

Western Canadian Satanism: Rebellion, Repression, Inversion, Subversion in *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*

Note: This article may contain minor spoilers for the series.

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In the Beginning: There Was ‘God’s Country’

I came of age during the early 80s and early 90s in the middle of the bible-belt Canadian Prairies and Western Canada, in what was known to locals as “God’s country.” Idle chatter about the dangers of the *Dungeons and Dragons* role-playing game and heavy metal music soon became a mass hysteria across Canada and the U.S.¹ The fear centred on conspiracy theories mostly focused on a mysterious underground network of Satanic cults and sects that purportedly operated covertly in every town and city in North America. Overwrought talk shows hosts, town pastors and school principals warned parents that children were secretly practising arcane occult rites.² Canadian and U.S. parents alike forbade *Iron Maiden* albums, 20-sided dice or books about witches lest their children be lured into a world of sexual perversion, murder and ritual suicide. Emerging from a culture steeped in these conspiratorial fears, the Canadian small-screen horror/comedy series *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*³ emerged as very Western Canadian, Prairies horror take on coming of age in a small town. This sardonic swear jar of a gore-fest is about a heavy metal fan and awkward outsider named Todd struggling with belonging and identity in a repressive, small Western Everytown. Through contextual, textual analyses and autobiographical musings, I will argue that this Winnipeg, Canada-based production was forged in the evangelical traditions of Western and Prairie Canada, and was shaped by the aftershocks of the Satanic Panic that rocked the Western Canada, U.S. and United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s. *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil* plays with and subverts the repressive realities lived by teens in small-town Western Canada.

Using elements of cultivation theory and cult television scholarship, I will analyze this horror cult classic while examining Western Canada’s role in as ground zero and the major exporter of the so-called “Satanic Panic” into the rest of Canada, the U.S. and the U.K.⁴ The viral fiction that Satanic cults were literally *everywhere* fuelled a decades-long hysteria that saw wrongful arrests, album and book burning, and conspiracy theories about secret, sinister societies that had infiltrated religious, law enforcement and governmental institutions. I will argue that *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*, this Canadian horror cult classic is a satiric inversion of the realities that played out in some Western Canadian towns during the heart of this conspiratorial hysteria. Through this chapter, I will interrogate

¹ “The great 1980s Dungeons & Dragons panic” *BBC*, April 11, 2014, Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26328105>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. Directed by Craig David Wallace, David Winning, James Dunnison, James Genn, September 29, 2010 –January 26, 2012

⁴ Gerbner, G.; Gross, L.; Morgan, M. & Signorielli, N. "Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process". In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (eds.). *Perspectives on media effects*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 1986, pp. 17–40.

my own bible-belt, small-town Western Prairie upbringing as I contemplate this very uniquely Western Canadian slice of small-screen horror. This Canadian horror cult classic turns small-town religious morality and probity on its ear, creating a story that is dripping with gore, black humour, with a deep, incisive commentary on the helplessness, repression and rebellion felt by youth. I will explore themes of the centrality of Evangelical religion and teenage alienation based on my own experience in growing up in small-town, Western Canada. Specifically, I will look at two episodes, Season 1, Episode 2 "How to Make a Homunculus"⁵, and Season 2, Episode 1, "Redierment Home"⁶. These qualitative case studies will also be explored using research on Satanism as a social movement in the developed, industrialized world⁷, while also looking at the featured monster of this series, in this case, Satan, who can be read as an embodiment of social, national and local insecurities.⁸

Of Metal Gods and Lords of Chaos: A *Todd* is Born

What About Todd? The two-season comedic horror television show *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil* was born and bred in Canada. It began its life as a short film created at the Toronto-based Canadian Film Centre in the Short Dramatic Film Programme and kicked off its international tour with the 2003 Toronto International Film Festival. That first film was written by Canadian writers Craig David Wallace and Max Reid, and directed by Wallace. *Todd* would go on to be developed for television for the Canadian cable network Space, airing first on the network on September 29, 2010 with an episode entitled, "Todd the Metal God".⁹ The television show ran for a scant two seasons, prompting a fan-propelled online petition to be circulated to pressure the network for a third season. An IndieGogo fundraiser was held and an animated short was funded to tie up loose ends left hanging by the final episode of the second season. The show developed a Canadian following, and was later released in the U.S. and the United Kingdom in 2012¹⁰. Show co-founder Wallace said he overheard Max Reid, a fellow student at the Canadian Film Centre, talking about the book, *Lords of Chaos: Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, a non-fiction study on the early days of Norwegian black metal¹¹. Wallace said he thought to himself about Reid, "I've got to work with that guy."¹² *Todd* was forged in their mutual love of heavy metal, and Wallace said Todd, the eponymous lead was modelled on his high school friend, down to the mullet, and "denim tuxedo and white high tops..."¹³ Born in Coquitlam, B.C. writer and director Craig David Wallace won a Canadian Screen Award for his direction of the comedy series in 2012 and was nominated for a Writers Guild of Canada and Gemini for his writing and direction respectively.

⁵ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "How to Make a Homunculus" Directed by written by James Genn. Written by James Genn and Craig David Wallace. September 29, 2010.

⁶ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "Redierment Home." Directed by James Genn. Written by James Genn, Charles Picco and Craig David Wallace. October 30, 2011.

