cube-shaped box in her hands, reminiscent of its original adaptation’s design and first configuration, and when Riley looks up, the Cenobites have vanished. She sets the box down and gazes at the skylight depicting dawn, and she goes to help Colin get to their car. Riley’s choice, therefore, lies in rejecting the cycles of power inherent to the Order’s system, ensuring that the cycle cannot continue with new victims. In terms of consent, the reboot refuses to acknowledge the adherence to cycles of trauma and establishes Riley’s personal choice regarding her boundaries in what she accepts from the Cenobites or not. Riley’s break from the cycle relies on the enforcement of her own autonomy, and rather than playing the Order’s game, she exemplifies a mode of being which focuses on the reintegration of healthy borders. Rather than engage with the abject, her choice reflects contemporary discourse surrounding the continued and willing conversation that consent embodies as parties engage in how they may relate to and influence each other.

Conclusion

In *The Hellbound Heart*, *Hellraiser (1987)*, and *Hellraiser (2022)*, the interactions with the Cenobites offer opportunities to examine the discourses around consent and bodily autonomy as audiences view the extreme methods that the Cenobites employ in their experiments. Whether we analyze their mutilation of each installment’s antagonist or their attempts to subjugate the protagonist, the issues of personal borders remains at the forefront of each text in conversation with the politics of the time. The excessive boundary-pushing of the Order of the Gash

illuminates the importance of having the freedom and ability to express one's agency, whether that's highlighted in the complicated negotiations within the novella, the assault rendered onscreen in the original adaptation, or the mind-influencing coercion displayed within the reboot film. The franchise in engages with contemporary discourses on consent and personal autonomy, whether in relation to sexual freedom, economic privilege, or bioethics, in order to construct the horror of recognizing your body as not your own. Contemporary scholarship regarding the *Hellraiser* cannot only focus on the Cenobites as liberatory figures within queer readings of the film but encompass discussions around consent that queer and kink communities continue to engage. In order to facilitate queer readings of this film, the engagement must remain focused on the political ramifications of the disenfranchisement of the individual's expression of bodily autonomy, focusing on the importance of expression through corporeality. Furthermore, theory cannot sustain itself without the academic understanding from a variety of disciplines, as social, literary, cinematic, and psychological elements combine to inform how society defines the conversation of consent.

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