⁷ Faxneld, Per and Jesper Aagaard Petersen. *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁸ Hammond, M. (2004). Monsters and Metaphors, *Cult Television*, eds. Gwenllian-Jones, S. & Pearson, R.E. University of Minnesota Press.

⁹ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "Todd Metal God." Directed by James Dunnison. Written by Charles Picco and Craig David Wallace. September 29, 2010.

¹⁰ King, Randall. "Dealing With the Devil". *Winnipeg Free Press*. April 6, 2010.

¹¹ Moynihan, Michael; Søderlind, Didrik. *Lords of Chaos (LOC)*. Feral House. 1998. p. 79. ISBN 0-922915-94-6.

¹² "GC144 Craig Wallace and the Book of Pure Evil." *Geekish Podcast*. May 3, 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/geekishcast/2017/05/03/gc144-craig-wallace-and-the-book-of-pure-evil>

¹³ *Ibid*.

This gore-splattered comedy television show filmed in Winnipeg, Manitoba was pitched by the showrunners as an Frankensteinian amalgam of the *The Evil Dead* and *The Breakfast Club* directed by John Hughes.¹⁴ Wallace is quoted in the *Winnipeg Free Press* saying that *Todd* is an attempt to make "... a modern updating of Faust."¹⁵ The show in a Satanic nutshell is an erstwhile hero, a teenager named Todd (Alex House) and a slacker Scooby gang comprised of a motorcycle-booted non-damsel Jenny Kolinsky (Maggie Castle), his one-armed, Labrador-retriever-like friend Curtis Weaver (Billy Turnbull), fiery-haired and bookish scientist Hannah B. Williams (Melanie Leishman) and the wise-old-man trope and janitor, Jimmy (Jason Mewes). The group's nemesis and sometimes Scooby gang fanboy is the brilliant Chris Leavins playing Atticus Murphy Jr, the high school guidance counsellor. The three tricksters of the piece are in Western Canadian parlance the "skids" or long-haired, leather- and flannel-wearing, slacker ne'er-do-wells smoking just outside the school grounds. Trickster One, Eddie (Norman Leung) who, between short, angry drags on cigarettes, punctuates every sentence with the word, "loser". Trickster Two, Rob is played by Steve Arbuckle who played the very first Todd in the short film launched at TIFF and the third trickster is Brody (Dan Petronijevic) who sports Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin hair.

Most of the action revolves around the actual hell that is high school. With Todd, hell, however, is not a metaphor. There's an actual book of evil made of scarred and puckered human skin with a pentagram etched in the front flapping around the teen's fictional Crowley High School. For *Evil Dead* fans, this *Book of Pure Evil* will look an awful lot like Necronomicon Ex-Mortis Book of the Dead. The show pursued an overarching plot line of the book looking to fulfill a prophecy involving Todd, a possible 'evil one' who would bring about the end of the world and hell on earth. The show also went through the paces of an *X-Files* 'monster of the week' approach as the *Book of Pure Evil* seduces a new person each episode to summon some destructive force to wreak havoc on the town. Undead rockers, a giant baby, cannibal zombie seniors, a tiny, vengeful homunculus, this army of evil was multitudinous and legion across the 26 live-action episodes and the single, animated conclusion. In this show, Satan is the centre of a belief system that holds the entire town together. Satan is the tradition, the status quo, the old god for the old guard in *Todd's* fictional world.

The arterial spray, the great geysers of blood and viscera were the calling cards for the show. The viewer visually bathes in the visual gore throughout the series and is treated to creative obscenities, utterances such as dickbag, cock lamp, ass taxi, sh*t rooster. These novel utterances alone were enough to spark a kind of cultish secret language among Toddies, the slang term for die-hard fans. All of these attributes, paired with relatable and over-the-top comedy, helped the show garnere a die-hard fan base. Gareth a viewer from the U.K. posted to the official Todd website, calling *Todd* "It's the best thing i've (sic) watched on TV over here in years."¹⁶ I count myself among the Todd fandom community. It resonates culturally with viewers for a reason. The audience reception and the cultural resonance of this show is rooted in a very Western Canadian conspiracy theory that changed lives through the 80s and 90s. If cult television shows can be understood as paratextual, contextual layers of authentic, shared

¹⁴ King, Randall. "Dealing With the Devil". *Winnipeg Free Press*. April 6, 2010.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Gareth. *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil* Website. April 30, 2012 at 4:18 am, Retrieved from <http://www.toddandthebookofpureevil.com/2012/04/how-you-can-supporttodd>

experience, then *Todd*, I will argue, can be understood as a product of its unique upbringing in Western Canada.¹⁷

Michelle Remembers: The Making of a ‘Satanic Panic’. If there is a ground zero for the Satanic Panic, it might have been located in British Columbia, Canada. Some commentators have contended that it was spurred on by the now widely-debunked book *Michelle Remembers*, authored by Michelle Smith, a young psychiatric patient and her Victoria, British Columbia-based psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder, who would later go on to become her husband.¹⁸ *Michelle Remembers* recounts a child’s horrific ordeal in a purported Satanic cult that practiced animal and human sacrifice, orgiastic rituals and child imprisonment.¹⁹ The book purportedly sparked off the rapidly-spreading viral belief in a networked Satanic conspiracy that permeated all levels of Canadian society. Today, it is a work that is widely discredited and viewed with skepticism by law enforcement officials, local Catholic diocese then and Michelle Smith’s family and her neighbours.²⁰ Michelle claimed that Satan was worshipped in secret by a network of cultists who walked among regular citizens, and held positions of power. Michelle claimed you would be able to know them by looking at their hands as many were missing the middle finger of their left hands. The book contains harrowing accounts of dark rituals designed to raise Satan, rites that included lowering the young Michelle into open graves and ritual human sacrifices. A note from the book’s publisher, Thomas B. Congdon, Jr., introduces the book and defends the novel against critics, writing:

“...Michelle is not a hysteric, not even a neurotic. She seems as clear as a glass of well water. She appears to be one of those rare people, like Joan of Arc and Bernadette ...they can tell you that would otherwise be laughable -- yet you do not laugh, you do not dismiss or forget.”²¹

The book became a best seller and was featured in grocery store tabloids like *National Enquirer*.²² This Canadian story continued to spread with infamous television afternoon host Geraldo Rivera declaring that, “The odds are it’s happening in your town.”²³ Michelle recounts her ordeal as a child in great detail recalling chants and ballads designed to raise the Beast. Michelle asserted that Satan himself would wind his tail around her neck:

¹⁷ Jancovich, M. & Hunt, N. (2004). *The Mainstream, Distinction and Cult TV*, Cult Television, eds. Gwenllian-Jones, S. & Pearson, R.E. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁸ Hopper, Tristin. “How Canada tricked the world into believing murderous Satanists were everywhere.” *National Post*, September 5, 2017, Retrieved from <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-canadian-book-that-tricked-the-world-into-believing-they-were-overrun-with-satanist-murder-cult>

¹⁹ Smith, Michelle. *Michelle Remembers*. New York: Pocket. 1989. ISBN 0-671-69433-2.

²⁰ Lewis, James R. *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*. Oxford University Press. 2003. p. 233. ISBN 0-19-514986-6.

²¹ *Ibid*, xiii.

²² Munger, Sean. “Michelle Remembers”: The story of the literary hoax that started a tragic moral panic. *Sean Munger Website*, November 6, 2014. Retrieved from <https://seanmunger.com/2014/11/06/michelle-remembers-the-story-of-the-literary-hoax-that-started-a-tragic-moral-panic/>

²³ Hopper, Tristin. “How Canada tricked the world into believing murderous Satanists were everywhere.” *National Post*, September 5, 2017.

“Satan instructs his priests and gives them fresh power through an elaborate ritual of counting and the arranged of relic bones stone from the sanctuaries of churches. New priests are initiated; they chop off the middle finger of one hand to signify their fealty and belonging.”²⁴

A *National Post* article pointed to *Michelle Remembers* as one of the contributing factors to the so-called Martensville Satanic Sex Scandal or alternately the Martensville Nightmare, an incident that saw arrests of dozens of people and hundreds of charges in the tiny town of Martensville, Saskatchewan.²⁵ It started with an accusation by a concerned mom complaining about a local, home daycare, it spiralled into a panic that also brought down members of the police force. Children recounted tales ritual abuse at the hands of an organization called “Brotherhood of the Ram”, adherents of a so-called Devil’s Church.²⁶ An Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) investigation found that incident was attributable to “emotional hysteria.”²⁷ The charges of the daycare owners, a couple named Ron and Linda Stirling, and a local policeman John Popovich, saw their charges dropped, receiving settlements for malicious prosecution for \$925,000 and \$1.3-million respectively²⁸.

The moral panic created by *Michelle Remembers* grew out its roots in the Canadian West. Growing up in the 80s and 90s in Canada meant a steady diet of broadcast television, infotainment programming and talk radio. Cultivation theory tells us that the steady consumption of media can subtly or overtly change perceptions of cultural and reality over time.²⁹ While I can’t peer into the hearts of the creators, I can suggest that *Todd’s* creator Wallace, the 40-something creator of *Todd and I*, a forty-something cultural critic and fan-girl of the series were steeped in a similar, Satanism-obsessed media landscape. Media stories like Geraldo’s blithely declared a devil-worshipping conspiracy; this caused metal-loving kids like Wallace, and all teenagers, to be looked upon with suspicion.³⁰

Bible belt upbringing. Born in Calgary, I later lived in Leduc, Alberta as a toddler, and moved north to Peace River just as I was starting grade school. “God’s country”: That was what the locals called our town, nestled in the valley near the Peace River. In my scripture-soaked neck of the woods, the locals really *meant* that the place belonged to god. The communities of my youth were highly religious, trending sharply toward the Evangelical. The Lord’s Prayer was a mandatory start of our school day, as was standing for the Canadian anthem, hands over hearts. My family was mostly irreligious, not in a thoughtful, ideological way, just listing lazily toward apathetic and anti-social. Trips to town were arduous and long and we stayed at home on Sundays. My mother literally tossed a Canadian Bible Society new testament at me when I was small, which my younger sister and I had a tendency to scribble and chew on. My family, ensconced in our rural homestead, were surrounded Holy Rollers, 7th Day Adventists, Hutterites, Mennonites, Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses. These congregations and more, made up the active faith communities in our 4,000-person town. Religion permeated every aspect of our lives. In the farming community I lived in, the large-scale harvest meals

²⁴ *Ibid*, 267.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ "Satanic Sex Scandal". CBC News. February 12, 2003. Retrieved 2007-10-31.

²⁷ "Policeman gets \$1.3 million in Martensville settlement". CBC News. 2002-06-19. Retrieved 2009-02-06.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ Gerbner, G.; Gross, L.; Morgan, M. & Signorielli, N. "Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process". In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (eds.). *Perspectives on media effects*. Hilledale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 1986, pp. 17–40.

³⁰ King, Randall. "Dealing With the Devil". *Winnipeg Free Press*. April 6, 2010.

we prepared, the men ate first, then the women and children ate whatever was left. Meals, except in my family, started with prayer. Hutterite families came into town to shop, the women wearing ankle-length floral skirts and bobby-pinned handkerchiefs covering their hair which was wound into tightly-wound buns, the men in dark, wide-brimmed hats and full beards. One of my best friends growing up, was not allowed to cut her hair. Her family, Mennonites who left their closed community, still adhered to the tradition that she wasn't allowed to wear pants nor alter her hair. One day, she flouted tradition, wore light-wash jeans to school, thrilled by her rebellion. We pushed it further and skipped high school, going to a local coffee shop to sip tea, our hands shaking. We were quickly spotted by the small-town Panopticon while stopping by the Canada Post office and we caught hell from our parents that night. Nothing slipped past the ever-watchful hive mind of our little town. No one could really have secrets ...for long. Folks knew everything about everybody. Nonetheless, my small-town had intrigues a-plenty; there were amusing and sinister eccentricities everywhere. Mostly, I felt like I was going nowhere, on the outside looking in on the rest of Canada. I was forever wondering what life was like in the big city or more specifically, the centre of the universe, Toronto. Western Canada, with movements like the recurring (goofy) spectre of Alberta separatism, contains in it that thread of isolation and alienation from the rest of Canada.

Despite my efforts and those of my family, I grew up literally steeped in Jesus. Sometimes the religious fervour would erupt in strange (to me) ways. It wasn't uncommon to see congregants break into holy reivere, eyes rolled back, hands toward the sky, rocking back and forth, crying and speaking in tongues. The Holy Rollers were known by those in my community to launch into a mystical state so profound that they would literally roll in the aisles of the church. Coffee klatch conversations with our rural neighbours about "them Holy Rollers" would absolutely terrorize me as a kid. I imagined grown men, inflamed by their love for Jesus, transformed into mindless whirling human steamrollers, knocking down and crushing everyone in their path. Jesus was the tie that bound all of the threads of my community together. Pastors were brought into my high school to talk about the dangers of fornication and the irredeemable sin of abortion. Even women with ectopic pregnancies should have "more faith in Jesus", the invited pastor intoned severely to my Grade 12 classroom. Learning about prehistoric humans and evolution was banned, I was mocked by students and teachers alike if I was caught reading books not assigned in class, for fun.

If it became known you didn't go to church, it wouldn't be uncommon to be invited to a Saturday night sleepover with a friends family in the hopes that my pagan mind would be exposed to the lord's word and join them. I would stare wordlessly, struck dumb by the puzzle of religious vocabulary, unable to find the correct response to, "Jesus loves you." I would crunch communion wafers loudly or otherwise ensure I never got a second invitation to church, no matter how proselytizing the family was. Ever the provocateur I even dabbled in witchcraft. Still in elementary school but handy with a library card, I found a spell for making things disappear. I convinced a farm friend to try a disappearing spell on a white laying hen. In our giddy, girlish glee, we convinced ourselves we had done it, feverishly kicking away the summoning circle we had drawn in the dust of an abandoned farm house on her property. The last straw for this friend's parents was when, packing my *Ouija* board in my overnight bag to conjure up the spirit of Elvis (the only dead person I could think of) at a sleepover. This resulted in my six-month ban from this friend's home. It wouldn't be the first time

in my life I was branded as a witch. All of this religious seriousness seemed deeply amusing and rather confusing to my adolescent brain.

It was in that fertile soil of religiosity and the Evangelical tradition, with its bent toward ‘fire and brimstone’, that the Satanic Panic took hold in my town. I took a job in my public library, a cinder-block building with big front windows in the centre of my town. I adored the library and this was my high school dream job. The work was as the ‘resident artist’ where I drew large murals and constructed paper mache dragon’s caves to lure local youngsters in during the summer months to read. Even in that hallowed place of learning, Jesus reigned. At first, “unpopular” books that hadn’t been taken out in four years or more were expunged. This was mostly to make room for large format Danielle Steele romances in hardcover, a decision that would made me seethe with resentment and sadness. My chief public librarian expunged all books discussing witchcraft, and those of “non-Christian” values including, for some reason, a beautiful book on Rastafarianism, telling me with a serious face that witchcraft was “a serious problem” in our town and the books would simply give “teenagers ideas.” While, teens were known to hold large “pit parties” in the woods all around our town, now there was worry that they weren’t just chug-a-lugging beers and breaking the empties against trees but they were conducting rituals and devil-worshipping ceremonies.

Breathless talk of teens dabbling in Satanism filled talk news shows, and soon there was hushed murmuring about cults during the coffee klatch at my mother’s large oak table. Like many small towns, there were quite a number of retirees with nothing but time (and judgment!) to watch our *doings a-transpirin*. Such was the dynamic of my rural town and those like mine. Then and now, these towns are both shrinking and aging. These rural communities are under existential threat and it isn’t about Satan. Canada has urbanized at a steady rate over the last 160 years.³¹ In 1851, nine of every 10 Canadians lived in rural areas; in 2011, 20 percent of Canadians live in small, rural towns. In 1981, 24 per cent of Canadians lived outside big urban centres.³²In my experience, the rural to urban shift can give rise to social insecurities.

Despite the ever-watchful town surveillance system, and the devout worship of Christianity, and ‘just say no’ mantra of Nancy Reagan filling our rural Canadian airwaves, teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases were dramatically higher in my small town than the rest of Canada. In fact, for a time in my teens we held the highest rates in Alberta, and Alberta had the highest rates in Canada. Ah, the civic pride: we were Number One! Illicit drug use and under-age drinking was similarly rampant. Now, the link between teens and Satan was “proven” by teen’s interest in *Dungeons and Dragons* and heavy metal music sweeping through my town. My otherwise irreligious mother warned me to steer clear of the, on their face, rather nerdy, harmless coven of *D&D* players at my school. According to media reporting, *D&D* was causing teens to kill themselves and worse, practicing dark rites to honour Satan.³³ While *D&D* was awfully tempting to me, I didn’t need any warning to avoid the head-banging,

³¹ Statistics Canada. 2014. “Canada's rural population declining since 1851”. *Canadian Demography at a Glance*, Catalogue No. 98-003-X.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “The great 1980s Dungeons & Dragons panic.” *BBC*, April 11, 2014. Retrieved by <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26328105>.

heavy-metal-loving knuckle-heads wearing their dad’s welding company’s jackets and truckers caps who snorted cocaine and toked weed near the back of my high school. They were kind of mean.

Satanism in Canada (and Elsewhere). Satanism as a religious philosophy, and the idea of Satanic boogeyman is still alive and well in contemporary culture. A mostly European underground movement formed with the goal of creating a species of Satanic “god-men”; Jacob C. Senholt has created a framework of characteristics that bind together some of these “sinister” groups.³⁴ These movements embrace the occult and merge with extreme political movements with the hope of creating a new species, purportedly the next step in human evolution. These groups weave anti-ethics, ritual sacrifice, social Darwinism, infiltration into right-wing political groups, physical trials, sinister secret words such as the use of the term *Homo Galactica*, referring to a genetic super race, and the co-opting Norse and Lovecraftian themes. Senholt notes, these movements are given new mobility through online communities, with these Satanic, sinister groups gaining an “increasing transnationality and translocality”.³⁵

Yet, Satanism in contemporary Canada is, well, kind of Canadian. My sleuth around Canadian Satanic sites shows us that it really isn’t the murderous death cult that *Michelle Remembers* warned us 80s kids about. There’s the Satanic Temple Ottawa Canada whose Facebook page celebrates diversity, freedom of speech, gender fluidity and openness to every sexual orientation. Smiley congregants are pictured participating in the Ottawa Pride Parade holding signs, “Love Who You Want, F*ck Who You Want, Be Who You Want.”³⁶ One user review in 2018 recommended the Satanic Temple, saying the congregants were, “Friendly, compassionate, open-minded folks.”³⁷ Far from dark blood rites, the Ottawa church celebrates the Voluptatis Carnis: A Ritual of Sexual Freedom, Club Debauchery Ottawa, called “A very rare event, celebrating the freedom of all beings to express themselves sexually AS THEY SO CHOOSE.”³⁸ This event is ushered in by “a very special dance performance, crafted by our Ladies of Satan, as well as vendors, music, and the ritual itself.”³⁹ The U.S.-based Church of Satan describe their philosophy as anti-drug, against harming children or animals. A frequently asked question on the site states:

“Unlike many religions and philosophies, Satanism respects and exalts life. Children and animals are the purest expressions of that life force, and as such are held sacred and precious in the eyes of the Satanist. Besides, it is very un-Satanic to take any creature’s life against its will.”⁴⁰

As Satanism takes on a distinctly Canadian flavour when practiced in this national milieu, so too, does *Todd*, I will argue, is a quintessentially Western Canadian offering. Contextual analysis in the television studies field tell us that TV should not be analyzed in a vacuum. Nor are television shows created in a vacuum. Shows are products of their specific contexts, the social, political milieus in which

³⁴ Senholt, Jacob. C., *Secret Identities in the Sinister Tradition, The Devil’s Party: Satanism in Modernity*, Oxford Scholarship Online: January 2013 DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199779239.003.0012).

³⁵ *Ibid*, 256.

³⁶ Satanic Temple of Ottawa Facebook Page. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/thesatanictempleottawa/>

³⁷ Satanic Temple of Ottawa Facebook Page. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/thesatanictempleottawa/>

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ “FAQ.” Church of Satan Website. Retrieved from <https://www.churchofsatan.com/satanic-youth-communicue/>

they were conceived and subsequently brought to flickering life. Cult television shows like *Todd* are in dialogue with other texts, social changes and even other television programs.⁴¹ As some television scholars call upon researchers to encounter television programs as integrated and consistent with social values and the cultures in which they are made, I will look at *Todd* as a seamlessly interwoven, inevitable product of growing up Western Canadian.⁴² “Television studies, though, is at its best when it remembers context is key...”⁴³ It is the context in which *Todd* was born and raised that might explain this gruesome, hilarious series and its cult fan appeal.

Decoding Todd: ‘Could You Pass Me My Blood Mop?’

Jesus. Bible-belt childhood stories. Satanism. This all brings us to *Todd*. Somewhere between the welcoming, inclusive Satanists of Ottawa, the scary Lovecraftian, dark-gods-worshipping sinister sects of Senholt’s research, we find the wriggling offspring that only a rabid cult following could love that is *Todd & the Book of Pure Evil*. Sure, there is blood, but it is fake and made by a Winnipeg-located FX crew who, from the extras on the DVD I own, look to be having a great time⁴⁴. I look specifically at two episodes Season 1, Episode 2 "How to Make a Homunculus" written by James Genn and Craig David Wallace and first aired on September 29, 2010⁴⁵, and Season 2, Episode 1, "Redierment Home" written by James Genn and Charles Picco and Craig David Wallace and first aired on October 30, 2011.⁴⁶ These episodes represent some of the themes I’ve explored with Canada’s own history of Satanic obsession, cultural research on Satanism in the industrialized world and my own experience.

"How to Make a Homunculus". Before we look at this episode, you might ask: what’s a Homunculus? Homunculus or the Latin *hō'mōnkōlōs* means "little person". Although there is some debate about this scholars believe the word first appears in the Paracelsus (1493–1541) alchemical writings in the book *De natura rerum* (1537).⁴⁷ A homunculus can be conjured up by an alchemist simply by putrefying human sperm in a horse womb for 40 days and then feeding the resulting tiny human fresh blood (human preferred) to raise up the small-statured and apparently quite pale little person. It is a very male idea that a fully formed human can be manifested simply via the spermatozoa, the horse’s womb is used strictly for warmth, *mind you* (such a hyper masculine, *pure metal* concept ...but mostly, gross).

However, this is not the method of homunculus birthing that is used in this second-ever episode of *Todd*. Rather it is Hannah, the bookish, science-loving student who conjures it up through a combination of angry teenage girl feelings of lust and vengeance, by intoning some dark recitations from the human-skinned cover of the *Book of Pure Evil*. The Homunculus is a “tiny Todd” that does Hannah’s will. Hannah’s small-town teacher mocks her love of science (that checks out) and tells her,

⁴¹ Gray, J. & Lotz, A. (2012). *Television Studies*. Polity Press.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 140

⁴⁴ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. Season Two, eOne Films, April 3 2012

⁴⁵ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "How to Make a Homunculus" Directed by written by James Genn. Written by James Genn and Craig David Wallace. September 29, 2010.

⁴⁶ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "Redierment Home." Directed by James Genn. Written by James Genn, Charles Picco and Craig David Wallace. October 30, 2011.

⁴⁷ Grafton, Anthony. *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*. MIT Press. 1999. pp. 328–329.

“It (science) doesn’t even like you and it killed your parents.”⁴⁸ The science teacher is unsympathetically cruel, and engaged in an illicit relationship with two cheerleaders so it may make some sense if he met a terrible end in the episode (Spoiler alert: he does. And it involves the classic TV trope and science fair staple of the baking soda volcano). While Hannah is able to trap the little Todd in a bird cage briefly, the Todd homunculus escapes and wreaks havoc around the school, around the science lab, through the air ductwork and outside, even creeping into Todd’s love-interest Jenny’s bed at night. The homunculus is a direct manifestation of Hannah’s unexpressed desires and Todd maintains a psychic link with his scuttling doppelganger. “I had a dream about her (Jenny) where I was quick and tiny. And I had another dream where I killed the science teacher...”, Todd says breathlessly to his friends.⁴⁹ Jenny, fresh from a nocturnal assassination attempt, reveals that her father is a journalist who disappeared investigating the town’s strangeness. In this episode, we also get the second half of the puzzle, meeting the school’s guidance counsellor Atticus who reveals he’s the simpering minion to some elderly Satanic cultists and secret mole inside the high school to keep a close eye on the teenagers. The viewer also gets introduced to the phrase that will recur throughout the series, “German herpes.”⁵⁰ The three skids outside the school warn Todd that the book will return to him eventually, saying, “It will come back like German herpes.”⁵¹

"Redierment Home". This Season 2, Episode 1, was written by James Genn and Charles Picco and Craig David Wallace, first aired on October 30, 2011. This episode goes deep into the underground Satanic cult, the politics and inner workings. Everyone wears cultist robes but underneath, they are wearing golf course attire and senior leisure wear. Each of the sinister society members lives in the town retirement home and are wearing ‘Hello My Name Is’ sticker badges. They are elderly, cranky and ...hungry as fans of the series will remember. Atticus, the high school guidance counsellor, has taken the helm of the Satanic cult and has the Book of Pure Evil in his possession. Minion Dave complained, “This secret society has gone to sh*t!”⁵² Another complains, “Whatever happened to all the booze, the drugs, the sexy girls?”⁵³ When Minion Bob, a disgruntled acolyte wishes for just one good meal, a gross-out fest to end all gross-out fests begins at the senior’s home. Think elderly people turning into slavering cannibal zombies and then make that thought as icky as you possibly can and you have a good sense of the episode. Jimmy, the wise man in Todd’s hero’s journey, played by *Clerks* Jason Mewes, asks the Todd gang who they are fighting today, “What are you fighting today? Vampires? Zombies? Zampires?”⁵⁴ Todd replies: “Senior citizens.” Jimmy replies, “Those are the worst kind of monsters.”⁵⁵ Vanquishing the pentacle-bibbed seniors with minimal loss of grandmas and grandpas ...with um, super-soakers of laxative (just watch it, okay?), Jenny and Todd confer about the Satanists and agree that they are probably everywhere. Jenny says, “For all we know, the police are

⁴⁸ *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "How to Make a Homunculus" Directed by written by James Genn. Written by James Genn and Craig David Wallace. September 29, 2010.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*. "Redierment Home." Directed by James Genn. Written by James Genn, Charles Picco and Craig David Wallace. October 30, 2011.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Satanists too.”⁵⁶ In this Satan and Satanists are the mainstream, the status quo. This takes us right into the ‘upside down’ of *Todd* where Satan is the anchor for the community, the tie binds the social cohesion in this tiny Western Everytown. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the “psychological, satanic family-threatening monsters of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.”⁵⁷ “(I)t is possible to ‘read’ the monster’s ‘meaning’ by the global, national, and/or social history that surrounds its screen embodiment.”⁵⁸

Notes from the ‘Flyover Provinces’

Why does *Todd* continue to resonate years after I first caught it on the Space Channel? I contend this Canadian horror comedy show appeals to anyone who has ever felt like an outsider in high school, an outsider looking into whatever might be considered mainstream. Protagonist Todd is kindred because he doesn’t fit. He’s not interested in helping the Satanic cult that runs his town in bringing about the end of life as we know it. This small-screen satirical series is immediately familiar but it is also an inversion of everything one might experience in a suffocating small-town, surrounded by a hyper-religious culture. Just as repression and isolation can be answered with rebellion and subversion, *Todd*’s comedic inversion is a rejection of the hegemonic upper-class dominance playing out in the hallways and classroom of Crowley High School. Through the prism of my lived experience, I see that the Satanists who founded and now dominate *Todd*’s fictional town are just as scary (to me) as the Holy Rollers, Jesus-invoking people that prevented me from learning about evolution in high school science. The god of *Todd* is Satan, he is the literal North Star for the society, the tie that binds families, relationships and institutions together. Satan is the status quo against which *Todd* and his proverbial Scooby gang rail, fight and attempt to subvert. As I was enculturated by my Western Canadian upbringing, *Todd* is also steeped in and born into a cultural milieu that was in the grips of fear-mongering conspiracy theories and hyper-religious paranoias. Like *Todd*, I rejected these anxieties and sought to subvert these devil-centric phobias. As I read in the "Redierment Home" episode, *Todd* subverts expectations by turning the pillars of his community and its elderly into the ones who are up to sinister dark rites in the dead of night.

The "Redierment Home" episode takes on the realities of small-town daily living with their elderly and their parenting class looking suspiciously through their blinds at metal-loving teenagers. In *Todd*’s inversion, it is the shambling, evil elderly that are up to cultist conspiracies to overturn the world order and summon the old gods to turn society into a Satanic hellscape. The idea of the small-town Panopticon is also present in *Todd*. Everyone is watching, always. For anyone who has ever lived in a small-town, you know that there is very little the members of your community don’t know about you and your family. These are daily anxieties for youth living in an ever-watchful, ever-judging town. The forces bent on thwarting these teenage goals are an ongoing theme in *Todd*. The fix is in at Crowley High School and there’s nowhere to turn. The police, the town government, elders, even *grandma* is in on the conspiracy. *Todd* meets *Michelle Remembers*, but this time the secret cultists have all of their fingers, and the kids have the upper hand.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Hammond, M. (2004). *Monsters and Metaphors*. Cult Television, eds. eds. Gwenllian-Jones, S. & Pearson, R.E. University of Minnesota Press.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149

The theme that pervades *Todd* of being on the outside looking in is just like home for for anyone who grew up in Western Canada. You are an outsider because you live in the flyover provinces, outside the seats of power in Central Canada. I grew up feeling I was on the outside looking in all the time. Watching television shows shot in Toronto, I knew I was living in the middle of nowhere. I was also an outsider because I didn't fit into my Evangelical Christian community. I guess was an outsider sandwich, no, a Linzer torte of layered outsider-ness. A western townie, I was a twitchy kid in flannel and rubber boots who felt disconnected from the rest of my town and the rest of Canada. Now I'm all grown up and have distance enough to find it all funny. I have the distance enough to turn it around in my mind and view it from all angles. The makers of *Todd* had the might and magic to turn their picture of growing up in Western Canada upside down. Turning the Satanic Panic that gripped this nation and other environs of the industrialized world completely on its head has made for a very funny television series. *Todd* is an expression of empowered distance that can grow out of the powerlessness and isolation that teenagers like Wallace may have experienced in his West Coast Canadian upbringing. I read in "How to Make a Homunculus" that science-loving Hannah felt powerlessness and alone. That internal storm of bad feelings and isolation inside Hannah was made manifest in a naked, shambling man puppet. As Wallace, the show's co-creator planned, this is a story about John Hughes-style teens meeting and battling monsters. The streak of anti-intellectualism and anti-science is embodied by Hannah's lizard-brained teacher. So too was anti-intellectualism a fixture of my Western Canadian life. Rebellion in *Todd* takes the form of battling Satanists. Rebellion in small-town Western Canada took the form of sex, drugs and head-banging metal. In *Todd*, we get the drugs and metal. The sex is there too but with the constant warnings of "German Herpes." This STD reference becomes a touchstone in the series and is an idea that resonates deep in my Western teen's long-term memory.

There is also a special brand of very Canadian Satanism that is indicated in *Todd*. The show, despite its high profanity and gore content, pulls its punches. Like the Canadian verbal tic of saying "sorry" for absolutely no reason, there's a sweet politeness under the gory, swear-fest that is *Todd*. In a quote that is frequently misattributed to Aristotle: "We are what we repeatedly do..."⁵⁹ Canadians have been called polite a time or two by other nations and cultures. As cultivation theory might further suggest, we are what we continually do, read and watch. In this way, *Todd* is again a product of its cultural context. The dark themes of anti-ethics, ritual sacrifice, social Darwinism, physical trials, sinister secret words, and the co-opting Norse and Lovecraftian themes per Senholt's research are there too in *Todd*. But there's a nerfing of those heavy metal edges. Sure, our hero Todd and his friends might have been able to resolve the senior zombies problem by destroying the head per <insert any zombie movie here>, but instead the evil-fighting quartet shoot the leisure-suited cannibals in the face and open mouth with laxatives so they could ...um, expel the evil. The kill count is therefore low. Curtis' grandma can live another day to pinch cheeks and dream of her dark Satanic overlord. In the same way Ottawa's own Satanists are all about human rights and fundraising, *Todd* is about throwing its arms around teen problems John Hughes style, and leaving the audience with a kind of sweet and ennobling message: *You can survive this. You will live long enough to find this all very funny.* In the case of Craig

⁵⁹ Durant, Will. *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the World's Greatest Philosophers* (1926), reprinted in Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books, 1991, ISBN 0-671-73916-6.

David Wallace he was able to build this miniature world, a kind of tiny ant farm that is shaken vigorously in every episode, allowing a Westerner like myself to watch its frantic workings with bemusement and delight.

The Final Circle of Hell: A Western Canadian Horror Story

Todd and the Book of Pure Evil speaks to me down to my Western Canadian born-and-bred bones. I, like *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*, was steeped in, enculturated, and fermented in the womb homunculus-style in the bible-belt Canadian Prairies and Western Canada. “God’s country” found itself, like other parts of North America in the grips of a swirl of viral, fake news in the form of a Satanic Panic. I have argued that *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil* is a product of that specific cultural milieu. Using my own lived experience as a teenager in the 80s in Western Canada, as well as the contextual and textual reading of several key episodes of this award-winning television series, I have argued that this Canadian horror comedy flips small-town Canadian religious culture on its back and watches it wriggle. It is through *Todd’s* inversion and subversion of the upright Christian-dominated communities that we can understand our culture better. A product of its context, *Todd* helps us understand more deeply the alienation and isolation of youth growing up as outsiders in the isolating and repressive fishbowl that can be small-town Western Canadian town life. Using elements of cultivation theory, I linked Western Canada’s role in as ground zero and the major exporter of the so-called “Satanic Panic” into the rest of Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. This example of fake news in our recent Canadian past cut a swath of paranoia and wrongful arrests as the fear of Satan rippled across our culture. This award-winning Canadian horror cult classic is, like any satire, it is an inversion of our societal hegemonies, and the dominance of Evangelical religion in small towns. Underneath the gore, potty mouth, disturbing puppets and puerile moments, *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil* gives Canadian fans a deeply resonant cultural commentary and a way to understand our cultural past. *Todd* captures the helplessness, repression and rebellion felt by youth growing up in Western Canada; it also pokes Satan in the eye while apologizing just a little bit, in, you know, a very sweet, Canadian way.

About the Author: Tanya Pobuda is studying board games, serious games, simulation in higher education, training and communication at the Ryerson and York University Communication and Culture PhD Program. She holds a Master's of Professional Communication (MPC) at Ryerson University and has a Bachelor of Journalism, High Honours from Carleton University. Ms. Pobuda has had a 24-year professional career in marketing and communication, beginning her career as Toronto-based journalist and news editor.

She is the co-founder and editor of the Canadian content movie and television website **Geek vs Goth** geekvsgoth.com <<http://geekvsgoth.com/>>. Born in Calgary, she grew up in Northern Alberta in a little farming community outside of Peace River, spending her formative years in a propane-heated trailer, with no potable water, no dedicated phone line and 50-minutes on mostly gravel grounds to the nearest store. As a result of her isolated upbringing, books, films and games - particularly Canadian ones - were very (very) important to her. She moved as soon as she could – at the age of 17 – to Ontario to become a reporter and later, marketing professional and now, scholar. She’s also crazy about vampires.

